

Human Rights Council – 40th Session

Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria

12 March 2019

Australian Statement

Australia thanks the Commission of Inquiry for its report. We are deeply concerned by the widespread and ongoing human rights violations and abuses outlined in the report.

Australia strongly supports the long-standing prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, an illegal and morally abhorrent practice. We support the Commission of Inquiry's ongoing investigations into an alleged chemical attack in November 2018. As Australia previously stated to this Council, the repeated use of chemical weapons is a dark legacy of shame for the Syrian authorities and their backers. Those responsible must be identified and held to account, because the use of chemical weapons anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstances is unjustifiable and unacceptable.

We are particularly troubled by reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions in areas that have returned to Syrian government control. The situation of those who have been abducted is also of grave concern, as are reports of the custodial deaths of Syrian civilians.

We note the importance of ensuring the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. We call on the Syrian Government to make all efforts to create the conditions for returns to occur, including by engaging substantively in a credible political process, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254. We underscore the importance of timely, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all areas in Syria.

The Syrian regime is not the only perpetrator of human rights abuses. We deplore the abuse of children's rights such as the denial of education to girls and the forced conscription of boys in Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-controlled areas, as well as the systematic terrorisation of the population by Da'esh and other extremists. The conflict is far from over. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and to respect and protect the human rights of all people.

We would like to ask the Commission of Inquiry whether a meaningful accountability process is a precondition for the return of Syrians displaced by the conflict?

[328 words]