



# 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 Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples, 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.

[26 May 2014]

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

GE.14-04307 (E)



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## **The human rights and humanitarian situation in the Northern region of the Syrian Arab Republic**

The Syrian conflict has entered its fourth year. According to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 160,000 people have been killed since the conflict began on March 15, 2011, roughly half of them civilians. The conflict has until now displaced more than nine million people, with 2.5 million refugees living outside Syria and 6.5 million displaced within the country.

MRAP has since the beginning of the conflict sought to draw particular international attention to the disastrous effects of the war on the civilian population and the suffering of large refugee communities in Syria's neighbouring countries. Moreover, MRAP has continually warned for the escalation of sectarian and ethnic violence within the conflict, which is targeting vulnerable communities and innocent civilians on grounds of religious and ethnic identity.

Since the end of the two-year siege on Homs and the last evacuation of rebel fighters from the old city, the conflict has intensified in northern Syria, and the humanitarian situation in this part of the country is therefore now of grave concern, particularly in the Aleppo region. As siege warfare is increasingly adopted for conduct of hostilities, especially in urban areas, the issue of humanitarian aid and access is of crucial importance in the approaching months. Several regions and enclaves in northern Syria with populations of hundreds of thousands of civilians are facing periodical sieges on their cities and localities. The sieges are imposed by either government forces or rebel armed groups. The imposition of sieges in Aleppo, Homs, Ayn Al-Arab, Yarmouk, Afrin, Nubul and Zahra have so far denied large communities basic access to food, water, electricity, medicine, hygiene and sanitation items.

In light of this development the UN Security Council, in resolution 2139, adopted on 22 February 2014, made an important call, addressing all parties to "allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, and cease depriving civilians of food and medicine indispensable to their survival". The resolution also called on rapid, safe, unhindered, and immediate humanitarian access for aid agencies, in order to ensure that relief supplies can reach people in need through the most direct routes. In this context the resolution also called for cross-border delivery of aid and assistance from neighbouring countries into Syrian territory, where such actions could provide help to Syrians in urgent need. With this, however, follows several important issues regarding border control and security, which need to be expressly highlighted as cases of gross human rights and humanitarian law violations, have been perpetrated in the border regions.

The regions close to the 900km-long Turkish-Syrian border are composed of a rich diversity of ethnic and religious communities, respectively including Arabs, Arameans, Armenians, Assyrians, Circassians, Kurds and Turkmens, and Muslims, Christians and Druze. The various minority groups have lived side by side for centuries. However, the emergence of hundreds of extremist armed groups, with radical and sectarian ideologies or direct association to organizations such as Al-Qaeda, poses a substantial threat to these communities. During last year there have been violent attacks on the civilian population in these border regions, and many incidents occurred merely on the basis of religious or ethnic identity. The recent attack by radical armed groups in April 2014 on the Armenian village Kassab, in Latakia governorate, is a sad and unfortunate example of this.

Furthermore, in the Kurdish regions that are under de facto control of Kurdish political groups since July 2012, when government forces withdrew from Afrin, Ayn Al-Arab and parts of Al-Hasakah, there have been similar attacks on civilians on the basis of their ethnic identity. The worst attacks were on the ethnically mixed town of Tal Abyad in Ar-Raqqah governorate, where Kurdish civilians were forcefully displaced from their homes amid arrests, killings and looting. Thousands of civilians were forced to leave their homes within 48 hours or to face armed attacks.

In both these instances, fighters belonging to extremist armed groups have been able to operate across the Turkish-Syrian border to carry out their operations. This has been widely reported and documented by journalists, humanitarian workers and human rights organizations. As the risk of attacks by the extremist groups on both sides of the border has increased, Turkish authorities have occasionally imposed stricter control of some parts of the border in an attempt to improve the border security. Yet, the situation on the Syrian-Turkish border continues to be of serious human rights and humanitarian concern.

MRAP will continue to monitor the development on the ground, and report on violations of IHL and IHRL; while supporting UN and humanitarian agencies, as well as human rights and refugee organizations, in their work to protect innocent civilians and victims of the Syrian conflict.