Side-event to 14th ICC Assembly of States Parties, World Forum Centre, The Hague

Accountability and the Prospect of a Political Solution to the Conflict in Syria

25 November 2015 13:15 – 14:45

Oceania Room, World Forum

13:15  Welcome

Co-Chairs: Hussein Sabbagh, Secretary General of Euro-Syrian Democratic Forum
           Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General No Peace Without Justice

13:20  Welcome remarks: Alexandra Valkenburg, Head of the Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands

13:30  Roundtable discussion on issues and challenges for accountability and a political solution to the Syrian crisis

Panel:
- Raheb Alwany, Human Rights Defender
- Rami Nakhla, NPWJ Syria Project Coordinator
- Ayman Ghojal, Human Rights Defender
- Stephen Rapp, former US Ambassador for Global Criminal Justice, former SCSL Prosecutor

14:15  Interventions from the floor and discussion

14:40  Conclusions: Elizabeth Evenson, Senior Counsel, Human Rights Watch

14:45  End
The conflict in Syria has reached further peaks of brutality where human life, democratic values and cultural human heritage is destroyed daily. More importantly, international legality and the rule of law have been violated for five years in an attempt to establish the rule of the might. National laws and international conventions protecting the rights of individuals have been crushed by terrorism, foreign interventions and regional and geopolitical logic that have turned Syria into a territory of conquest. The conflict is increasingly driven by international and regional powers, primarily in accordance with their respective geostrategic interests. The role played by external powers is leading toward a situation where Syrians are gradually losing control over the course of events, including how to find a negotiated solution to the war. With each passing day, the goal of regaining ordinary life is increasingly distant and exponentially harder to reach.

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (CoI) continues to report periodically well-documented patterns of serious violations of international humanitarian law and gross violations of human rights. These transgressions are massive in extent and scope and with no end in sight.

Any solution to the conflict has to take this background into consideration and address accountability and redress for all victims of these atrocities, enabling a Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, enables them independently and democratically to determine their future and ensures that crimes will not go unpunished and that those who bear the greatest responsibility not be part of the future of Syria. Syria’s people are looking for reprieve and for redress, while increasingly unable to believe this will ever happen. The consequences do not fall on those who are breaking the law, but on those whom the law should protect, namely the civilian population of Syria, particularly in areas unreachable by aid efforts. Continued impunity has fed the violence; the lack of credible signals that there is an expectation of accountability for what is happening has created a situation where impunity is the norm, breeding extremism, terrorism and widespread violence.

Against this backdrop, this side event in the margins of the ICC Assembly of States Parties looks at the fundamental issue of redress for victims and accountability as an essential component of any political solution to the conflict, addressing some of the difficult questions that will arise. The meeting also serves as a reminder that a lasting political solution to the Syrian war requires an inclusive and participatory process capable to ensure redress for all victims of violence, violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, irrespective of their ethnic, religious and political affiliation, and accountability mechanisms to foster national reconciliation, ensure no repetition, respect of international and humanitarian laws and the end of impunity.