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United Nations Security Council

Statement by Ms. Karen Abu Zayd

Commissioner

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry

on the Syrian Arab Republic

New York, 12 October 2012

Excellencies,

The depth of the humanitarian crisis caused by the militarization of the Syrian conflict, and in particular the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, cannot be over-emphasised. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries; many more – 1.5 million people by recent UNCHR estimates- have been internally displaced.

As of 2 October, UNHCR has determined that 300,000 Syrians are registered refugees or are awaiting registration in neighbouring states. This is a dramatic increase from the 100,000 refugees recorded by UNHCR in June 2012. In addition, there are some estimated 40,000 refugees in Egypt, with only 1,000 of them registered for assistance with UNHCR.

The crisis has also affected the refugees inside Syria, including some 500,000 Palestinians and over 103,000 registered Iraqi refugees. Over 13,000 Iraqi refugees left Syria during the first half of 2012, most returning to Iraq. UNRWA has estimated that 40% of the Palestinian refugee population has been displaced as a result of the current crisis, with some 6,000 of them leaving to Jordan and Lebanon.

There are also over 6,000 foreign workers residing in Syria, many of whom are female domestic workers from more than 23 countries, who have requested for evacuation. Most lack the resources needed to leave independently.

It was evident from the Commission's interviews that many of those fleeing Syria were driven out by shortages as well as by shelling. Where Government forces have cordoned off some areas that are being shelled, shortages of food, potable water, gas and necessary items such as baby formula and milk have resulted.

The Commission received numerous accounts, in particular from civilians in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo governorates and in Homs city, of civilians barely managing to survive. Shelling, and in some cases snipers, made venturing outside to search for food or water often too dangerous to contemplate. Hospitals, including field hospitals and clinics, reportedly lack equipment and supplies to give the wounded medical care. There is an urgent need for the organisation of safe passage of humanitarian aid to communities inside Syria.

Children have been particularly affected by the conflict, and have numbered heavily among those killed and injured. With the reopening of schools on 16 September, thousands of children have reportedly been unable to return to their school. According to OCHA figures, some 2,072 schools, or 10 per cent of all public schools have been damaged and destroyed as a result of the violence, while more than 600 schools across Syria are currently hosting IDPs.

The conflict has exacerbated pre-existing levels of poverty and unemployment driven by the decade-long drought in rural, agricultural areas. There has been a dramatic contraction of the Syrian economy, with the devaluation of the Syrian pound, which has lost 30% of its value since the onset of events, and inflation that soared to an annual rate of over 50%.

The socio-economic and humanitarian situation in Syria has deteriorated dramatically in the last three months. A clear path forward to a resolution of the conflict which allows refugees and the displaced to safely return to their homes, and their lives, needs urgently to be found.