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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Selected testimonies from victims of the Syrian conflict

I. Introduction

1. The ongoing armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has caused death and destruction on a massive scale. The commission's reports, updates, thematic papers and speeches have chronicled violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law by all warring parties and the immense human suffering that these violations have caused. The commission is presenting, with their consent, twelve selected testimonies from victims of egregious violations. These testimonies are a public recognition of victims' suffering and the harm caused to them by parties to the conflict. They serve as an acknowledgement of the facts and as a tribute to the victims.¹

2. In the present document, victims are persons who suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that constitute gross violations of international human rights law, or serious violations of international humanitarian law. Victims also include immediate family or dependants of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in reprisal for intervening to assist victims in distress.

3. Exposing victim's voices guarantees the preservation of memory and serves as a vital safeguard against the recurrence of violations. Victims, their families and their societies have the imprescriptible right to know the truth about the circumstances in which violations took place and the victims' fate.² As an official declaration, this selection of testimonies asserts this individual and collective right to full and public disclosure of the truth. In establishing an accurate account of the violations that occurred in the Syrian Arab Republic, the commission plays a role in ensuring the enjoyment of the right to truth for victims, their relatives, communities and societies.

4. Since its establishment, the commission has relied primarily on first-hand accounts to corroborate incidents. Photographs, video recordings, satellite imagery and forensic and medical records are collected, analysed and used to verify accounts. Reports from Governments and non-Governmental sources, academic analyses, as well as United Nations reports, including from human rights bodies and mechanisms and humanitarian organizations, form part of the investigation. The standard of proof employed in previous reports was used in assessing these accounts. Such a standard was met when incidents were corroborated to a level where the commission had reasonable grounds to believe that violations had occurred as described. While the violations set out have been corroborated, the personal details of each victim's account remain their own.

5. These twelve statements are a fraction of the 3200 testimonies that the commission has collected. They are indicative of trends and patterns of violations identified in the commission's reports. They represent the most recent emblematic cases documented between 2011 and 2014, and demonstrate that few Syrians have been spared in this war. They include a citizen journalist detained and tortured by Government forces and then by ISIS; a pregnant woman left adrift after losing her husband and parents; a field hospital doctor who treats victims of barrel bomb attacks in Aleppo; a witness of the chlorine attacks in Hama; a witness to executions and amputations carried out by ISIS in Aleppo governorate; a victim of the ongoing siege of Yarmouk camp in Damascus; a child injured

¹ In accordance with the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 2005, A/RES/60/147

² Principle 2, Set of principles for the protection and promotion of human rights through action to combat impunity, E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1

in a missile attack on a school in Aleppo city and his father who describes the anguish of searching for his children among the ruins of their school; a first-responder to a double car-bombing in Homs city; a man tortured in Damascus' Mezzeh detention facility; a victim of forcible displacement of Kurdish civilians in Ar-Raqqah; and a witness to ISIS fighters' conducting executions and recruiting children for active participation in hostilities. Many of those interviewed were victims of multiple abuses and violations perpetrated by Government, anti-Government armed groups and ISIS. These testimonies are taken from internally displaced persons, persons living inside Syria, as well as men, women and children in hospitals, cities and refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The statements are recorded in the third person to provide additional protection to interviewees in the event that they become witnesses in future judicial proceedings.

6. Female interviewees largely did not provide consent to the release of testimonies detailing rape and other forms of sexual violence. Where children were interviewed, consent was obtained from the children and their guardians. While most of the interviewees are civilians, former combatants from all parties to the conflict have also been interviewed. Journalists, human rights defenders, aid workers and medical staff are among those who provided invaluable accounts. In all instances, care has been taken to protect their identities.

7. These accounts show that all parties to the conflict in Syria violate international human rights and humanitarian law. Above all, these testimonies demonstrate that civilians pay the greatest price for the brutality of the parties to the conflict.

II. Selected Testimonies

A. *The interviewee is a male citizen journalist from Aleppo who was interviewed on 15 August 2014*

The interviewee has been arrested three times by Government forces for being an activist. The fourth time he was arrested and detained by ISIS due to his criticism of them in online newspapers.

From 2011 till 2014, he was coordinating demonstrations, working on social media and a [REDACTED]. The interviewee [REDACTED] for online newspapers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

The first time the interviewee was detained was in [REDACTED] 2011. He was arrested by the Shabbiha while participating in a demonstration in Aleppo. He was detained for [REDACTED] days at the Military Intelligence Branch in Aleppo. He was interrogated, beaten with a wooden stick, received electric shocks on his knees and was hung up by his wrists from the ceiling for [REDACTED] days.

The second time he was detained was in [REDACTED] 2011. Again, he was arrested by the Shabbiha while participating in a demonstration in Aleppo. He was detained for [REDACTED] days at the Military Intelligence Branch in Aleppo. He was interrogated and beaten with a wooden stick during the [REDACTED] days there.

The third time he was detained was in early 2012. The interviewee was arrested by Government forces while he was taking pictures with his mobile phone of the big clock in Aleppo. He was first detained for [REDACTED] days in an isolated cell at the Political Intelligence Branch in Suleimania neighbourhood of Aleppo. For [REDACTED] days he was interrogated, beaten with a wooden stick and hung up by his wrists from the ceiling. Afterwards the interviewee was transferred to the Criminal Security Intelligence Branch in Aleppo. He was detained there for [REDACTED] days. He was interrogated for one day and beaten with a plastic pipe. After his release, the interviewee went to his family in [REDACTED]. He continued working as an activist, writing commentary on [REDACTED]. Most of his writing criticised the rise of ISIS.

In October 2013, █████ was killed by ISIS in █████ in Aleppo governorate. He was █████ years old. █████ was a journalist. He was murdered while █████. Two ISIS members came into █████ and shot the victim. One ISIS member was waiting outside. Witnesses recognized them as being from ISIS. The interviewee was informed of what happened by friends who witnessed the event. The murder of █████ was widely reported. ISIS announced on Twitter that they would continue killing people working for his media outlet. The interviewee saw the Twitter message. (A copy of Twitter message has been retrieved and archived).

