

*Permanent Representation of the Republic of Estonia
Geneva*

No. 19.1-6/89-1

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Estonia to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to forward the response of the Government of the Republic of Estonia to the joint communication of the United Nations Special Procedures mandate holders AL EST 1/2021 from 26 January 2021.

The Permanent Mission of Estonia in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 25 March 2021



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Special Procedures Branch

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

GENEVA

Enclosure

RESPONSE of the Government of the Republic of Estonia

To the joint communication of the UN Special Procedures AL EST 1/2021 of 26 January 2021

Estonia would like to thank the UN Special Procedures mandate holders for their letter addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.

Estonia is concerned about the alleged violation of the international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Al-Hol and Roj camps and about the dire conditions of civilians living in Al-Hol and Roj camps, especially women and children.

At the outset, we would like to inform the UN Special Procedures mandate holders that the competent Estonian authorities carefully studied the joint communication and a domestic review process was carried out to verify the circumstances as described in the communication.

As to the facts as presented in the joint communication of the UN Special Procedures mandate holders concerning detention of Estonian nationals in the camps of Al-Hol and Roj, we would like to explain the following.

During the national review proceedings, the following facts were established. Estonian competent authorities were notified on 9 August 2019 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about four Estonian nationals in Al-Hol camp, Syria, whom ICRC delegates have visited and who expressed their wish to be notified to their government. It appears that the notification and its annex, listing four Estonian citizens comprising of a mother with her three minor children and attached to the note, was based on the information given by four individuals.

The competent Estonian authorities have determined that these four persons are not and have never been citizens of Estonia nor are they entitled to the Estonian citizenship.

In 2019, the ICRC was informed about the findings of the national procedures that the four persons indicated in their notification are not Estonian citizens.

Based on the findings above, Estonian authorities do not confirm the detention of Estonian citizens in Al-Hol and Roj camps. Estonian authorities have no information about detention of Estonian citizens in Al-Hol and Roj camps. No Estonian citizens have informed Estonian authorities about their detention in those camps or asked for consular or any other assistance.

Therefore, we kindly ask to exclude Estonia from the list of governments who are believed to have nationals in these camps according to the information of the UN Special Procedures.

In addition, Estonia would like to make some general comments about the situation in Syrian Arab Republic. Estonia and the European Union remain fully committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria, as defined in the UN Security Council resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

Estonia condemns the persistent, systematic and widespread gross violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, in particular by the Syrian regime and its allies. These have hit hardest the most vulnerable of the society: women and girls have been disproportionately affected throughout Syria. Estonia recalls the importance of implementing the conclusions on Syria of the Security Council Working

Group on Children and Armed Conflict from 2019, as well as the relevant Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, and women, peace and security.

Estonia reiterates the need for safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access to all parts of Syria, in line with humanitarian principles. All channels of delivering life-saving aid should be made available. We call upon the Syrian regime to cease all restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid and to stop the harassment of humanitarian workers.

It is the primary responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security, to uphold and promote international law by acting decisively to the widespread violations of international human rights law in Syria. Many of these acts amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Estonia as an elected member 2020-2021 to the Security Council supports the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Estonia highly values the important work of the UN Special Procedures mandate holders in general and in particular their efforts to advance the humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria.

Estonia remains at the disposal of the Special Procedures should there be a need for any additional information and stands ready to assist the Special Procedures in their work.