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UN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON SYRIA: PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY AND COLLECTIVELY TO BRING MEANINGFUL RESPITE TO CIVILIANS IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

Geneva, 4 February 2020 - The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic is alarmed by the surge of attacks in the northwest of the country that has heightened an already complex protection environment for civilians. The Commission appeals to all parties to exercise caution and restraint and to de-escalate hostilities immediately.

In the last two weeks, attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools, markets, and medical facilities causing civilian casualties, including many girls and boys, have been reported. The deliberate and systematic targeting of hospitals follows a pattern already documented by the Commission, and may amount to war crimes. Continuing such attacks has been, and remains, completely unacceptable.

While the Commission's investigations are continuing, this preliminary information raises concerns that all parties to the conflict continue to ignore the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian and human rights law in the course of their activities. Their legal obligations not to direct attacks against civilians and civilian targets remains. Warring parties must act immediately and collectively to bring meaningful respite to the civilian population. The international community must use every tool at its disposal to prevent a further spiralling of the conflict in northwest Syria and to ensure that crimes and violations do not continue to go unpunished.

In the last three months alone similar patterns of attack forced more than 500,000 women, men and children, to be displaced further north toward the border. Some towns and villages in southern Idlib and western Aleppo governorates reportedly have been completely depopulated. Many of the displaced have previously fled other parts of Syria including those forcibly displaced pursuant to "evacuation agreements". Each new displacement brings with it additional risks and further increases existing vulnerabilities, in particular for women as well as children. Parties must allow unfettered access for independent humanitarian, protection and human rights organizations to address the increasing needs and those organisations must act swiftly to increase protection.

The United Nations Secretary-General has made it clear that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The Commission reminds all parties that they have a moral imperative to engage in good faith dialogue to de-escalate the situation and prioritize the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian and human rights law.

The Commission is next scheduled to brief to the Human Rights Council on 10 March 2020.

Background

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which comprises Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Chair), Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, and Mr. Hanny Megally has been mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate and record all violations of international law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic. Its reports can be found on the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic's [webpage](#) and [Twitter](#) page.