

## Press Release

Beirut November 4<sup>th</sup> 2016

### Efforts to make use of the Syrian Universal Periodic Review

The 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review working group - Syria, was held on Monday Oct 31<sup>st</sup> in Geneva at the Palais de Nations. Members of “AWASUR”<sup>1</sup>, (NUON- ENSSAN-PHRO)<sup>2</sup> were present and noted that the responses of the different member states within the UPR could broadly be divided into three categories.

Firstly, recommendations from certain, mainly European, member states indicated that those countries have a profound understanding of the uniqueness and significance of this UPR taking into consideration the situation in Syria.

Their recommendations were directed to all parties to the conflict in-particular the Syrian “regime”, which they hold the most responsible for the dire human rights situation, and focused on: ceasing all acts of aggression against residential areas and civilians; protection of civilians, particularly women, from gender based violence and sexual violence as a weapon of war, and children from recruitment as soldiers or participation in military acts; delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to those who are in need, in particular hard to reach and besieged areas; independent inquiry and investigation missions; release all of human rights defenders, unlawful detainees and prisoners of conscience; reveal the fate of enforced disappearances; accountability and democratic transition. These recommendations were the culmination of sustained advocacy efforts conducted by PHRO and NUON prior to the UPR pre-session, organized with the support of FIDH. At the UPR pre-session, the representative of NUON presented the findings of the recent “AWASUR” reports that provide a unique overview of the current human rights situation in Syria and make concrete recommendations for change.

A second group of member states largely dealt with the UPR Review in a standard manner. And their recommendations were focused on changing laws and mainly targeted the improvement of the situation of women, such as: withdraw the reservations to CEDAW; eliminate discrimination against women in the Personal Status Law; protect women from physical and sexual violence and prosecute those responsible

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<sup>1</sup>**AWASUR**: alliance for Writing and Advocating the Syrian UPR Reports, consisting of sixteen NGOs plus supporters, amongst them networks.

<sup>2</sup>**NUON**: Nuon Organization for Peace Building.

**ENSSAN**: Center for Documenting Human Rights Violations in Syria, part of the Development Interaction Network (DIN).

**PHRO**: Palestinian Human Rights Organization, working to defend, protect and promote the human rights of Palestinian refugees in the MENA. PHRO, is member of FIDH, EUROMED Rights, AOHR

for such violence; ensure women guardianship over their children and the transferring of citizenship to them; ensure their political participation and so on.

There were also some recommendations on protection of child rights including access to education; elimination of arbitrary arrests, detention and torture; and ensuring Freedom of assembly.

However, these recommendations did not take into consideration the current situation in Syria, specifically the widespread use of violence and sexual violence against women as a weapon of war in the current conflict.

Finally, a few member states such as Iraq, Iran and Russia, were of the view that under the circumstances in Syria, the Syrian government is doing its best to protect its population and sovereignty by fighting terrorism and they expressed support and encouragement for the Syrian government to continue fighting terrorism. Their recommendations were directed towards the international community, requesting them to stop interfering in the internal affairs of Syria whilst also requesting support for the Syrian government!

**NUON, ENSSAN and PHRO** also witnessed the delusion of the Syrian representative to the review: for example, claiming that there are no areas in Syria held under siege by the "regime"; that all military action taken by "regime" forces is defensive action against terrorism in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions; and so on. Also noted was the absence of some missions, including several Arab states, as well as the absence of recommendations about minorities and refugees by almost all member states.

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