The Netherlands holds Syria responsible for gross human rights violations

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Today the Netherlands announced its decision to hold Syria responsible under international law for gross human rights violations and torture in particular. ‘The Assad regime has committed horrific crimes time after time. The evidence is overwhelming. There must be consequences,’ said Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok.

Syria has been informed of the decision by diplomatic note. The government believes there is ample evidence that Syria has committed widespread gross human rights violations against Syrians, including torture. International organisations have repeatedly reported serious human rights violations for years. Large numbers of Syrians have been tortured, murdered, forcibly disappeared, and subjected to poison-gas attacks, or have lost everything fleeing for their lives.

The Netherlands has invoked Syria’s responsibility for human rights violations under international law, specifically holding Syria responsible for torture under the UN Convention against Torture. In the diplomatic note, the Netherlands reminded Syria of its international obligations to cease the violations and offer victims full reparation. The diplomatic note asked Syria to enter into negotiations, which is a necessary first step in dispute settlement. Should the two states be unable to resolve the dispute, the Netherlands can propose to submit the case to arbitration. If no agreement can be reached on this issue, the Netherlands will submit the case to an international court.

Over the past decade nearly 200,000 Syrian civilians have died in the conflict in Syria, and many more even, according to some sources. Another 100,000 are missing. More than six million Syrians are displaced in their own country and 5.5 million have fled to neighbouring countries, Europe and further. According to Mr Blok, ‘The Assad regime has not hesitated to crack down hard on its own population, using torture and chemical weapons, and bombing hospitals.

A lasting political solution in Syria is only possible if there is no impunity. ‘The victims of these serious crimes must obtain justice, and we are pursuing that end by calling the perpetrators to account,’ said Mr Blok. The Netherlands has been working for years to obtain justice for the victims of human rights violations in Syria. An attempt to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, however, was vetoed in the UN Security Council. Meanwhile, the

Commission of Inquiry on Syria has continuously reported publicly on the human rights violations in Syria, which continue to this day. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (IIIM) was subsequently established to gather and analyse evidence of the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria. The Netherlands has always been a strong supporter of these aims. ‘As the evidence continues to mount, the Netherlands has decided to formally hold the Syrian state accountable,’ said the minister.

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