

Syria: Key UN expert group urges human rights-based peace deal at Geneva II Conference

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GENEVA (21 January 2014) – Representatives of the largest body of independent experts in the United Nations human rights system called for the upcoming Geneva II Conference on Syria to agree on measures to swiftly end the violence. In an open letter* published today, the UN experts also urged a durable peace that has protection of the human rights of all as a core obligation and objective.

“The lives, future and fundamental human rights of millions of affected civilians are at stake in Syria,” said Chaloka Beyani on behalf the Committee which coordinates the work of Special Procedures’ experts.

The UN Experts pledged to support and assist all positive initiatives to end the conflict, re-establish the rule of law, and ensure protection of human rights and humanitarian assistance for all. They offered their expertise in a wide range of human rights issues and emphasized that relevant experts should be granted immediate access to the country to assess the human rights situation.

Mr. Beyani reminded all parties of their obligations to abide by international human rights and humanitarian law. “Civilians, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or political affiliation, must be protected by the Government and opposition groups in the areas they control,” Mr. Beyani underscored. “War crimes and crimes against humanity have been documented...perpetrators of such violations must be held accountable,” he emphasized.

The Experts expressed alarm at civilian deaths. “Protection of the right to life of civilians must be absolute and unconditional, yet the death toll from the conflict to-date is well over 100,000 people,” Mr. Beyani noted, while highlighting “the horrific impact of the conflict on civilian women, children and elderly persons on all sides.”

The group of human experts drew special attention to the situation of an estimated 6.5 million people, 30 percent of the Syrian population, who remain in the country as internally displaced persons, and 2.4 million who are refugees in neighbouring countries. They particularly highlighted the desperate plight of many who remain under siege close to the conflict and in areas where there is frequent change of control, who are facing deteriorating humanitarian conditions.

“The basic needs for security, physical integrity, food, healthcare, shelter, water and sanitation, and education, are almost impossible to meet,” Mr. Beyani warned.

“Humanitarian actors must be able to operate freely and their security must be

guaranteed by all sides. Humanitarian corridors should be immediately established by all parties to the conflict.”

“The hampering of aid to anyone based on their religious or any other affiliation is unacceptable and a grave violation of human rights,” he said.

According to the Experts, (evidence suggests that sectarian tensions and attacks against specific religious and other population groups in Syria have increased and demonstrate a rapidly disintegrating social fabric and growing inter-communal tensions. They expressed concern that such sectarian elements to the violence could have implications for future peace and stability in both Syria and the wider region.

All legitimate actors and population groups must have a voice in shaping the future of Syria, the independent experts said. They particularly emphasized the need to ensure that Syrian women take part in the Geneva talks and all future discussion to end the conflict.

“It is imperative to secure the right of Syrian women to be heard so that the disproportionate consequences of the conflict suffered by them are adequately addressed,” Mr. Beyani said. “Women have a legitimate and critical role to play in rebuilding and reconciling Syria.”

“The Syrian people deserve a secure future with rights, dignity, justice and peace under a broad based representative leadership and national institutions and political bodies committed to human rights of all and reflecting fully the diversity of the Syrian population. No effort should be spared to cease the tragedy of war that has engulfed them,” they said.

(*) Read the Open Letter by the UN Special Procedures human rights experts:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14943&LangID=E>

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The **Coordination Committee** is a body of six independent experts which coordinates and facilitates the work of special procedures as a whole. It is currently composed of Mr. Chaloka Beyani (Chair), Mr. Olivier de Frouville, Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth, Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana, Ms. Frances Raday, and Ms. Farida Shaheed.

They are charged by the Human Rights Council to monitor, report and advise on human rights issues. Currently, there are 37 thematic mandates and 14 mandates related to countries and territories, with 72 mandate holders. In March 2014, three new mandates

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