On █████ November 2013, another friend of the interviewee was kidnapped by ISIS. His name was █████, aged █████ years. He was also a journalist.

On █████ November 2013, the interviewee was arrested at his house in █████ by five members of ISIS. ISIS members handcuffed and blindfolded him and took him away in the presence of his friends. His friends and family were not arrested. ISIS took the interviewee to a former hospital in Qadi Askar. The interviewee was put into in a cell in the basement. There were 12 cells. Each cell contained 40 to 50 people. All detainees were male. Most of the detainees were activists or people who opposed ISIS's ideology.

The next day, the interviewee was taken out of his cell, blindfolded, and escorted into a room on the first floor. While he lay on the ground, up to four ISIS members beat him with their hands, feet, and a wooden stick. He was beaten because he criticized ISIS on a public page of Facebook.

The interviewee was detained for █████ days. He was handcuffed with his hands in front of him. Each time an ISIS member would come, everyone was forced to stand against the wall so nobody would see them. If ISIS needed one of the detainees, he would be blindfolded before being taken away. During the last three days of his detention, the interviewee asked ISIS to remove his handcuffs because he had small insects over his body. Conditions of the cells were very bad. There was no bathroom. Many detainees had long hair. Interviewee did not take a shower for the entirety of his time in custody.

Every day he could hear people being tortured but could not see what was done to them. After █████ days they interrogated and beat him again. Then ISIS members started to come into the basement on a daily basis. It became evident to him that his fellow detainees were being executed. The executions followed a pattern: two ISIS members would come into the cell, announce the names of the wanted persons, blindfold them while standing against the wall, escort them out of the cell into the first floor and a few minutes later they would hear gunshots. This occurred once a day, every day.

During the last three days, there were 27 detainees left in the interviewee's cell. One day, 19 detainees were killed from his cell at the same time. The last day ISIS came into his cell and called his name and another detainee called █████. At that time clashes were taking place outside the building. Just when they were being escorted out of the cell, fighters from another armed group entered the building and started shooting. The interviewee and █████ were pushed back into the cell and ISIS locked their cell. Some members of ISIS escaped during the clashes, while others were killed.

Around 150 people were released by the other armed group on 7 or 8 January 2014. The interviewee estimates that before the execution, there were between 400 and 600 detainees. When fighters from the other armed group helped the survivors escape from the backyard of the building, they discovered approximately 45 bodies in the yard of the hospital. They had all recently been shot in the back of their head. The other armed group filmed the discovered bodies. (A copy of video has been retrieved and archived). The interviewee, aided by the other armed groups, escaped on 8 January 2014 and went to his family in █████.

B. *The interviewee is a [REDACTED] woman, interviewed on 9 July 2014.*

The interviewee, a Kurdish woman, has suffered greatly from the poor security and humanitarian situation in [REDACTED] neighbourhood in Aleppo city. The area had been severely affected by the conflict, and in particular by indiscriminate shelling “from both the FSA and the Syrian Army”. The FSA and “Al Hayani” (a local armed group affiliated with the FSA) were fighting in the area against the Syrian Army, allied with “the Kurdish party”. She was not able to provide further details on the various groups and army units.

One day in April 2014, her husband left the house to buy some bread for the family. He never returned and the interviewee has no information about what happened to him. She tried to collect information about him “from everybody”, including family relatives, friends and people from the neighbourhood, but to no avail. She “does not know if he is alive or dead, if he has been arrested or kidnapped”. Her husband “had nothing to do with any groups or the conflict”. Since then, her life has been completely devastated and she is “lost”. She does not know what to do because she is alone and pregnant. She does not know what she should say to her children when they ask about their father.

After the disappearance of her husband, she went to live with his parents who resided in the same neighbourhood. One day, after two weeks there, she went out to buy some food in another neighbourhood. When she came back a few hours later, she discovered that a barrel bomb had hit her neighbourhood. She did not witness the incident herself. One of her neighbours saw her and told her that she should not go further because the house of her in-laws had been directly hit by a barrel bomb and was completely destroyed: “He told me there was nothing left, only rubble”. The neighbour also informed her that both parents of her husband (who were 85 and 60 years old) were killed in the incident. According to her, the front line was located “approximately 4 kilometres” from the house of her in-laws in [REDACTED] and there was no military target in the vicinity.

The interviewee “did not know what to do” and “went running and crying in the street” with her son. She was “devastated” because she “had lost her husband, her in-laws, her house and had nothing left” but her one-year-old son. She kept her ID and papers in her handbag. She “always kept them with” her as “you never knew where there would be shelling and you would have to leave”. She had no more money, clothes or any personal belongings as everything had been left in the house of her in-laws.

Two elderly people from her neighbourhood offered her a place to stay. She was in a state of despair because her son was “always crying, like he was asking for his dad” and she did not have any money to buy diapers or food for him. After two weeks, the neighbours asked her to leave because they could not afford to help her anymore. She went into the street and asked someone to let her use his phone to call her brother who lived in a small village outside of Aleppo. Her brother came to pick her up and she stayed with them for two weeks. After that, she left because her brother had no job, six children and could no longer afford to host her. She then called her younger sister who was already in Lebanon and joined her.

Since then, she “does not know what to do” because she will give birth very soon and she does not have any money. She went “everywhere” in Beirut to ask for work but was not able to find any because “nobody wants to hire a pregnant woman”. She is staying with her younger sister who is single and also does not have any source of income.

She recently went to the hospital and was informed that she would need to pay 250 USD to be able to deliver there. She became even more worried as she does not have that money. She convinced one of her neighbours to give her some work that she could do from home. She is now working from home to make “carton boxes”. She is paid 20,000 Lebanese

pounds for every 30 boxes. Her sister is helping her and they have managed to collect 100USD until the neighbour told her that he could not continue to give her work. All she can do is “cry, weep and rely on God”.

