



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention at

Arria-formula Meeting on "Syrian Women's Voices on Detainees and the Disappeared in Syria"

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New York, 03/06/2022

Mr. President,

Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Delegation of the European Union.

We welcome the holding of this arria formula meeting which Belgium co-sponsors given the scale of the issue, causing anguish and uncertainty for thousands of Syrian families. People have the right to know what has happened to their missing relatives. We also remain very concerned about the use of arbitrary detention, torture and detention conditions of prisoners held by the Syrian regime.

First and foremost, I thank the briefers for their comprehensive and sobering accounts. I also acknowledge their remarkable efforts in the quest for truth, justice and accountability.

Mr. President,

Since the start of the conflict in Syria tens of thousands of people have been detained. Many of them have been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment and thousands are reported to have died in custody as a result. Men, women and children alike.

Today, I would like to make the following three points:

- Firstly, victims and survivors need to be at the heart of our efforts.

We have heard the voices of 4 brave women, whose briefings show that we must take into account the gender and generational impact of detention in our efforts to address the needs of survivors and the families of detained persons. Both women survivors as well as women whose male relatives have disappeared are faced with substantial challenges. Women in detention continue to be subject to different forms of torture, including rape, threats of rape and sexual harassment. Upon release, they suffer particular discrimination and stigma. The imprisonment of women, as well as their male relatives also risks impacting families and family relationships more broadly. Families grieve emotionally, but also have to face the consequences of continuous administrative and judicial limitations impacting their lives on a daily basis.

- Secondly, families of detainees continue to suffer due to lacking information concerning their loved ones. We call for full access for all humanitarian actors to detention facilities in line with international humanitarian law.. We further call on the Syrian authorities to provide families with detailed information on all those who are held in their custody, and clarify their legal status and whereabouts.
- Finally, in order to break the cycle of violence, justice must take place. We call for independent and transparent investigations in all alleged cases of torture. Perpetrators must be held accountable. Belgium fully supports all accountability initiatives, including IIIM and its support to criminal proceedings in national and international courts.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I would like to underline that progress on the issue of detainees is a prerequisite to achieve sustainable peace in Syria.