Your Excellency,

Yesterday marked the four year anniversary of the commencement of the conflict in Syria, which began on 15 March 2011 with protests against the detention and torture of several young students, who were arrested for writing anti-government graffiti. After four years of increasingly violent conflict, with increasingly dire consequences for civilians, it is clear that the inaction that has plagued the international community is no longer an option. The men, women and children of Syria cannot wait: they need you to help ensure a coordinated response that can contribute to ending the violence and ensuring victims receive much-needed support and redress.

On 17 March, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic will present its ninth report to the Human Rights Council. Since its inception, the UN Commission of Inquiry has documented some of the worst violations of human rights and international criminal law gathered by any UN-mandated body.

This information has been supported and corroborated by the courageous work of Syrian human rights activists and by almost daily media reports. The fact that awareness of what is happening has not yet led to any kind of accountability, with the resulting impunity feeding into ever graver violations, is clearly of frustration to the Commission, a frustration that we share.

In its ninth Report, the Commission indicates that “it is crucial for the international community to adopt a common and effective strategy to address the impunity gap in the Syrian Arab Republic” (para 139). One way to do this is to tell alleged perpetrators clearly that their actions are not going unnoticed, but that the international community is watching and that justice will follow (paras 140, 141). In an unprecedented move, the Commission stated that “not to publish names at this juncture of the investigation would be to reinforce the impunity that the Commission was mandated to combat” (para 140).
No Peace Without Justice agrees with the Commission’s assessment, considering that a political solution to the conflict will be more difficult to attain while those who bear the greatest responsibility for violations are in the highest positions of authority on all sides. Not naming alleged perpetrators has contributed directly to the political dynamics of the conflict in Syria, particularly after the chemical attack in Ghouta, resulting in an expectation that massive and systematic attacks against civilian populations will not incur a political cost, but rather will be rewarded with increased power and legitimacy.

We urge your Government to support the people of Syria by requesting that the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria publish the names of alleged perpetrators, as they have proposed, as a concrete means of supporting its mandated role in the fight against impunity and continuing the mandate of the Commission to document violations in Syria to allow it to continue to play this role.

The brutality of the Assad regime and the expectation of impunity for the crimes has fuelled violence not only in Syria but in the region, one striking example of this being crimes committed by ISIS forces in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. To that end, we are pleased to send you a copy of our latest report into crimes in northern Iraq, done together with the Institute for International Law and Human Rights, Minority Rights Group International and the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organisation. While this report concerns events in Iraq, they are emblematic of the broader regional effect of violations in Syria and the culture of impunity that surrounds them.

It is not just for the people of Syria, but the people of the region and the world that strong action must be taken now.

Please accept, dear Ambassador, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Nicolò Figà-Talamanca
Secretary-General
No Peace Without Justice