C. *The interviewee is a man working in a field hospital in [REDACTED], Aleppo city interviewed on 12 February 2014.*

Opposition-held districts in Aleppo city have been shelled fiercely for weeks by Government forces. Fighter planes and helicopters carrying barrel bombs fly over the city all day long on a daily basis. For the residents of Aleppo, days have become imbued with terror and the expectation of death from the sky.

While Aleppo has been under intensive shelling for several weeks, Friday 31 January 2014 was among the worst that Aleppo city witnessed since the eruption of the conflict. Government forces fiercely and relentlessly struck Aleppo, all day long from morning till sunset, with at least 40 barrel bombs and missiles, causing dozens of killings, hundreds of injuries, entirely levelling tens of buildings and destroying tens of cars.

The shelling started on Friday 31 January at 8:30am while he was at the [REDACTED] field hospital. He heard many helicopter gunships hovering all over the opposition-held areas of Aleppo city. The warship helicopters started dropping barrel bombs on opposition-held areas in the eastern and western districts of Aleppo city. The same districts were consecutively hit with hardly any intervals. The barrel bombs exploded in densely residential and shopping areas.

The eastern districts of Aleppo city were hit with barrel bombs and missiles included Al Mousalt, Moyaser, Al Sh'ar, Qadi Askar, Al Maadi, Al Sakhour and Maskin Hanano districts. The eastern districts were hit with about 12 barrel bombs between 8:30am and noon. They also targeted western districts with barrel bombs and missiles including Al Sukkari, Al Zabedia, Seif Al Dawala, Jisr Al Haj, Al Ansari Al Sharqi and Al Kallasa. The western districts were hit with about 15 barrel bombs between 8:30am and noon.

Fighter jets and helicopters carrying barrel bombs were flying over the city all day long. They kept patrolling the skies, finding their next target, then dropping their load. The same districts were hit frequently, making barrel bombs unavoidable and inescapable.

The helicopters have been dropping their load from a high latitude of approximately six kilometres. Armed fighters kept firing intermittently at the helicopters with 14.5mm and 23mm machine guns. However, the fighters lacked the weapons needed to take down aircraft. The helicopters and fighter jets did not pay much attention and kept hovering, patrolling the sky and taking their time to find their next target.

The daily shelling usually starts by 8:45am and stops by 4:00pm, when it would get dark. On 31 January shelling continued beyond that, as gunship helicopters hit Al Fardous and Al Kalasa districts at 4:30pm and 4:45pm, at sunset.

Shelling killed dozens, injured hundreds, flattened scores of residential buildings, burned down large parts of the city, destroyed infrastructure, and forced hundreds of residents to flee Aleppo city. Civilians were targeted to weaken popular support. Armed group fighters positioned on the frontlines were hardly hit while civilian districts and structure were constantly fired upon.

The shelling of 31 January 2014 resulted in dozens of injured being brought to field hospitals in Aleppo hospitals including [REDACTED], where he was working. The field hospitals and medical staff were overwhelmed with injured people being brought in. Paramedics were overwhelmed with medical evacuation and ambulance vehicles kept racing to bring the injured from several airstrike scenes. Doctors and other medical personnel worked amid

continuous shelling by barrel bomb and missiles. All the injuries he treated were from aerial strikes bombardment. The injuries were severe. Many injured died upon or after few minutes of reaching the hospital. He dealt with very severe injuries, mostly abdominal and brain injuries. There were pools of blood and distorted limbs. The hospital turned into a morgue. Bodies were lined up on the pavement.

Medical staff worked amid a lack of basic medical necessities, for example blood, syringes, serum, bandages, and gloves. Medical supplies were already running low as the hospital had been treating many casualties from intensive Government shelling for over two months. The situation was exacerbated by the blockade of the road between Turkey and Aleppo due to infighting between ISIS and other armed groups. The blockade continued until the reopening of roads and the border crossing on 7 February 2014.

The number of injured transferred was beyond his hospital's capacity, so they attempted to refer patients to other field hospitals. However all field hospitals in opposition-held areas were far more overwhelmed, for example Al Zarzour, Al Shaar and Al Fardous field hospitals.

News of deaths, numbers of casualties and locations of airstrikes spread with alarming speed through field hospitals, among medical staff and the injured and people accompanying them. The exact number of deaths is unknown as many civilians were buried under rubble. There was a lack of proper tools and machines needed to exhume them. The majority of the injured he received were civilians, mostly children and women. He added that Government forces do not target armed group fighters. Rather they target civilians to terrorise them and force them to flee.

By midnight he literally collapsed emotionally and physically as he had never seen such bloody and brutal attacks since the eruption of the conflict in Aleppo. The attacks continued on the following day, 1 February 2014. █████ as well as other districts were targeted with aerial strikes and barrel bombardment. A plane dropped another barrel bomb in █████.

People knew that this campaign would continue. They were terrorized, which led to huge waves of displacement as thousands fled opposition-held districts. He remembers standing out in the street in █████ watching people crying, leaving their homes, with expressions of helplessness and hopelessness. "They did not know where they were heading and did not have means to go."

He watched helplessly as hundreds of terrified residents fled █████ and other nearby districts. People who were determined never to leave, broke down and left to save their lives. Entire districts were emptied, shops and schools closed. Cars disappeared from the streets along with the people.

Before the barrel bombing campaign and during the stalemate opposition-held districts in Aleppo city used to be more densely populated than Government-controlled areas. Basic necessities were available and normal life continued. Even though some residents had been killed and injured in prior attacks, people were determined not to leave their homes. The latest barrel bombing attacks forced these people to flee these districts.

Many were displaced to Government-held districts in Aleppo city as these areas are not subjected to aerial strikes or shelling by Government forces. Further fighting between ISIS and other armed groups blocked the road for residents of Aleppo's eastern districts, so some of them had no choice but to go to Government areas.

D. *The interviewee is an adult man, originally from Hama governorate. He was interviewed on 27 May 2014.*

The interviewee became a refugee in [REDACTED] 2014. He returned to Syria to visit his family who lives in Kafr Zeita in early April 2014. He stayed there for a month before returning to [REDACTED].

