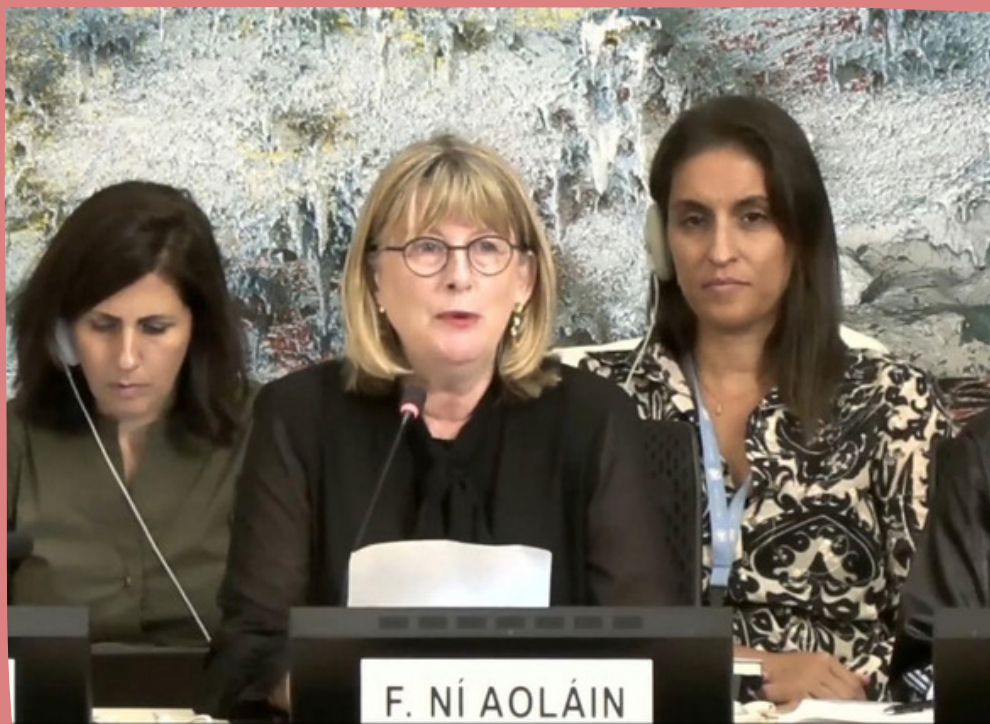


63rd Session of the Human Rights Council

TWO YEARS LATER, WHERE DOES SYRIA STAND?



By Nayira Himpe / GICJ



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I. Executive Summary

On 8 September 2026, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic presented an oral update to the Human Rights Council during its 63rd session, addressing the human rights situation in Syria following the fall of the former government and the country's ongoing political transition. The Commission welcomed developments including the establishment of a People's Assembly and Constitutional Court, the return of millions of Syrians, and continued cooperation and access from the Syrian authorities. At the same time, it stressed that significant challenges remain, particularly regarding accountability, transitional justice and the prevention of renewed violations.

The Commission raised concerns over continuing Israeli military activities in southern Syria, violence and sectarian abuses in several regions, arbitrary detention and restrictions on civic freedoms, as well as the situation of missing and detained persons. Particular attention was given to the rights of women and children, including those detained in Al Rawj camp, as well as the transfer of Syrian detainees to Iraq. The Commission emphasised that accountability for violations committed both under the former government and during the transition must remain central to Syria's efforts towards reconciliation and a sustainable transition.

Syria reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms and outlined measures undertaken in the areas of transitional justice, missing persons, accountability and the prevention of torture. It acknowledged the challenges that remain and called for an end to violations committed by Israel. The European Union similarly expressed support for a peaceful and inclusive transition grounded in human rights and international law.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) supports a peaceful transition in Syria based on international law, human rights and accountability. It welcomes the Syrian authorities' continued cooperation with the Commission while calling for accountability for human rights violations and an end to violations of international law in Syria.

