

Statement by Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council 19th Special Session on "The deteriorating human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the killings in El-Houleh" Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human

Rights
1 June 2012 (...) I wish also to express my deep concern that for the fourth time the Human Rights Council is compelled to convene a Special Session to discuss the situation in Syria. I would like to echo the calls of the Secretary-General and of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Kofi Annan, for an immediate end to all forms of violence and human rights violations by all parties.

I am appalled by the atrocities committed in El-Houleh. Preliminary investigations indicate that the attacks possibly directed at the civilian population have resulted in the killings of 108 people, including 49 children, and 34 women.

According to preliminary reports, on Friday, 25 May at 12:30 p.m, shortly after a demonstration had taken place, the Syrian military allegedly unleashed a barrage of heavy weapons on the El-Houleh area, including artillery and tank fire, which continued until 2:00 a.m. on Saturday, 26 May. Some reports suggest that pro-government Shabiha paramilitary groups also entered the villages and may bear responsibility for dozens of killings. These acts may amount to crimes against humanity and other international crimes, and may be indicative of a pattern of widespread or systematic attacks against civilian populations that have been perpetrated with impunity.

On 30 May, the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic sent a note verbale to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights attributing the killings in El-Houleh to what it called "terrorist armed groups." The Government of Syria stated that its military was acting only in self-defence, and that it sought to protect the civilian population. The Government said that three members of the armed forces were killed and 16 soldiers were injured as a result of the armed clashes in El-Houleh.

The Government of Syria said that it established an inter-ministerial committee to investigate these events. Nevertheless, there is a need for prompt, independent and impartial international investigations into all serious human rights violations in Syria, including those that have occurred in El-Houleh.

(...)

We must make all efforts to end impunity, to ensure accountability for perpetrators, and to provide adequate and effective remedies for the victims.

In this context, I regret that, despite the Human Rights Council's repeated calls on the Government of Syria to cooperate fully with the Commission of Inquiry, the Commission still has not been granted access to Syria. I have taken note of the Security Council's call on the UN Supervision Mission in Syria to continue its investigations into the El-Houleh killings, and I urge the Government of Syria to cooperate fully with UNSMIS. In addition, I reiterate my call to the Government of Syria to grant the Commission of Inquiry full and unimpeded access to the country to carry out investigations into all human rights violations, including the El-Houleh events.

(...) On 24 May, the Commission published a Periodic Update based on two field missions it conducted in March and April. It reported that gross violations and abuses continue unabated in an increasingly militarized context despite the ceasefire announced on 12 April. In addition, on 30 May, UNSMIS reported the discovery of thirteen bodies in the area of Assukar in Dier EL-Zour, with their hands tied behind their backs. Some appeared to have been shot at close range.

I take this opportunity to call again on the Government of Syria to assume its **responsibility to protect** the civilian population in the country. I reiterate that those who order, assist, or fail to stop attacks on civilians are individually criminally liable for their actions. Other States have a duty to do all they can to prevent and prosecute perpetrators of international crimes. Once again, I urge the Security Council to consider referring the case of Syria to the International Criminal Court.

(...)

The Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan seeks to pave the way for a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis, in particular by ending all violence and human rights violations. It is vital that the Government of Syria immediately and comprehensively implement this plan. This includes halting the use of heavy weapons in population centers, allowing unhindered humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need, intensifying the pace and scale of releasing arbitrarily detained persons, and allowing access to detention facilities. It is equally vital that all parties desist from all forms of violence. I urge the international community to throw its weight behind the Joint Envoy's six-point plan and call for the conduct of immediate investigations into the El-Houleh events, as well as into other human rights violations committed in Syria. Otherwise, the situation in Syria might descend into a full-fledged conflict and the future of the country, as well as the region as a whole could be in grave danger. We must do our utmost to prevent this from happening.

(...) **Read the [full statement](#) .**