Kafr Zeita is an opposition-held town located in the countryside of Hama governorate, 35 km to the north west of Hama city. It has been constantly targeted by air strikes and artillery shelling from regime forces stationed in Deir Mehrda. Armed group fighters were based at its outskirts and were launching attacks on Government forces in Hama city from there. Kafr Zeita was located about six kilometres from the front lines. It is also located near Morek village which has been the site of recent violent clashes. Recently, opposition forces advanced in northern Hama and have also blocked the highway between Hama and Aleppo.

Prior to conflict, Kafr Zeita used to have a population of approximately 25,000 people. Less than one-tenth of the population still remains there. Some of them are original residents, but many are internally displaced persons from nearby villages which are under more sustained attack.

In early April 2014, Government forces and anti-Government armed groups, stationed at the outskirts of Kafr Zeita, agreed upon a one-month truce. Both parties agreed that Government forces would cease bombarding civilians in Kafr Zeita in return for the withdrawal of the armed group fighters from Hama city who were now based just out of Kafr Zeita. The truce ended three days later, on about 10 April, when Government forces stationed in Deir Mehrda launched artillery attack against Kafr Zeita, killing two people including one infant.

During his stay in Kafr Zeita in April 2014, a series of barrel bombs packed with chlorine gas dropped by a Government helicopter warship. They killed two people and injured scores more. They also caused mass displacement of civilians.

On 11 April 2014, at 6:00pm, he heard warship helicopter hovering. A few minutes later the helicopter dropped several barrels on the western part of Kafr Zeita. The first barrel bomb was dropped about 400 meters away from where he was. It resulted in a massive explosion with yellowish fumes. The yellowish fumes were moving eastward with the wind and smelled like chlorine.

Meanwhile armed group fighters started screaming from mosque minarets and on the radio that this was a chemical attack and that people should take necessary precautions. The fumes and smell of chlorine caused state of panic and terror among the people. Many started to flee from Kafr Zeita, moving to the west, as the smoke was being blown eastward. Some people rushed to the impact site to rescue affected people, including the interviewee. They were covering their face with their shirts.

Ambulances rushed to the impact site and transferred dozens of victims who were suffering from suffocation and had difficulty breathing. Victims were transferred to a hospital in Kafr Zeita. Among the people he rescued are children of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They were taken to the hospital in Kafr Zeita. They also transferred the son of [REDACTED] to the same hospital. Due to a lack of medical equipment including inhalers and oxygen, he had to be transferred to another hospital. All of the children were under 12-years-old and were having difficulty breathing. He heard that no one was killed as a direct result of chlorine gas. Two died from head injuries at the impact site. They were an old man and a girl.

The following day, 12 April, at 8:30am, a Government warship helicopter dropped two barrel bombs packed with chlorine gas on the eastern part of the city. One barrel did not explode. It was torn open on impact, and the gas leaked. At least 25 people were affected.

Most of them suffered from suffocation, shortness of breath and fainting. They were rushed to a nearby hospital.

On 16 April 2014, a Government warship helicopter dropped a barrel bomb packed with chlorine gas on the centre of Kafr Zeita. Several people suffered from suffocation, shortness of breath and fainting. They were rushed to the hospital in Kafer Zeita. Additionally, at about 7:30pm, Government forces stationed at al Hamamiyat, Deir Mehrda, and Al-Khazanat checkpoints pounded Kafr Zeita with heavy artillery and rocket shelling. Residents fled to groves on the outskirts and spent the night there. They returned to the town in the morning, when shelling stopped at about 4:00am.

The Government renewed its attack on 18 April 2014 at about 11:00pm. A Government warship helicopter dropped two barrels loaded with chlorine gas on the centre of Kafr Zeita. At least 50 people suffered from suffocation, shortness of breath and fainting. They were treated at the hospital in Kafr Zeita.

E. *The interviewee is an adult male from Minbeij in Aleppo governorate. He was interviewed on 3 July 2014.*

The interviewee is from Minbeij countryside in Aleppo province. He left Syria to become a refugee in █████ 2014.

ISIS took over Minbeij town after the withdrawal of the Free Syrian Army. When ISIS assumed control, they started to enforce their laws. Women were ordered to cover their face and hair. Women who failed to do so were flogged. ISIS members arrested people who were selling cigarettes and closed their shops. Any person who sold cigarettes in his shop had the cigarettes confiscated and destroyed. They also had to pay a fine to ISIS or they would be arrested.

Between April and June 2014, the interviewee witnessed several executions by ISIS. Victims were either shot in the head or had their throats cut. Sometimes people were beheaded. Corpses were left in the public space for one to three days. Sometimes bodies were tied to a wooden cross. They were left there for people passing by to see. People were terrified. Children would see the bodies. The families of the persons killed could only remove the bodies with the permission of ISIS. The interviewee's █████ saw the head of one of the victims placed on a spike on a fence around a public garden. ISIS says that the people executed were collaborating with the Government or were FSA fighters or had committed rape but the interviewee is not sure this is the case.

The interviewee was also present at an amputation. ISIS announced that the man they brought in front of the crowd was a thief. The amputation was also in the public space before a crowd. ISIS injected the man's right hand with an anaesthetic and then they cut his hand with a sword.

ISIS fighters in Minbeij were a mix of Syrians and foreigners. They used noms de guerre such as █████ and █████. As far as he is aware, no one knew their real names. ISIS had taken over a government building in Minbeij. It is rumoured that the group is using it as a detention centre. He heard they were arresting relatives of members of other armed groups. He does not know what happened to the people who were arrested.

F. *The interviewee is an adult male from Damascus city. He was interviewed on 3 July 2014.*

The interviewee is originally from █████ in Damascus city. In 2013, his family moved to █████ in Rif Damascus as Government security forces were conducting mass arrests

of people in Damascus city, especially of Sunni men. One of his friends, a civilian, was arrested from his house in late 2013. Government security forces broke down the door to his house and arrested him. Up to now, no one knows where he is or what happened to him.

