



CAIRO INSTITUTE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

Cairo, April 21, 2011

Letter of Appeal by Syrian and Arab Human Rights NGOs:

Syria Should not be allowed on the UN Human Rights Council

Dear Excellency,

We, the undersigned Syrian and Arab NGOs, are deeply alarmed about the candidacy of the Syrian Arab Republic to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in the upcoming UN General Assembly (GA) elections for membership in the HRC. Syria is currently being put forward by the Asian Group at the GA as a candidate for membership of the HRC within a closed slate that does not allow for competitive elections.

According to resolution A/RES/60/251 establishing the HRC, “members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.” In light of recent grave and systematic human rights violations being carried out by the Syrian government to repress largely peaceful protests for democratic reform, it is impossible to justify Syria’s unchallenged candidacy and potential membership in the HRC. All member states of the GA, in particular the Asian Group, should ensure the retraction of Syria’s candidacy and/or ensure that Syria does not attain the votes required within the GA to become a member state of the HRC.

Since the beginning of peaceful protests in Syria over three weeks ago, security forces have responded with excessive use of force and have brutally targeted protests with live ammunition, resulting in more than 220 deaths. Furthermore, at least 342 protestors have been arbitrarily arrested and detained. A majority of these remain in incommunicado detention. Journalists have not been permitted to enter the country to cover the events. The government crackdown on peaceful protesters continues till this day, and the authorities have indicated that its response to protests might become more violent still.

On the 1st of March, the General Assembly suspended Libya’s membership in the HRC by consensus. If only two months later Syria is accepted into the HRC, this will be a shocking display of selectivity in the GA’s stance on human rights violations. While we consider the candidacy of Syria to the HRC to have been unacceptable before the recent unrest, based on the continuous and widespread violations of human rights committed by the state over the past decades, its successful candidacy at this moment in time would constitute a form of international impunity, sending the signal to Syria and other governments who commit grave human rights violations to repress popular movements for democratic reform, that their breach of international human rights law is acceptable to the international community. Furthermore, the credibility of the GA and the Council is at stake, as the successful candidacy of Syria would be a mockery of the standards regulating HRC membership.

We urge all UN member states and the Asian Group in particular, to call upon Syria to withdraw its bid for membership in the HRC. If it refuses to do so, we urge all states to uphold the credibility of the HRC by ensuring that Syria is not given a seat in the HRC in the May elections.

Sincerely,

1. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
2. Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights
3. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, Egypt
4. Bahrain Center for Human Rights
5. Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights
6. Center for Trade Unions and Worker's Services, Egypt
7. Coalition of Families of Missing Persons in Algeria
8. Committee for the Respect of Liberties and Human Rights in Tunisia
9. Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies
10. Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement
11. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
12. Haitham Maleh Foundation for the Defense of Syrian Human Rights Defenders
13. Hisham Mubarak Law Center, Egypt
14. Human Rights First Society, Saudi Arabia
15. Journalists for Human Rights - JHR, Sudan
16. Moroccan Association for Human Rights
17. Moroccan Organization for Human Rights
18. Palestinian Organization for Human Rights, Lebanon
19. Yemeni Organization for Defending Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms