

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

Ref.: AL SYR 7/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

12 August 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 50/7, 54/14, 53/4, 59/12, 52/5, 58/5, 58/14, 52/7 and 54/8.

In this connection, we would like to express our alarm at reported attacks by armed groups on the Syrian Druze communities of Syria on and since 13 July 2025, including sexual and gender based violence against Druze women and girls.

According to information received:

On 13 July 2025, Suweida Governorate in southern Syria became the epicenter of intense sectarian clashes between Druze and Bedouin communities, triggered by the abduction of a Druze vegetable merchant on the highway to Damascus on 12 July. His truck was reportedly looted and his money taken. Reportedly, this incident was one in a long list of similar incidents of attacks and robberies by armed criminal gangs on the Suweida-Damascus road.

Following the abduction of the merchant, the relatives of the merchant reportedly abducted eight Bedouins from Suweida in retaliation, who reciprocated the abduction by reportedly abducting five Druze persons. Initially the situation was resolved on 13 July 2025 by freeing and allowing the return of the abducted persons to both communities.

The situation, however, escalated rapidly on 14 July 2025, involving local militias, Syrian interim Government forces, and external actors. On that day, the Syrian interim Government sent security forces to Suweida who reportedly attacked the Druze villages of Ta'ara, Al Doura and Al Douweira in Reif

Suweida with heavy artillery and machine guns, which led to the killing of hundreds of Druze civilians and the forced displacement of hundreds of others. According to the information received, armed Bedouins, supported by Government forces affiliated with the interim Syrian Government, attacked the western country side of the province and cut off the Damascus-Suweida road. They also reportedly besieged many villages.

On 15 July 2025, a ceasefire was announced. Reportedly, the Druze leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and some other Druze factions rejected the ceasefire agreement proposed by the Syrian interim Government as they did not feel it was fair or that it would guarantee the safety of the Druze community. Confrontations continued in several areas of Suweida, such as Umm Al-Zayton, Walgha and Kanaker. On 15 July 2025, armed individuals affiliated with the interim Government allegedly killed at least 13 people at a family gathering and summarily executed six men in separate incidents.

These events took place in tandem with Israeli airstrikes in and around Suweida, with claims being made that Israel's intervention was protective of the Druze. In response to such claims, Druze leaders, including in Suweida, firmly rejected Israel's or any other foreign intervention.

Following the first few days of the conflict, credible reports emerged of widespread looting, destruction of property, and attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, accompanied by looting and burning of homes. Shops, pharmacies, gold stores, and livestock were stolen. Reportedly, a "special looting unit", associated with forces associated with the Syrian interim forces, oversaw these thefts. Mobile phones were stolen and used to send threatening messages to victims' families, including recorded gunfire during calls, to extort money in exchange for release—without actually releasing them.

Furthermore, credible reports spoke of civilians being massacred and extrajudicially executed in the northern, western and north-western countryside of the province as well as the city of Suweida.

More than twenty villages were reportedly burnt to the ground. Religious houses of worship such as the Mar Mikhael Church in as-Sawra al-Kabira were also attacked. Druze religious men were also publicly humiliated and had their religious beliefs attacked as they were forced to shave their moustaches. These acts were reportedly carried out by Bedouin armed men and by armed men reportedly affiliated with the Syrian interim Government. Reportedly, there were ISIS/Da'esh emblems on the uniforms of several armed men that were part of the Syrian interim Government forces.

The violence reportedly resulted in over 1,000 deaths by 30 July 2025, including at least 20 children and an undetermined number of women. Of these, at least 539 identified Druze have been killed – most of them civilians – of whom 39 are women, and 21 are children. Other human rights actors have put the number of those killed at 657. Of those, 196 have reportedly been extrajudicially executed, including 8 children and 30 women. An additional 3 Bedouin civilians, including one woman and one child, were also reportedly summarily executed.

In addition, 464 armed personnel affiliated with the Syrian interim Government, one Lebanese armed individual, and forty armed Bedouin fighters were reportedly killed in the fighting. Currently, 763 persons including women are also reportedly missing.

At least 105 Druze women were also reportedly abducted by armed groups and individuals reportedly affiliated with the Syrian interim Government forces. At least 80 Syrian Druze women and girls are also missing, with their fate or whereabouts unknown. Several of them have reportedly been released, particularly women who also have Western passports, but their whereabouts continue to be unknown. Those who were released in Suweida are unable to return home – some because of continued fears about their safety and security.

The acts were reportedly accompanied and followed by widespread incitement to violence against the Druze community. According to information received there has been an orchestrated campaign on different media outlets, major international TV channels and social media, presenting the Druze as allies of Israel. Syrian Druze university students who are currently in Damascus are reportedly being harassed and intimidated due to the fact that they belong to this minority. Information received indicate that Druze survivors of these episodes of violence are fearful and do not feel safe. Some of the hateful speech circulating on social media is encouraging Syrians to kidnap Druze women, on the account that they are non-believers. Incitement to hatred and violence against members of the Syrian Druze community is reportedly also spreading amongst the Syrian diaspora in Europe and other Western countries.

In addition, the fighting displaced nearly 192,000 persons, including around 40,000 people who were already displaced, overwhelmed hospitals, and damaged humanitarian infrastructure, including a Syrian Arab Red Crescent warehouse which was shelled on 15 July 2025. Around 130,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are displaced within Suweida Governorate while roughly 60,000 have been displaced to Dar'a Governorate and Homs. In Suweida, around 90 per cent of IDPs are hosted within local communities rather than at designated IDP sites, putting strain on these communities' limited resources, while in Dar'a, 25,000 IDPs are being accommodated in 63 collective shelters, primarily repurposed schools. IDPs report significant humanitarian needs in terms of water and sanitation, healthcare including mental health and psychosocial support, and food assistance and not receiving sufficient humanitarian assistance as effective humanitarian access was reportedly impeded by the Syrian interim Government and others. They lack supplies including mattresses, blankets, and cooking tools, and many are facing the widespread loss of civil documentation which prevents them from accessing humanitarian assistance, healthcare, and legal protection. These challenges have been compounded by delays in granting access for humanitarian actors, which was only granted on 29 July 2025, after 16 days of hostilities.

Many displaced persons are frightened to return as concerns about their safety and the fragile ceasefire persist. Only around 120 IDP returns have been recorded, mainly in Salkhad District. Snipers affiliated with the Bedouins and armed militant extremist groups continue to be stationed in Suweida, targeting

Druze males.

According to information received, Druze women were subjected to sexual and gender-based violence that has included abductions of women and children. On at least three occasions, Druze women were reportedly raped before being extrajudicially executed.

By 18 July 2025 a fragile ceasefire began to take hold, with Syrian Government forces withdrawing from Suweida city and local Druze fighters regaining control. Local governance and an estimated 19 Druze villages were reportedly handed back to Druze-led structures under Sheikh Hijri, restoring some form of autonomy. The ceasefire is reportedly fragile and interrupted by sporadic shelling and outbursts of fighting.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we express alarm at the reports of violence inflicted on the Druze community in Suweida, including their subjection to extrajudicial killings, forced displacement, and looting. We are also gravely concerned about the reported abductions, enforced disappearances, and gender-based violence faced by women and girls in Suweida since July 2025.

The cases presented above suggest a widespread failure to prevent, investigate, and respond appropriately to serious violations, including of the rights to life, liberty and security of person, the prohibition of torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the potential trafficking and unlawful detention of women and girls, many of whom appear to have been targeted on the basis of their perceived sectarian affiliation and/or ethnic or religious identity.

We are gravely concerned at the reports that some members of the Syrian interim Government armed forces either aided or abetted the attacks on the Druze community. We are also alarmed at the reports that there have so far been no thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigations that would allow to identify those responsible and hold them accountable.

We are also concerned by the stigmatizing and threatening responses reportedly faced by victims and their families when seeking help, as well as the lack of safe, gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms, female investigators, and psychosocial support for the victims and their families. The absence of transparent investigations and accountability can contribute to an environment of impunity and a climate of fear among Druze women and girls, many of whom reportedly feel unsafe moving freely in their own communities, fearing they may also be targeted. We underline the importance of establishing accessible and effective legal assistance and protection mechanisms to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, abuse and threats, and to ensure a safe environment for reporting crimes without fear of stigma or retaliation.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful

for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information on the steps taken by the interim Government to investigate the alleged crimes committed during the events of July 2025 against Syrian Druze in Suweida including violations of the rights to life and liberty and security of person, the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and/or degrading treatment or punishment and violations against women and girls; and to identify those responsible, to prosecute and sanction them.
3. Please provide information on the efforts made by the interim Syrian Government to determine the fate and whereabouts of disappeared persons through effective search activities, in line with the Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons.
4. Please provide information on the steps taken to identify the perpetrators and ensure that all allegations of potentially unlawful killings are investigated as required under international law and in line with applicable standards, including the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016), with a view to hold those responsible accountable.
5. Please explain what measures have been adopted by the interim Government to ensure that the victims of violence, including women and girls that are survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and torture or ill-treatment, receive medical, psychological, legal, and social support, including through gender-sensitive procedures and personnel.
6. Please indicate what legal and institutional mechanisms exist under the interim Government to ensure that female victims of such violence, their families or representatives, can report the crimes committed against them without fear of stigma, retaliation, or discriminatory treatment by authorities.
7. Please describe what guarantees are in place to protect the families of victims and witnesses from reprisals, including in cases where individuals are willing to testify publicly or cooperate with investigative mechanisms.
8. Please indicate what steps are being taken to ensure the protection and security of persons belonging to minorities and the measures being taken to stop campaigns that incite hatred and violence against persons belonging to minorities, including the Druze.
9. Please indicate what measures have been taken or are envisaged to ensure comprehensive and uninterrupted access to humanitarian assistance and protection for displaced persons, including access to civil

documentation.

10. Please indicate what measures have been taken or are envisaged to enable a pathway to durable solutions to displacement for displaced persons.
11. Please explain what measures are being taken to prevent violations of the right to life, and the right to liberty and security of person, and torture and/or other ill-treatment by state security forces and others associated with them, including as regards training, regulations, orders, and disciplinary procedures.
12. Please explain how the conditions conducive to violence, as set out in pillar I of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, are being addressed, particularly to end conflict, protect human rights, ensure political inclusion and good governance, and prevent discrimination and poverty.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

Further, we would like to inform your Excellency's Government that after having transmitted the information contained in the present communication to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may also transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether the deprivation of liberty was arbitrary or not. The present communication in no way prejudices any opinion the Working Group may render. The Government is required to respond separately to the letter of allegation and the regular procedure.

We would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government that should sources submit the allegations concerning individual cases of enforced disappearances for the consideration of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances under its humanitarian procedure, the case will be examined by the Working Group according to its methods of work, in which case your Excellency's Government will be informed by separate correspondence.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Gabriella Citroni

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Alice Jill Edwards
Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Bernard Duhaime
Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, and without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant international norms and standards.

We first underscore the obligation to investigate and punish gross human rights violations and to provide redress to victims. Article 2 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by the Syrian Arab Republic on 21 April 1969, establishes that States must adopt measures to ensure that persons whose rights or freedoms are violated have an effective remedy. Article 6 (1) of the ICCPR guarantees the right of every individual to life and provides that this right shall be protected by law and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their life. It also requires the State to undertake all necessary measures to prevent arbitrary deprivation of life by law enforcement officials.

Additionally, we would like to highlight that States are obliged to take adequate preventive measures in order to protect individuals against reasonably foreseeable threats of being killed or murdered by private actors, including criminals, organized crime or armed groups; and to take special measures of protection towards persons in vulnerable situations whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence, including members of religious, racial or ethnic minorities (Human Rights Committee, general comment 36). Women and girls are often disproportionately affected by such violence, especially in conflict settings, and require targeted protection measures to address gender-based violence, sexual violence, and femicide (Human Rights Committee, general comment 36, para. 61).

We recall the duty of States to investigate alleged or suspected violations of article 6 of the ICCPR in a prompt, effective, thorough, independent, impartial and transparent manner, and that all persons identified by the investigation as having participated in crimes of extra-legal or arbitrary killings, should be brought to justice and punished with sentences commensurate with the gravity of the crimes committed (Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36). Failure to properly, independently and reliably investigate a killing or a disappearance, with a view to holding accountable those responsible, would in itself constitute a grave violation under international human rights law. In this respect, we refer to the United Nations Revised Manual for the Effective Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions also known as the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) ("The Minnesota Protocol"), which provides detailed guidelines on the duty to investigate potential unlawful deaths "promptly, effectively and thoroughly, with independence, impartiality and transparency. Effective remedies must also be provided to the victims (ICCPR article 2(3) in conjunction with article 6).

In addition, article 7 guarantees the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as does inter alia articles 1, 2, 12, 13 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We recall that attached to the absolute prohibition on torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are obligations to

criminalize and investigate all acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to prosecute suspects, to punish those responsible and to provide remedies to victims. Victims are to be protected from reprisals or intimidation during said investigations, and they have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible.¹

Article 9 guarantees everyone's right to liberty and security and the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law is provided in article 16. All this should be read in conjunction with article 2(3) of the ICCPR. Article 9 guarantees the right to liberty and security of person.

We wish to emphasize your Excellency's Government's obligation under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, acceded to by the Syrian Arab Republic on 28 March 2003, to protect women against gender-based discrimination and against gender-based violence as a manifestation of such discrimination, namely, "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately". Gender-based violence includes "acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty". There, particular attention should be paid to the investigation of gender-based violence, including killings targeting women and girls.

We note that the absolute prohibition of enforced disappearances and corresponding obligation to investigate them has attained the status of *jus cogens*. enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated series of acts and omissions representing a grave threat to life. The deprivation of liberty, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, in effect removes that person from the protection of the law and places the person's life at serious and constant risk, for which the State is accountable. It thus results in a violation of the right to life as well as other rights recognized in the ICCPR (general comment No. 36, para. 58).

Furthermore, in relation to the crimes of enforced disappearance, we wish to remind that, according to article 1 of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the practice of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention as well as general comment No. 35 of the Human Rights Committee, enforced disappearances violate numerous substantive and procedural provisions of the ICCPR and constitute a particularly aggravated form of arbitrary detention. General comment No. 36 also highlights that "enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated series of acts and omissions representing a grave threat to life. States parties must take adequate measures to prevent the enforced disappearance of individuals and conduct an effective and speedy inquiry to establish the fate and whereabouts of persons who may have been subject to enforced disappearance. States parties should also ensure

¹ For a full explanation on the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the related States' obligations to criminalize, investigate and prosecute crimes of torture and other ill-treatment, see Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (A/77/502): <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/610/77/PDF/N2261077.pdf?OpenElement>; and Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Good practices in national criminalization, investigation, prosecution and sentencing for offences of torture (A/HRC/52/30): <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/033/16/pdf/g2303316.pdf?token=clzfg4HLIHmm6KknXQ&fe=true>.