In [REDACTED] 2011, Government forces arrested about [REDACTED] persons in [REDACTED], including a friend of his. They were taken to the security branch in Kafr Sousa. After [REDACTED] months, his friend's family received call from the intelligence branch in Kafr Sousa informing them that their son died of natural causes in the detention and asked them to collect his ID. His family refused to go.

In [REDACTED] 2013, Government forces raided [REDACTED]. The interviewee and his brother, both civilians, fled to other neighbourhoods and eventually went to live in Al Yarmouk camp in Rif Damascus. Government forces, together with local Popular Committees, besieged Al Yarmouk camp, Beit Sahm and Al-Hajar Al-Aswad. No food or medicine was being allowed into these areas.

People inside were starving. They were eating grass and leaves to survive. Some people, especially the elderly and young children, died due to lack of food and medicine. The interviewee had no choice but to stay in the camp until March 2014 when they were told that the Government forces would allow civilians to leave the camp. However, the Government forces allowed only elderly women to leave. Even elderly men were ordered to go back to the camp. About 180 young men were arrested at Government checkpoints when they tried to leave the camp.

The armed groups present in the camp are Jabhat Al-Nusra, the FSA and the Islamic Front. In April 2014, Yarmouk residents heard that the Government forces and armed groups in Beit Sahm, Babila and Yalda had reached an agreement under which the armed groups would surrender their weapons to the Government's Palestine branch and the Government would allow people to leave the camp and also allow food to enter the besieged areas.

Based on this agreement the interviewee managed to leave Al Yarmouk camp through Babila checkpoint with other families. The interviewee's [REDACTED] was too afraid to leave the camp as he had not completed his military service with the Government and was of being arrested. He is still inside Al Yarmouk camp, where the siege continues.

G. *The interviewee is a [REDACTED] boy from Aleppo who was interviewed in presence of an appropriate adult on 30 June 2014.*

The interviewee is a student who lived in [REDACTED], an opposition-held district in Aleppo city. He took refuge in [REDACTED] together with his family on [REDACTED] June 2014. He was a student at [REDACTED] Elementary School in [REDACTED]. Since September 2012, however, Government-run education in opposition-held areas has been disrupted due to the eruption of armed conflict in Aleppo governorate.

Consequently he lost a school year (2012-2013) and instead of being in the sixth grade, he is currently in the fifth grade. His school had been occupied by Ahrar Al Sham since 2012. An alternative educational system was created in opposition held areas including in his neighbourhood. Mosques are often used as schools as they are usually well-built and can survive Government attacks.

He is currently studying at [REDACTED], a school based [REDACTED] Mosque. It is a co-educational school teaches about 300 students aged between 5 and 15 years. The same curriculum used prior to conflict is still in use. However mention of Ba'ath party and related subjects have been removed.

On approximately 10 April 2014, his teacher told the students at the school that they would be participating in an art exhibition and singing event for children from schools around the

area to be held in Ain Jalout in two weeks' time. He is a talented art student and he can sing nicely, so some of his drawings were selected.

On 30 April, at about 7:30am, the interviewee went together with his [REDACTED] brother to [REDACTED] School, where twenty-five students gathered and walked accompanied by their teacher to Ain Jalout School, located in Al Ansari Al Sharqi.

They entered the school at about 8:00am. On the ground floor, there was a corridor with classrooms on either side. They were placed in a class room with windows facing the school yard. His brother was standing close to the window, while he was close to the classroom door. By 9am, there were about 400 people at the school including hundreds of students from several schools in the vicinity, organizers, school teachers and students' family members. The event was supposed to start at 9:00am and hundreds more people were expected to arrive shortly. About 9:05am, he heard a distant loud roar of a warplane, and soon afterwards he felt strong pressure coming from the windows that lifted him up and pushed him against the wall.

He fell unconscious. When he regained his conscious, he saw the destroyed room. Windows were blown out from the walls. There was smashed glass and large parts of the ceiling had fallen a few centimetres away from him. He also saw a female student, from the fourth grade, aged ten, sitting on a chair, with her head bent down. He couldn't tell whether she was dead or unconscious. While bleeding from his head injury and other injuries to his back and arm, he managed to leave the room. There were three men outside who rushed to rescue him. They rushed him in a car to Al Zarzour hospital, where his wounds were stitched and wrapped in bandages. One of his teachers, who had been on her way to the exhibition when the missile hit the school, accompanied him together with other injured students to their houses.

He did not know that his younger brother, [REDACTED], was killed in the incident until he reached home.

H. *The interviewee is a [REDACTED] male from Aleppo who was interviewed on 30 June 2014. He is the father of the above interviewee.*

The father of interviewee G, a [REDACTED] man, stated that on 30 April at about 9:05am, he was home in [REDACTED], in Aleppo city. Both his neighbourhood and the Al-Ansari neighborhood, where the Ain Jalout Elementary School is, are in opposition-held areas. He heard a loud explosion. When he looked from the window of his apartment, he saw smoke rising from an area he suspected it to be near Ain Jalout Elementary School where his two sons had just gone to participate in an art exhibition.

He and his wife were shocked and kept praying that their children were safe. He rushed immediately to the school. He arrived there within ten minutes.

The school building was seriously damaged. There were pools of blood and dead bodies were scattered everywhere. Many students were trapped and buried under rubble. He kept looking for his children among the dead bodies and severed body parts, trying to identify them by their clothes. He could not find them so he rushed to Omer Abd Al Aziz Hospital. To his shock, he found his son [REDACTED], seriously injured in the head, bleeding heavily but still breathing. He rushed to get a car to transfer him to Turkey for medical treatment. He asked a friend to accompany him and then he continued to look for his other son [REDACTED].

Devastated, he went home and told his wife about what happened to [REDACTED] and was on his way out when he saw the teacher bringing [REDACTED] safely home. He could not believe that his son was alive. He took him immediately to a private clinic to check on his head injury. In the meantime he kept calling his friend to check on [REDACTED]. His friend called him a little

while later and told him that [REDACTED] did not make it to Turkey, as he died upon reaching Bab al Salama border crossing.

