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INFORMAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING – HIGH-LEVEL PANEL BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

2 March 2021

Statement by H.E. The Hon. Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

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Australia thanks the panel for its briefing on the ongoing human rights abuses in Syria.

This month marks ten years since the start of the conflict in Syria - a decade of immense suffering for the Syrian people. This grim anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on what more the global community can do to ensure a peaceful resolution to the conflict and an end to the killing, maiming, abuse and displacement of Syrian civilians.

The recent report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria laid bare the Syrian regime's egregious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including acts which the Commission claim likely constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

We call on the Syrian regime to cooperate fully with the Human Rights Council and the Commission of Inquiry, particularly by granting the Commission and its staff immediate and unfettered access to Syrian territory.

Australia condemns the continued use of arbitrary detention and disappearances, and we express concern at reports of financial extortion of families, by Syrian officials, in exchange for information about detained relatives. We welcome the Commission of Inquiry's upcoming report which provides greater detail of these abuses.

We are also deeply disturbed by the deliberate targeting of medical facilities, hospitals, and medical workers by Syrian forces, severely limiting the Syrian health system's ability to provide lifesaving assistance to an already vulnerable population. Such undermine global humanitarian efforts and dangerously hinder the response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia regrets the lack of progress made at the recent meetings of the Constitutional Committee. Recognising that the only viable end to the conflict in Syria is through a peaceful political solution, we further call on the Syrian regime to engage in good faith with the UN-facilitated process.

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