II. Background

Following the fall of the Assad regime nearly two years ago, the Syrian Arab Republic has entered a political transition after more than a decade of armed conflict and widespread human rights abuses. The conflict began in March 2011, initially as peaceful protests calling for political reform, before escalating into a prolonged armed conflict involving multiple domestic and international actors. It resulted in extensive destruction, large-scale displacement and severe humanitarian consequences, while violations including arbitrary

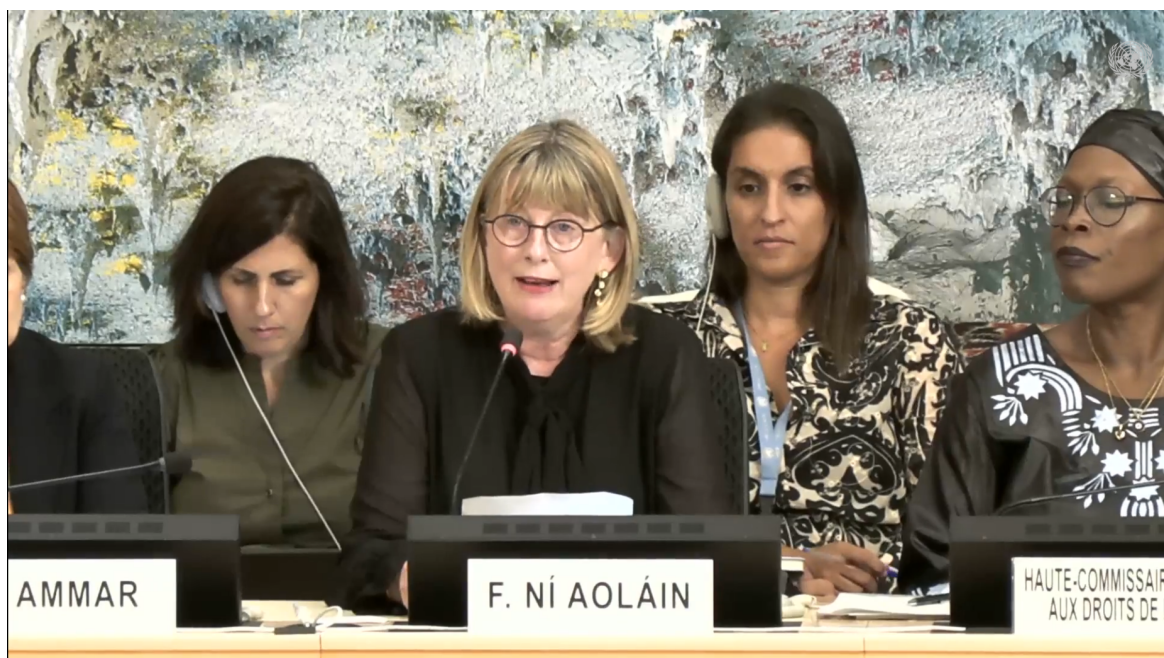
detention, torture, enforced disappearances, attacks against civilians and other serious abuses were documented throughout the conflict.[1]

In response to the deteriorating human rights situation, the Human Rights Council established the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic in August 2011. Its mandate is to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law committed in Syria since March 2011, establish the facts and circumstances surrounding such violations, and identify those responsible where possible.[2]

Against this background, the Commission delivered its latest oral update to the Human Rights Council on 8 September 2026, during the Council's 63rd session in Geneva. The Commissioners highlighted significant developments since the fall of the former government, including the establishment of a legislative body and a Constitutional Court. They nevertheless stressed the challenges involved in building institutions that respect human rights while addressing the legacy of past violations and ensuring their non-recurrence.[3]

III. Exhaustive Summary of the Interactive Dialogue

1. Opening statement by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic



As the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic presented its latest oral update, Commissioner Fionnuala Ní Aoláin noted that Syria is undergoing a significant transformation while continuing to face substantial human rights challenges. The Commission welcomed several developments since the fall of the former

government, including the establishment of a People's Assembly and a Constitutional Court, the return of millions of Syrians and accelerated reconstruction efforts. It also welcomed the Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) announcement regarding their dissolution and the continuation of the process of integrating their forces into state institutions. The Commission further expressed appreciation for the Government's continued access and engagement with its work. Nevertheless, the Commission identified several areas requiring continued attention.

First, the Commission raised concerns regarding Israel's ongoing military activities in Syrian territory. It reported recurrent ground incursions, patrols, raids and searches in southern Syria, as well as the establishment of temporary checkpoints and fixed military infrastructure. It also reported the interrogation and detention of Syrian residents, including minors. The Commission stated that some of these acts may amount to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including potential war crimes.