After the death of his younger son, the family left Aleppo city and took refuge in Turkey. The family is still in mourning. His son avoids talking about his brother.

He explained that Ain Jalout is located in a complex that consists of four schools including Ain Jalout Elementary School. [REDACTED] school is located about 61 metres south of Ain Jalout and is occupied by Ansar Al Aqida Battalion. It is used as a sleeping shelter for about 50 armed men carrying light weapons. It has been rarely targeted though it is well-known.

There is also a Sharia Court for civil disputes, operated by Ahrar Al Sham. It is located in [REDACTED] school located in the same school complex. At least 35 people were killed and 40 injured. Most of the dead and injured were students. Among them, there were three sisters from the [REDACTED] family. Two of them were killed immediately. The third sustained serious injuries to her lungs and is currently in intensive care in a [REDACTED] hospital.

Three days prior to the attack, the school administration sent around an invitation to an exhibit of children's drawings depicting Syria at war. They published the invitation online. The attack came two days after the Government and armed groups reached a deal in Aleppo governorate to restore electricity in exchange for a cessation of military attacks on civilians, namely the barrel bombing campaign launched by the Government against opposition-held areas. This truce encouraged the organisers to publish it online and to spread the word about it.

The interviewee emphasized that a Government fighter jet fired a missile on Ain Jalout elementary school. It was not hit with a barrel bomb which connected be aimed accurately, in contrast to missiles that never miss their targets. The school has been targeted as part of Government policy targeting civil gatherings.

The same school had been hit before, when a charity organised a fundraising market mainly for displaced and poor people just before Eid 2013. On 5 August 2013, Government forces targeted Ain Jalout elementary school with mortar shelling, while the school was packed mostly with women and children who gathered at the school to get free clothing or other basic necessities from the charity market. The mortar attack resulted in the deaths of many, mostly children and women and injured dozens of victims.

I. *The interviewee is a man from Homs city. He was interviewed on 5 May 2014.*

The interviewee lost his [REDACTED] in one of the recent car bomb attacks on a government controlled area of Homs City, called Karm Al-Louz. The car-bombings took place on 9 April 2014.

The explosion that occurred that day was actually "double" car bomb. The two cars that were parked in the area exploded one after another within a period of 20 minutes in a nearby area. Both car bombs exploded in Karm Al-Louz, on the main street of this neighbourhood, Mohammed Al-Khoudari Street. The first car was parked near a distribution centre for gas cylinders, not far from a busy commercial popular market in the area. "Just few minutes before the truck was scheduled to come to the area of distribution, loaded with gas cylinders, the booby trapped car that was parked nearby exploded". He, as well as many other residents of the neighbourhood, rushed to the area to rescue wounded and killed persons and to help the firefighters extinguish the raging fire.

He does not know exactly how many people were killed in this first attack. The number of victims was in the dozens, possibly more than 30 persons. "I know one family whose home was close to the site of the explosion. They were all killed as their home completely

collapsed”. Many children and women were killed. He describes the horrific scene with parts of bodies – hands, legs, heads – scattered all around the targeted area and says that this was the worst scene ever that he’d ever seen in his entire life. He described the area as a completely civilian area. “We don’t have any army presence in this part of Homs, not even a checkpoint or a security barrier.”

The interviewee said that his [REDACTED] rushed to help those who were injured. “He was going back and forth with his car transporting injured people to the area’s hospitals and clinics.” Tragically, 20-30 minutes later, while [REDACTED] was transporting other wounded persons, the second car exploded, killing [REDACTED] as well as many other victims. Most of the people killed were aid workers and residents who gathered to help to rescue the victims of the first attack.

The following day, the day of [REDACTED]’s funeral, the procession of the crowd was attacked by three mortar shells coming from the direction of the old city of Homs, where the last anti-Government armed group fighters were still barricading themselves. Many of the civilians who were at the funeral were injured.

Jabhat Al-Nusra announced on the Internet that they were responsible for the double car bomb.

J. The interviewee is a [REDACTED] man from Rif Damascus who was interviewed on [REDACTED]

The interviewee has been in the custody of Syrian Government Security Forces on two occasions because of his involvement with the [REDACTED] Coordination Committee. He was detained even though he participated exclusively in peaceful demonstrations. He was also a member of the Local Council created in [REDACTED] when it fell under the control of anti-Government armed groups. The Council aimed to ensure security and administration during a potential period of transition.

On [REDACTED] August 2012, following the withdrawal of anti-Government armed groups from the neighbourhood, the Syrian armed forces conducted house-raids. Soldiers came to his house, where he was living with his parents and sisters. During their search they discovered, a depot for medical supplies near his house. The soldiers brought him to the location. He heard their commander saying: “Kill him.” The interviewee pleaded with the soldiers. He lied, saying that he would provide them with information on who had rented the house.

One of the soldiers told the interviewee to get down on his knees. He was about to shoot when another soldier who was about to set the depot on fire suggested that they should leave the interviewee to burn in the basement. The interviewee begged them for mercy saying that he has kids and that he had nothing to do with the depot. The officer called the soldiers and ordered them to bring him outside where another soldier attacked him and beat him on his face until he bled. The soldiers took his ID card but left him as they hadn’t found a field hospital or any wounded persons being treated in the area. In November, the interviewee left [REDACTED] with his family and moved to [REDACTED] neighbourhood.

On [REDACTED] March 2013, the interviewee was arrested by elements of the Air Force Intelligence because of his posts on Facebook, his [REDACTED]’s activities with opposition civil society groups and his [REDACTED]’s involvement with anti-Government armed groups. He believes he was detained for these reasons because he was mainly interrogated about his relatives’ activities and whereabouts.

AFI agents put him in their car, tied his hands and covered his eyes. They searched him but didn’t beat him during the short ride to their office. He initially suspected that he was taken to the AFI branch in the Mezzeh Airport as it was the closest. He was later able to confirm his suspicion.

