



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté  
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad  
رابطة النساء الدولية للسلام والحرية

26 June 2018

### **Statement on the oral update of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria**

UN Human Rights Council 38<sup>th</sup> session (18 June to 6 July 2018)  
Item 4: **Interactive Dialogue** with Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

I speak on behalf of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Action Canada for Population and Development. The Sexual Rights Initiative supports this statement.

Sexual and gender-based violence has been a persistent issue in Syria since the uprising in 2011 and it has been used to instil fear, humiliate and punish, with grave and disproportionate impact on women and girls.

In March this year, the Commission of Inquiry released a report on sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>1</sup> The report is ground-breaking and a significant departure from previous Commission's reports often lacking a more gender-sensitive analysis. The report brings to the forefront the complexities of such violence in conflict-affected areas over a drawn-out period of time. In so doing, it shows that all those who are made vulnerable by the conflict and the power dynamics within it are affected by such violence, and the differential way in which they are affected. Our organisations urge Human Rights Council members and observer States to ensure that Commission's findings and recommendations in that report be addressed fully in the resolutions and meaningful follow-up be given to them.

In this framework, we urge States to take holistic action to protect women and girls in Syria and in refugee hosting countries and to prevent the exacerbation of the ongoing violence committed against them. This should happen through addressing both individual criminal responsibility and state responsibility for the widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as through targeted sanctions against all perpetrators listed in the Commission of Inquiry's report.

Despite the fact that the report on sexual and gender-based violence showed consistent analysis on the profound and lasting impact of sexual and gender-based violence on those who endure it, the two reports released afterwards, namely the 'Sieges as weapons of war' report<sup>2</sup> and the update on Eastern Ghouta,<sup>3</sup> show that a gender-sensitive approach has not been consistently applied. We urge the Commission to adopt a consistent gender-sensitive approach throughout its work, as this is a crucial element of documenting human rights violations and ensuring that the fulsome extent of those violations is captured.

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<sup>1</sup> '“I lost my dignity”: Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic', UN Index: A/HRC/37/CRP.3, 8 March 2018.

See also, a Commentary on the report by Christine Chinkin - Emerita Professor of International Law London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and Madeleine Rees - Secretary General WILPF International, available at: [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Syria-CoI-23rd\\_May2018\\_CChinkin-MRees\\_FINAL2.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Syria-CoI-23rd_May2018_CChinkin-MRees_FINAL2.pdf) .

<sup>2</sup> "Siege as a weapon of war: Encircle, starve, surrender, evacuate", 29 May 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The siege and recapture of eastern Ghouta marked by war crimes, crimes against humanity, UN Index: A/HRC/38/CRP.3, 20 June 2018.