**Joint Statement on Human Rights and Humanitarian Concerns Related to Conflict Affected Women and Children in Syria and Iraq**

**New York, 11 November 2019 –**Four United Nations High-Level Advocates express their concerns about the precarious human rights, humanitarian and security situation faced by thousands of people, mainly composed of women and children, who are being held in inhumane conditions in overcrowded camps or other settings in northern Syria and Iraq.

“We are deeply concerned about the uncertainty of detention and security arrangements in this region including possible lack of due process, arbitrary detention, imposition of the death penalty, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, sexual violence, among others, as well as limited access to basic humanitarian services such as food, water, medical care and other essential services. We stress that children should not be detained, except as a matter of last resort and only for the shortest possible period, in line with international, human rights and humanitarian laws including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols.”

The recent ongoing hostilities can further exacerbate the dire conditions of this highly vulnerable group and the four UN advocates express their concern at the possible consequences for the whole region. “We urge positive and cooperative action by States to ensure the full protection of human rights and ensure humanitarian needs of these civilians are met.”

“Recognizing that acts of sexual violence have been used as a tactic of terror, we urge that women, boys and girls who have suffered sexual violence and/or have been trafficked or otherwise forced into marriage, sexual slavery and exploitation by UN-listed terrorist groups are not re-victimized by being punished for offences resulting from their exploitation. Survivors of sexual violence committed by UN-listed terrorist groups must be treated as victims of terrorism and should be entitled to holistic support including reparations and redress.”

“States should also take all necessary measures to avoid the stigmatization of children, including those who were born of conflict-related sexual violence or children who were recruited or used by parties to conflict. States must also prevent discrimination of these children based on nationality, birth and immigration status, and should take all measures to prevent statelessness.”

The four UN advocates remind States that they have the obligation to take all the necessary steps to intervene in favour of their nationals abroad, including through the safe repatriation of women and children to their countries of origin with full respect of *non-refoulement*. The situation of women and children deprived of their liberty in northern Syria and Iraq must be assessed on an individual basis. Any decision regarding children should be guided by the best interests of the child as well as principles of family unity, including in the context of repatriation.

“We commend the action of States who have already facilitated the return of their citizens, acknowledging the vulnerability of women and children trapped in displacement camps.  We call on States to fully implement their legal obligations by accepting those citizens who wish to return to their country of citizenship, granting due process to those who should be prosecuted and reintegrating individuals as appropriate into society.  We call on States to treat all survivors of violations, specifically boys and girls, humanely and fairly, so to affirm their dignity and rights.  We offer our collective support and assistance to all Member States to work towards this end.”