After arriving at the branch and prior to being taken inside the interrogation room, they took off all his clothes except his underwear. Immediately, one officer came from behind with a hard plastic stick and pushed it towards his anus and genitals. Once in the interrogation room, they asked him to get down on his knees. The interrogating officer, who appeared to be of a high rank, accused him of smuggling weapons, which he denied. He ordered his men to remove him. They took him out of the room and started beating him on his legs with hard plastic sticks.

They took him back to the officer who accused him again of smuggling weapons and of being an intellectual leader of the the Coordination Committee in [REDACTED] along with the activist [REDACTED]. When he denied the accusations, the soldiers put him in the Shabah (in which they hung him from the ceiling with his hands tied behind his back) and pushed sticks into his anus. The pain was so tremendous that he was ready to sign and admit anything. The officer then ordered his assistant to record the investigation and asked him about the quantity and the type of weapons he used to smuggle, who were his accomplices and how they used to do it. The interviewee invented answers while the officers provided the names of his supposed accomplices which he repeated.

The officer also interrogated him about his brother and uncle. Once the interrogation was finished, he was given his clothes and sent to the detention facility. He was placed into an overcrowded group cell. Some detainees took some of his clothes. Inside the room, there were between 90 and 110 male detainees mostly between 20 and 40 years old and mainly from Daraya, Dara and Hama. They all had multiple scars and bore marks of torture. As punishment, guards used to close the small opening in the door, the only source of fresh air to the cell.

Many detainees died inside the cell either due to several consecutive days of torture or due to lack of air and medical care. Two detainees, accused of being part of the FSA, were taken every night (or what they believed was night), and tortured before guards brought them back to the cell. One of them, a man in his twenties, started peeing blood and died in the cell a few days later. They had one restroom outside which they had to use in groups of four. It was also their only source of water. During his stay in this detention facility (around [REDACTED] days), 20 dead detainees were removed from the cell, including one from Darayya from the [REDACTED] family.

Inmates were only given marmalade with one small piece of bread to eat. Due to the lack of medical care, extreme dirtiness, lack of food, lack of fresh air, and bad sleeping conditions, several inmates became mentally ill and stopped eating. One inmate stopped eating for several days until his death.

After [REDACTED] days of detention, one of the guards stomped on [REDACTED] causing a severe injury and bleeding. (The interviewee has a large scar). He was transferred to the Mezzeh Military Hospital or Hospital 601. During [REDACTED] he spent there, he only saw the doctor twice.

The head of the Military Security team was called [REDACTED] and his deputy was named [REDACTED]. The deputy “was referred to often as the man with hammer because he used to hit detainees with a hammer”. They were in charge of interrogating inmates in the hospital. They also tortured several of the patients.

Patients were attached to the beds with metallic chains. They were badly treated and some of them were tortured. They were all naked, attached in their beds (usually two to four per bed, attached to each other) where they would eat, drink, sleep and urinate and defecate into a plastic bag as there were no toilets. Several patients had serious illnesses such as respiratory infections but never received appropriate care or treatment. After his arrival, a patient from [REDACTED] died in his bed, followed by another one from [REDACTED] neighborhood. With almost no exceptions, all patients were severely malnourished; “skin and bones”.

The patient from █████, who died next to him, died in the evening and the guards left his body under the interviewee's bed in the room until the next morning. In the morning, a detainee chosen by the guards came and detached his body from the bed. He put small pieces of sticky tape on his front and hands and wrote on them "Air Force" and a number. He later heard that deceased inmates were taken to Najha cemetery and registered as unknown.

He was transferred to the Military Police headquarters in Al Qaboun. He was detained in a small room that could accommodate up to 50 people but which held over 150 detainees. He witnessed the death of two detainees in Al Qaboun. One other detainee from █████ went insane and started walking over the other detainees, so they attacked him and almost lynched him.

The interviewee was █████ sentenced by the Anti-Terrorism Court located in Mezzeh without ever appearing before the tribunal. He was transferred to Adra Prison. The situation in Adra was better. He could receive visits from █████ once a week, see a doctor to get treatment for scabies and also could shave and bathe more often.

K. *The interviewee is an adult male, from Ar Raqqa governorate. He was interviewed on 27 May 2014.*

The interviewee is a █████, and a resident of Tel Akhadr. He became a refugee on █████ 2014. Tel Akhadr is located seven kilometres to the west of Tel Abyad, in Ar-Raqqah, and is predominantly inhabited by Kurds. Before the conflict, it had a population of about 5,000 people. Approximately 70% of its residents have fled since clashes erupted in the area in July 2013.

Until July 2013, the interviewee lived in Tel Abyad. After ISIS defeated the Kurdish forces, the YPG and Jabhat Al-Akrad, ISIS forced thousands of Kurdish civilians to leave Tel Abyad. ISIS fighters made an announcement from the minarets of the local mosques that all Kurds had to leave. He fled with his family by car. They were stopped at the Ain Al-Arous checkpoint where ISIS fighters detained his 13-year-old son for three days. Tel Abyad's Kurdish residents were forced to leave without taking any of their property. ISIS confiscated his farm and his shop. He has been without a job and penniless since then.

Many of the Kurds from Tel Abyad fled to Tel Akhadr, another Kurdish enclave where many of them had relatives. Tel Akhadr was captured by Ahrar al-Sham in approximately August 2013. In January 2014, in-fighting erupted between ISIS and Islamic Front, which included Ahrar al Sham and some other FSA affiliated militias. ISIS took control of all areas in the Tel Abyad countryside. This included the village of Tel Akhadr.

In March 2014, clashes intensified between ISIS and YPG in Tel Abyad and extended to countryside west of Tel Abyad. Tel Akhadr was close to where clashes were taken place. As the YPG withdrew, ISIS advanced.

At about noon on 18 March 2014, ISIS fighters came to Tel Akhadr in three armed vehicles. They took over the mosque and used its minarets to order the Kurdish residents of Tel Akhadr residents to gather at the mosque. There the ISIS fighters gave them an ultimatum: they had two days to leave the village, after which ISIS would return and kill all those who remained.

