**34th session of the Human Rights Council**

**High-level panel discussion on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic**

Draft concept note *(as of 13 March 2017)*

**Date and venue: 14 March 2017, 9 a.m. - noon**,Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva, Switzerland

*(will be broadcast live and archived on http://webtv.un.org)*

**Mandate:** In its resolution 33/23, adopted on 30 September 2016, the Human Rights Council decided to convene a high-level panel on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic at its thirty-fourth session, in consultation with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, including on the issue of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, and the need for accountability for related violations and abuses, featuring witness testimony and Syrian voices, and requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) to liaise with States and all stakeholders, including relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, special procedures of the Human Rights Council, national human rights institutions and civil society, with a view to ensuring their participation in the panel discussion.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the high-level panel discussion include:

* increasing the visibility of violations and abuses of international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL) committed by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic with a particular focus on the issue of arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and torture in detention and enforced disappearances since 2011; and
* suggesting ways forward to make meaningful efforts to address these issues, including on the need to bring alleged perpetrators to account for crimes committed.

**Chair: H.E. Mr. Joaquín Alexander Maza Martelli**, President of the Human Rights Council

**Opening statements: Mr. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro,** Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

**Mr. Kevin Kennedy**, United Nations Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syrian Crisis

**Moderator: Ms. Arwa Damon**,journalist and Senior International Correspondent for CNN

**Panellists: Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghani**,Executive Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights

**Ms. Joumana Seif**,lawyer actively engaged with the Syrian Women’s Network

**Ms. Noura Aljizawi**,former detainee, activist and former Vice-President of the Syrian National Coalition

**Mr. Sarmad Al-Jilane,** Co-Founder of Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, Researcher on Extremist Groups in the Middle East

**Mr. Mazen Darwish**, lawyer and free speech advocate, Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) and detained for over three years

**Format:** The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists, the latter guided by the moderator, will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots and chaired by the President of the Human Rights Council. The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. States and observers, including representatives of civil society, take the floor for a 2-minute intervention each (total 45 minutes), followed by responses from the panellists (15 minutes). A second round of interventions from the floor (45 minutes) will be followed by responses and concluding remarks from the panellists and the moderator (15 minutes). To make the panel interactive, speakers are encouraged to focus their interventions on the themes of the panellists either by asking the panellists questions or sharing relevant experience. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.)

**Outcome:** In accordance with resolution 33/23, OHCHR will prepare a report, in the form of a summary, on the high-level panel discussion, to be presented to the Human Rights Council at its thirty-fifth session.

**Background:** The Syrian crisis is by all accounts one of the most serious human rights crisis the world has seen for the past 60 years. Serious violations and abuses of IHRL and IHL have been committed by all parties to the conflict that may amount to war crimes and some also to crimes against humanity. Thousands have been forcibly disappeared, are missing or in detention, often subjected to torture and under inhumane conditions. Such detainees are often held without charge, in lengthy pre-trial detention which sometimes lasts for years, or sentenced without having been afforded due process or their fair trial rights.

The Human Rights Council decided in September 2016 to convene a high-level panel discussion on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic at its thirty-fourth session, “including on the issue of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, and the need for accountability for related violations and abuses”. On 21 December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 71/248 establishing an international, impartial and independent mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. This mechanism was tasked to cooperate closely with the Commission of Inquiry to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyse evidence of the most serious crimes and human rights violations in order to prepare files that could assist prosecutors, in any jurisdiction, willing to bring criminal action against alleged perpetrators of such crimes.

**Useful documents:** [Human Rights Council resolution 33/23](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/33/23) of 30 September 2016 on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

Monthly reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council submitted pursuant to Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) available at <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/sgreports>

Periodic reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic available at [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx)

OHCHR reports on the Syrian Arab Republic available at [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/MENARegion/Pages/SYIndex.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/MENARegion/Pages/SYIndex.aspx)

[General Assembly resolution 71/248](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/248) of 21 December 2016 on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011