Ending Impunity for Atrocities in Syria
17 June 2014 at 15:00 to 17:00
Room XVII, Palais des Nations
United Nations Headquarters in Geneva

Introduction

After more than three years of war, the plight of the Syrian population remains enormous and continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. According to OCHA, around 9.3 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including 6.5 million people who are internally displaced. In his first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, the UN Secretary-General reports on the “countless killings and the maiming of children” and numerous violations of children’s rights. Since November 2011, the UN’s independent international Commission of Inquiry has documented patterns of summary executions, enforced disappearance, torture, rape and other sexual- and gender-based violence, forced displacement, starvation and city siege. Security Council Resolution 2118, calling for the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons program, was adopted unanimously on 27 September 2013, further to the use of chemical weapons against civilian population in the town of Ghouta. Still in April 2014, though, the use of chlorine was reported in the Hama in Idlib governorates.

What is happening in Syria is a humanitarian and human rights disaster. The link between the humanitarian and human rights situation is clear: people have a right to food, medical treatment and to security. They also have a right to express their opinions, live their lives and elect freely their own representatives. However, the people in Syria are able to enjoy none of these rights. Furthermore, as is so often the case, it is the civilians who are bearing the brunt of the conflict, particularly Syria’s women and children.

On 22 May 2014, the international community was finally called today to vote on a resolution - submitted by France and sponsored by 62 UN Member States - calling to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC. The support expressed for the resolution by all Security Council members with the exception of Russia and China, signals that a growing number of members of the international community are willing to take action aimed at ending impunity and preparing for the prosecution of those who bear the greatest responsibility for the appalling atrocities that have been committed against the civilian population in Syria.

The lack of focus on accountability for anyone for what is happening in Syria - be it for crimes under international law or failure to adhere to international legal obligations as prescribed in general law and by the UN Security Council – created a situation where impunity is the norm. Impunity breeds more violations as people see an “easy” way to reach their objectives. As with situations all around the world since time immemorial, the consequences fall not on those who are breaking the law, but on those whom the law should protect, namely the civilian population of Syria, particularly those in areas where aid cannot reach.

It is crucial for the international community to continue being firm on accountability to serve the cause of peace and security in Syria. Providing accountability for the horrible crimes committed in this conflict is the only way to help breaking the cycle of impunity that is ravaging Syria.

Accountability needs to become the centerpiece of any international efforts on Syria to bring justice to for the Syrian people.

The aim

This side-event aims at presenting the gross human rights violations that have been and continue to be committed on a daily basis all across Syria as well the efforts to shed a light on these horrors. The international community has to redouble its efforts to support justice and accountability for the Syrian people, as the only nonviolent and effective tool to break the cycle of violence.