that the enforced disappearance of persons is punished with appropriate criminal sanctions and introduce prompt and effective procedures for cases of disappearance to be investigated thoroughly by independent and impartial bodies that operate, as a rule, within the ordinary criminal justice system. They should bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts and omissions and ensure that victims of enforced disappearance and their relatives are informed about the outcome of the investigation and are provided with full reparation (para. 58).” We further refer to the General Comment from the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances regarding the Right to the Truth in Relation to Enforced Disappearances ([A/HRC/16/48](#)), which highlights that the right of the relatives to know the truth of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared persons is an absolute right, not subject to any limitation or derogation. The State has the obligation to let any interested person know the concrete steps taken to clarify the fate and the whereabouts of the person. Such information must include the steps taken on the basis of the evidence provided by the relatives or other witnesses. The relatives of the victims should be closely associated with an investigation into a case of enforced disappearance.

We also refer to article 13 of the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which states that any person having knowledge or a legitimate interest who alleges that a person has been subjected to enforced disappearance has the right to complain to a competent and independent State authority and to have that complaint promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated by that authority. Whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that an enforced disappearance has been committed, the State shall promptly refer the matter to that authority for such an investigation, even if there has been no formal complaint. Article 13 also states that steps shall be taken to ensure that all involved in the investigation, including witnesses, are protected against ill-treatment, intimidation or reprisal. We recall the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances’, general comment on women affected by enforced disappearances ([A/HRC/WGEID/98/2](#)) which highlights that gender perspective is crucial in explaining, understanding and dealing with unique disadvantages and obstacles that women face in the exercise of their human rights. In this regard, we recall the 2019 Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons and, in particular, principle 4, which states that searches should follow a differential approach.

Article 18 of the ICCPR states that that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. These rights shall include freedom [...] either individual or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” The Human Rights Committee has noted in general comment No. 22, paragraph 3, that article 18 of the ICCPR “Does not permit any limitations whatsoever on the freedom of thought and conscience [...]”. Thus, peaceful expression of one’s thought and conscience cannot be restricted unless such restrictions have fulfilled stringent tests of legality, proportionality and necessity.

Human Rights Council resolution 12/11 on Human rights and transitional justice reaffirmed the responsibility of States to prosecute perpetrators of gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, constituting crimes under international law, with a view to ending impunity (paragraph 7). The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 31, has also

emphasised the obligation of States to investigate and punish serious human rights violations, such as torture, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Failure to investigate and prosecute such violations is in itself a breach of the norms of human rights treaties (paragraph 18). Impunity for such violations can be an important element contributing to the recurrence of violations. In this regard, the Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity establishes the duty of States to undertake prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and to ensure that those responsible for serious crimes under international law are prosecuted, tried and duly punished (principle 19).

Furthermore, regarding the acts of violence against women and girls in the Syrian Arab Republic, we recall that the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, defines violence against women in article 2 as encompassing, but not limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence.²

The Declaration states that women are entitled to equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields. These rights include, inter alia, (a) the right to life; (b) the right to equality; (c) the right to liberty and security; and (d) the right to equal protection under the law (article 3). In article 4(g), the Declaration notes the importance of ensuring that women subjected to violence receive specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in childcare, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.

The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls emphasized in her report that sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is rarely incidental, as it is often used as a tool of intimidation, punishment, and social control (A/78/256). She underscored that women and girls belonging to specific ethnic, religious, or political communities are disproportionately targeted and, therefore, face heightened vulnerability to intersectional violence, including kidnapping, enforced disappearance, and trafficking, particularly in conflict or crisis contexts. In her report on “Institutional violence and the denial of access to services for women and girls”, the Special Rapporteur also noted that gender-based violence often intersects with state failure or inaction, particularly where survivors are dismissed, blamed, or retraumatized during institutional engagement (A/HRC/53/37). She identified the lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure, including absence of female investigators and safe reporting channels, as serious barriers to justice for victims.

