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Written statement* submitted by Amnesty International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 June 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Syria. The UN Human Rights Council must prompt action across the UN to end the violence and ensure accountability

Since April 2011, Amnesty International has received the names of more than 9,880 people killed in Syria, including more than 700 children. The killings in Syria are escalating and a rapid response is desperately needed. The brutal attack on Friday 25 May in Houla killed scores of civilians - men, women and children.

Amnesty International has spoken to a number of sources including an eye witness in the aftermath of last Friday's attacks. They describe a barrage of shells, mortars and rockets and raids on the residential area of Teldo that left at least 108 dead, 50 of them children. According to the eye witness, artillery shells and rockets were fired into areas of Houla by the Syrian military from around 8pm on Friday until around midnight, at times falling at the rate of one per minute.

Sixty-two of those killed were from the Abd al-Razaq family in Teldo. All had been shot dead, except for a few children whose skulls had been smashed, presumably by rifle butts. In recent days, activists say the security presence around the town has increased, with four military checkpoints now posted along the main road.

These horrific acts could be repeated elsewhere in Syria if concerted action is not taken now. Our field research in Syria in the last week has documented excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators in Aleppo, with our delegate personally witnessing the resultant killings and injuries, including of children. The unrest in Syria began with similar peaceful demonstrators last year, and the heavy handed response of the security forces has brought us to the tipping point we see today.

For more than a year, Amnesty International has called on the Human Rights Council to take a strong stand on the crimes against humanity and human rights abuses taking place in Syria. For so long as powerful voices in the international community, including some members of the Human Rights and Security Councils, continue to deny the reality of the situation, these abuses will continue.

Last Friday's brutal attacks in Houla demand a consequential and rapid response from the UN - including its human rights system. Condemnation of last week's attacks is not sufficient. The Human Rights Council must call for action across the UN to put an end to the escalating violence and repression and to ensure accountability for violations and abuses, which include crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council to:

- Recommend that the UN Security Council refer the situation in Syria to the Prosecutor of the ICC.
- Ensure that any resolution adopted at this session explicitly mentions the crimes against humanity being committed in Syria.
- Ensure that any resolution adopted at this session builds upon provisions for the United Nations supervision mission in the Annan plan and is formed in the context of that plan.
- Call upon the Human Rights Council Independent International Commission of Inquiry to investigate immediately the Houla attacks and demand that the Syrian authorities cooperate fully with that investigation and give the Commission of Inquiry full and unhindered access to Syria.

- Recommend that the UN Security Council ensure that the UN observer mission has an adequately resourced and strong human rights component with the mandate and capacity to monitor, investigate and publicly report on all human rights abuses.
 - Recommend that the UN Security Council ensure that human rights monitors have the capacity to protect victims and witnesses. Monitors must be provided with necessary logistical and other support, including protection, so that they can travel to all areas of Syria and visit all places of detention.
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