

**Submission to the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court**

**By**

**Dr. Radwan Ziadeh**

**Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies (DCHRS), SYRIA**

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Madam President, Members of the Assembly, Distinguished delegates,

I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

After over twenty months of bloodshed and more than 40,000 deaths, unspeakable brutality of the Assad regime is escalating by the day. Today, I am honored to address the General Debate session as a human rights activist and on behalf of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies to:

*Denounce the deterioration of the situation in Syria, in particular the continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities, such as the use of force against civilians, arbitrary executions, the killing and persecution of protestors, human rights defenders and journalists, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, interference with access to medical treatment, torture, sexual violence and ill-treatment, including against children;*

I would like to seize this opportunity to **call upon all Member States, present today, to provide support to the resolution of the escalating conflict in Syria.** Similar to Switzerland's initiative, we urge member countries in the UN Security Council to support any future attempts for the referral of the Syria situation to the ICC.

On behalf of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies and our partners in Syria and in exile, we call upon states to use the opportune platform offered at the ASP, to take a proactive and immediate action to halt the mass atrocities taking place in my country, and combat the culture of impunity.

Under the current legal framework, a referral of the situation of Syria can only be initiated at the UN Security Council level. However, this process has not yielded positive developments due to internal divisions within the Council. As such, our organization and on behalf of our coalition of Syrian human rights members, we would like to call upon the International Criminal Court, as the international guardian of international criminal law, to take necessary measures vis-a-vis the United Nations General Assembly to increase cooperation mechanisms to expedite intervention in Syria.

I reflect the views of partner human rights compatriots in persisting on our call for accountability initiatives with diplomatic and technical support from the international

community and the ICC. The main feedback received from our Syrian civil society partners on the future role of ICC in **Syria**, include:

- ✓ The availability of an internationally recognized body, like the ICC, can enforce principles vital to attaining justice in Syria
- ✓ Continued monitoring of domestic justice by international entities forms a corollary and an integral part of a commitment to ‘shared responsibility’ and ‘responsibility to protect’. It is, thus, difficult to negate the role of international monitoring in the accountability efforts in Syria
- ✓ The Syrian criminal justice system will have to meet new challenges based on a changed international environment. Particularly, the ICC’s Rome Statute would be instrumental as the country embarks on legislative reforms, to incorporate international crimes into the Syrian Criminal Code and repeal any statutory limitations applying to such crimes. Equally important is the establishment of an independent judiciary and capacity strengthening programs for judicial, police, prison, in particular in the development of specialized investigative and prosecution skills; as well as considering the rights of victims in all mechanisms of accountability in accordance with ICC provisions.

We call on the UN Security Council to stop the deadly terror in Syria by, immediately, referring the situation against the regime to the International Criminal Court. As days go by, there is increasing evidence that Assad's regime and security forces have committed crimes against humanity, war crimes and gross human rights violations. It is time to stop this murderous brutality and protect the Syrian people, who are risking everything to reclaim their rights and their dignity. It remains important for Syria to respect international customary law and its obligations under its signature of the Rome Statute.

Finally, we would argue that the ICC was created precisely to deal with such atrocities occurring in Syria, and that bringing it into play would build rather than undermine those norms. This is a debate which is well worth having -- and one which I look forward to continuing.