38th FIDH Congress
23-27 May 2013
Istanbul (Turkey)

Urgent resolution on the human rights situation in Syria

Presented by DCHRS and CDF

In May 2013, the United Nations (UN) has again declared a rise in its estimated death-toll for the Syrian crisis. More than 80,000 Syrians are believed to have been killed in the two years since peaceful protesters took to the streets in March 2011 to demand political reform. According to the UN, more than 1.3 million others have fled across the borders to escape the escalating carnage, and some 4 million others are internally displaced. Civilians are paying the heaviest price in what has become an increasingly bloody conflict with apparently no end in sight.

Meanwhile, the most heinous crimes continue to be perpetrated, including the shelling of populated areas with ballistic missiles, the use of heavy weapons and force against civilians, unlawful killings, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrest and detentions, massacres, enforced disappearances, widespread and systematic attacks against the civilian population, the use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, sexual violence against women, men and children, indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombardment of civilian gatherings, and mass killings. Given the widespread and indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and the apparent targeting of civilians by regime forces, these violations can be qualified as crimes against humanity. With the intensification of fighting and the escalation of the crisis into an internal armed conflict, violations perpetrated by all parties to the conflict have also been qualified as war crimes. These crimes are being perpetrated with total impunity as the international community has failed until now to refer the Syrian situation to the International Criminal court, despite numerous calls by human rights groups and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. All those responsible for such international crimes must be held accountable.

Peaceful activists including human rights defenders, journalists, media activists, humanitarian workers and civilians speaking out against the government in Syria have been harshly repressed. These activists continuously face systematic repression that includes gross human rights violations – unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearances, abductions and intimidation – by both pro-government and anti-government forces. Many people are known to have paid with their lives for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Moreover, thousands of prisoners of conscience including human rights defender are currently arbitrarily detained or disappeared in Syria.

Despite the growing scale of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the Syrian government has limited and even prevented aid from being distributed, especially in rebel-controlled areas, and has reduced the number of aid groups authorized to work in the country. Aid convoys that have been granted access have been regularly attacked or shot at, and staff intimidated or kidnapped.

The violent conflict in Syria increasingly threatens regional stability and represents a serious threat to international peace and security as violence and/ or tensions spill over into neighbouring countries. Israel has hinted at further military action in Syria, and we have seen escalating political tension in Lebanon as a result of the conflict in Syria. In addition, the ever-increasing flow of refugees has a considerable impact on the security and stability of Syria's neighbours, in particular Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Considering the gravity of the Syrian crisis, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), meeting at its XXXVIIIth Congress in Istanbul, Turkey, calls on:

All parties to the conflict:
- to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law and immediately cease all violations, in particular against civilians ;
- to reveal the whereabouts of those who have been forcibly dissappeared and guarantee the safety and respect for the integrity of al those who are detained,
- to ensure the safe and unfettered access of humanitarian aid to the entire territory of Syria, and,

- to issue clear orders against the perpetration of such violence through their respective chains of command;

All States, especially those with ties to the Syrian regime, and in particular Russia and China, to urge the Syrian regime to:
- immediately end its policy of repression, indiscriminate and widespread attacks and serious human rights violations against civilians, which could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity;
- immediately and unconditionally release of all those currently detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression, opinion, association and assembly guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party;
- to cooperate with and provide unimpeded access to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria to investigate all alleged crimes under international law and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including crimes of sexual violence and other forms of violence against women; and ,
- to allow international human rights monitors and humanitarian agencies prompt and unfettered access into Syria.

All States, in particular those with ties to the parties to the conflict: to call upon all parties to the conflict to:
- respect international human rights and humanitarian law and immediately cease violations; and
- to investigate and prosecute, where possible, including under the principle of extra-territorial jurisdiction, those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

UN Security Council: to refer the Syrian situation to the ICC and encourage efforts to fight against the impunity of those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The International Community:
- to increase its support and protection of Syrian refugees, and provide needed financial and technical assistance to support the efforts of Syria's neighbouring countries to address the needs of Syrian refugees.