On 20 March, approximately 400 ISIS fighters on twenty armed vehicles surrounded Tel Akhadr and again threatened to kill them if they did not leave. This created a state of terror and panic. All the residents fled. Many became refugees. Others went to Ayn Al-Arab. The humanitarian situation in Ayn Al-Arab is difficult as it is being besieged by ISIS.

- L. *The interviewee is an adult male from Homs city. He was interviewed on 24 August 2014.*

The interviewee is from [REDACTED] in Homs city. He, his parents, and his siblings left their home in Homs around 2 years ago, after their house was first burned and later partly destroyed by a missile. They moved to Hassakah governorate, where the family has been residing in an abandoned school in a village, near Hassakah city.

The interviewee and his parents decided to leave Hassakah as there were no jobs there. Additionally, his [REDACTED] had a non-life-threatening condition which it was not possible to treat there. The interviewee himself requires daily medication which was not available after ISIS took control of the area in April or May 2014. Before ISIS, the FSA groups were in command. Medicine was available when the FSA groups were there.

After ISIS took over, people who went to Turkey to get medicine risked being arrested. Sometimes ISIS would confiscate the medicine. The Government's bombardments and shelling of neighbouring areas led to the closure of many of the clinics and pharmacies that might otherwise have been able to serve the population.

ISIS also introduced a number of other restrictions on the population. For example, jeans were not allowed anymore. Videos and songs on mobile phones were illegal. People risked being arrested for breaching these rules. Once the interviewee was walking in the street wearing jeans when a French and Magreb-Arabic speaker (who the interviewee believed to be from Tunisia) and ISIS member stopped him and told him his clothing was haram and he should return home to change. The majority of ISIS members based in the village were from Tunisia, Libya, and Chechnya. There were also some Syrians. He did not know where in Syria they were from as he did not speak with them.

In May or June 2014, the interviewee witnessed ISIS publicly executing a man. The interviewee had been walking in the street with [REDACTED] when ISIS members stopped and called them to attend the execution. They did not want to attend but had no choice. He was shot by one of the ISIS fighters. After the man was shot, his relatives were asked to remove his body.

The interviewee also saw armed children with ISIS. They were approximately 13 and 14 years old. These boys worked as guards for their headquarters and at checkpoints. They were armed with Kalashnikovs and grenades. Interviewee "had heard that there was an ISIS training camp for children". The interviewee had not seen the FSA brigades in his town use child soldiers during their time there: "the FSA here refused to hire anyone younger than 18, and I never saw kids serving with them". The boys who were at the ISIS checkpoints were armed and would give orders to the civilians passing through the checkpoints. From what he could gather from their dialects, the children appeared to be a mix of Iraqi, Tunisian and Syrian. While he was in the village in Hassakah, he saw at least 10 child soldiers. The interviewee and his family left the village in Hassakah in [REDACTED] 2014.

Several of the interviewee's relatives were detained by Government forces in Homs in 2013. Many have not been heard from since. One died shortly after being released from a Government detention centre, where he had been tortured. The interviewee gave the following details:

- (i) The interviewee's [REDACTED], was detained approximately one year ago (around August 2013) by the Syrian army in Homs. Since then, there has been no news on his whereabouts. His [REDACTED] was working as a [REDACTED] in a field hospital (which was treating both civilians and armed group fighters) near [REDACTED] in Homs city, where clashes were ongoing at that time. He heard from others that his [REDACTED] was arrested as the Syrian army advanced through the neighbourhood. The FSA withdrew from the area around the field hospital without notifying those present there. Workers and patients fled. His [REDACTED] was not able to escape

away from the area quickly enough and was arrested. His family has sought information as to his [REDACTED]'s whereabouts, unsuccessfully.

(ii) The [REDACTED] interviewee's [REDACTED], [REDACTED], was working in a factory in [REDACTED] in Homs city. His [REDACTED] was present during the initial arrest/abduction. She herself fled Syria and became a refugee in [REDACTED] 2014. In [REDACTED] 2013, [REDACTED] decided to move the family to Hasakah as the situation in Homs city had become too difficult. He was travelling with his family on a service bus which was stopped in at a checkpoint in [REDACTED], in Homs city. The checkpoint was controlled by the "regime and shabihha". The [REDACTED] was detained there. The family has tried desperately to find out where [REDACTED] was taken and has paid substantial sums of money as bribes to people inside the Syrian security services. As of now, they have no information.

(iii) Another [REDACTED] died in 2012, shortly after being released from prison in Homs city. The man was detained by Government forces as he was heading to an FSA controlled area of Homs city. He was detained for a [REDACTED]. On his release, his family was told to go to see him at the hospital. He was in terrible condition. He had been brutally beaten and the family believes he may have been poisoned. He died the following day.

III. Conclusion

8. The victims who have shared their testimonies, as all victims of the Syrian conflict, should be treated with humanity and respect for their dignity and human rights. Appropriate measures have been taken by the commission to protect their identities to ensure their safety from intimidation and retaliation, physical and psychological well-being and privacy, as well as those of their families.

9. The commission could not do its work without those who agree to share their experiences and suffering with us. If their cooperation is stifled, our reporting becomes compromised. The Syrian Arab Republic bears the primary responsibility of ensuring that persons who cooperate with the commission, as a United Nations human rights mechanism, are protected. Where the State is not able to perform this role, it is essential that the international community devises strong protection measures and supports them.³

10. In honouring the victims' right to be heard and to the truth, the commission has adopted a victim-oriented perspective, reaffirming the international legal principles of accountability, justice and the rule of law. Desperate, many of the victims interviewed, remained hopeful that their stories can prompt the action and dialogue necessary to bring this conflict to an end. In consenting to share their testimonies with the public, they expressed a desire that their voices be used to trigger international efforts toward ensuring accountability.

11. The quest for peace and justice is a shared responsibility at the national, regional and international levels. The commission's detailed recommendations — to the Syrian Government, anti-Government and non-State armed groups, the international community, the Human Rights Council and the Security Council — serve to emphasize the need to combat a persistent culture of impunity, through referral to justice at the national and international levels, in addition to other channels to promote truth and reconciliation.

³ Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, 13 August 2012, A/HRC/21/18