Furthermore, we would also like to remind that persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language (article 27 of the ICCPR). The Special Rapporteur on minority issues highlighted that peacebuilding processes and transitional periods are both a time for major institutional changes and an opportunity to alleviate

² The Syrian Arab Republic made a reservation to this article, where the provisions of international law may be assessed as conflicting with the domestic interpretations

potential tensions between different groups co-existing within a single but diverse, peaceful, stable and inclusive society. It is essential to build strong, inclusive and resilient institutions to ensure that the conditions for a lasting peace are met, and that the fate of minorities does not become or remain a destabilizing factor (A/79/169, paras. 21 and 44). Women belonging to minority groups face unique challenges and must be empowered to participate meaningfully in peacebuilding processes and decision-making roles. Such institutional designs should be centred around the effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in decision-making processes (A/79/169, para. 15).

In accordance with the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, national authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction (principle 3(1)). States are under a particular obligation to protect against the displacement of Indigenous Peoples, minorities, peasants, pastoralists, and other groups with a special dependency on and attachment to their lands (principle 9). Internally displaced persons shall be protected in particular against *inter alia* summary or arbitrary executions and enforced disappearances (principle 10(1)) as well as against rape and gender-specific violence (principle 11(2a)). All internally displaced persons have the right to an adequate standard of living, and competent authorities shall at the minimum provide internally displaced persons with and ensure safe access to essential food and potable water, basic shelter and housing, appropriate clothing, and essential medical services and sanitation (principle 18) as well as medical care and attention (principle 19). Every human being has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law, and the authorities concerned shall issue to internally displaced persons all documents necessary for the enjoyment and exercise of their legal rights, including the issuance of new documents or the replacement of documents lost in the course of displacement, without imposing unreasonable conditions (principle 20). No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of property and possessions, and the property and possessions of internally displaced persons shall be protected against *inter alia* pillage, destruction, and arbitrary and illegal appropriation, occupation or use (principle 21).

The primary duty and responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons lies with national authorities (principle 25(1)). International humanitarian organizations and other appropriate actors have the right to offer their services in support of the internally displaced. Such an offer shall not be regarded as an unfriendly act or an interference in a State's internal affairs and shall be considered in good faith. Consent thereto shall not be arbitrarily withheld, particularly when authorities concerned are unable or unwilling to provide the required humanitarian assistance (principle 25(2)). All authorities concerned shall grant and facilitate the free passage of humanitarian assistance and grant persons engaged in the provision of such assistance rapid and unimpeded access to the internally displaced (principle 25(3)). Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country (principle 28(1)).

We would like to remind your Excellency's Government of the international standards stemming from the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to

National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (hereinafter, “the Declaration”), adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1992 (A/RES/47/135). Article 2.1 of the Declaration recognizes the right of persons belonging to a minority “to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination”.

We would further like to call your Excellency’s Government attention to the 2005 Working Group on Minorities’ commentary on the application of the Declaration. In particular, we recall the Working Group’s conclusion that the “protection of the existence of minorities” protected in article 1 of the Declaration, “includes their physical existence, their continued existence on the territories on which they live and their continued access to the material resources required to continue their existence on those territories” (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2, para. 24). We further recall its conclusion that, as it pertains to the State duty to take “appropriate legislative or other measures” to protect and promote the existence of minorities, this includes the adoption of legislative measures which are “intended to protect groups against hatred and violence on racial or ethnic grounds” (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2, para. 32).

We recall the 2022 recommendation by the Universal Periodic Review ([A/HRC/50/6](#)) that urges your Excellency’s Government to take steps to prevent sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, and ethnic and religious minorities, among others, and to hold perpetrators thereof accountable.

We also emphasize that an effective counter-terrorism strategy requires sustained effort to address the conditions conducive to terrorism, in line with pillar I of the United Nations Global Counter-terrorism Strategy. These are stated to include prolonged unresolved conflicts, lack of the rule of law and violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance. Effective measures to counter terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law are complementary and mutually reinforcing.³

³ See e.g., UN Security Council Resolution 2617, S/RES/2617 (2021).