



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP), a non-governmental organization on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 February 2013]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Protect and promote the fundamental human rights of the Kurdish people in the context of the civil war in the Arab Republic of Syria**

In the framework of the civil war in the Arab Republic of Syria and the on-going mass killing of thousands of civilians and the widespread devastation of urban areas, MRAP calls on the Commission of Inquiry and the Human Rights Council's attention to the civil areas in which Kurds constitute a majority and have remained relatively insulated.

According to recent reports from international humanitarian organizations the Kurdish regions have been spared the brunt of regime attacks; and over time government security forces withdrew to regroup elsewhere. Kurdish groups stepped in to replace them: to stake out zones of influence, protect their respective areas, provide essential services and ensure an improved status for the community.

However, since the beginning of 2013, there is an increase in tensions and violent clashes have erupted in the Kurdish regions as well, in particular in the town of Ras al - Ayn on the Syrian-Turkish border. Heavy clashes between the Kurdish armed group Yekîneyên Parastina Gel<sup>1</sup> (YPG) and jihadist-armed groups were fought in the urban centre and peripheral neighbourhoods for two weeks, before a cease-fire was agreed. Credible reports from different sources confirm vast cross-border activity under the 15 day long armed hostility; verifying the Turkish side of the border was systematically utilized by jihadist-armed groups for re-deployment of combatants and provision of logistical supplies.

MRAP call on the Human Rights Council's attention to this critical matter that poses an imminent risk of deteriorating the sectarian strife in Syria, between the different religious and ethnic communities of the country.

Complex relations with local Arab tribes also represent a potential flashpoint, tying into tensions between Kurdish factions and opposition armed groups. Although in the early stages of the uprising both actors appeared to coordinate their demands vis-à-vis the regime, territorial issues and mutual suspicions derived in part from longstanding regime practices of playing one side against the other, as well as competition for control of local resources have prompted a growing number of violent incidents. Hostilities have involved in particular tribes the regime historically settled along the Turkish border, part of an attempt to establish an Arab corridor to separate Turkish and Syrian Kurds.<sup>2</sup>

MRAP also calls on the Commission of Inquiry's and the Council's attention with regard to the acute humanitarian situation in Syria's war torn regions, in particular central regions and Aleppo. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians lack access to basic health care and water supplies are only available at one-third of pre-crisis level. According to a UNICEF report in February, providing essential relief supplies like medicines were among the top four humanitarian priorities inside the country.

The situation in the Kurdish regions in the northeast of Syria require a particular attention as the region is inaccessible to humanitarian agencies and it cannot be reached from central Syria due to heavy fighting between governmental troops and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces. Hereto Turkish border-crossing points remain mainly closed, leaving the border with Iraqi Kurdistan, northern Iraq, as the only avenue for basic humanitarian assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Popular Protection Units.

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group – Middle East Report no. 136 (22 January 2013).

To prevent a humanitarian crisis in the relatively insulated region of Syria, the least devastated and war-weary of the country, and avoid rapid decline in food and medicine access, MRAP calls on the international humanitarian community's direct attention and urgent action to this matter, to the human suffering of the peoples of Syria.

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