Second, the Commission stressed that accountability must remain central to Syria's transitional justice process. It warned that addressing violations selectively could breach international legal obligations, perpetuate grievances and undermine reconciliation. The Commission therefore emphasised the need for accountability for violations committed both under the former government and during the recent period of violence.

Third, the Commission addressed the violence that occurred in March and July 2025 in the coastal region and in Sweida. While acknowledging efforts by the Government to address these events, it considered several fundamental human rights concerns to remain unresolved. These include the displacement of thousands of Druze and Bedouin families, the fate of missing and detained persons and the impact of the violence on students' ability to attend their examinations. The Commission attributed the lack of progress in part to the continuing standoff between local authorities and the national Government, alongside continued Israeli involvement in southern Syria.

Although a limited number of trials have taken place, the Commission stressed that accountability for violations committed in Sweida remains urgent. It also called on local authorities to refrain from further violations, including restrictions on freedom of movement and expression. Accountability for the March 2025 violence likewise remains limited. The Commission further reported continuing localised sectarian abuses and intimidation targeting members of the Alawite community. It is investigating reported killings in Homs that predominantly targeted Alawite civilians, as well as alleged abductions of women and girls in several governorates. The Commission stressed the need for gender-sensitive investigations and for the Government to address the fear and distress experienced by affected communities.

Fourth, the Commission raised concerns regarding detention and civic freedoms. It reported nine deaths in detention during 2026, including that of a former humanitarian worker.

Although freedoms of expression and association have expanded considerably, the Commission noted reports of activists being arrested after criticising the Government. It also raised concerns regarding continuing hate speech targeting groups perceived as being associated with the former government, as well as threats of violence against women activists, including online threats.

Fifth, the Commission addressed the situation in Aleppo and northeastern Syria. It recognised meaningful efforts by the Government to mitigate violations during its military operations in the region. Nevertheless, it continues to investigate reported violations, including the killing of civilians and persons *hors de combat*. Hundreds of SDF-affiliated fighters also remain missing. The Commission reiterated its concerns regarding the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, noting reports that some fighters killed during the recent violence were under the age of 18.

Particular concern was expressed regarding women and children allegedly associated with Da'esh. The Commission called for the urgent resolution of their situation and reiterated its call for the immediate closure of the Al Rawj (Roj) camp, where more than 2,000 people, mostly women and children, remain detained on security grounds. It described the camp as the world's largest site of mass detention of women and children on such grounds and reported that conditions have further deteriorated. More than 100 foreign children also remain in detention in northeastern Syria, some of whom have been held since 2019. The Commission stressed that the detention of children should be a measure of last resort and called for their rehabilitation and treatment as victims where appropriate.

The Commission also expressed serious concern regarding the transfer of more than 5,700 men and boys from northeastern Syria to Iraq earlier in 2026 by United States forces. The detainees reportedly represented more than 60 nationalities. The Commission stated that the transfer may raise serious concerns under the principle of non-refoulement and that it is investigating the circumstances surrounding the operation.

In concluding her intervention, Commissioner Ní Aoláin reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to supporting Syria's transition and ensuring that the rights of the Syrian people are protected. She stressed that the momentum towards strengthening respect for human rights in Syria must be supported through concrete action by the Human Rights Council and the international community. The Commission emphasised that breaking with past patterns of violence and establishing strong safeguards against their recurrence will be essential to ensuring a transition founded on human rights and dignity.

2. Statement by the Syrian Arab Republic as the concerned country



The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirmed its determination to “continue its constructive and positive cooperation” with the United Nations human rights mechanisms. It highlighted its continued cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Special Procedures, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Forum on the Human Rights of Refugees, Displaced Persons and Internally Displaced Persons.

Regarding transitional justice, Syria stated that the Transitional Justice Council had prepared a draft transitional justice programme, with particular emphasis on the participation of victims. It also reported that investigations were ongoing and that authorities remained engaged with victims to collect testimonies and evidence. According to the Syrian delegation, five cases had been brought before the relevant transitional justice court, with a further 12 cases before the court and 69 files before investigating judges. It further reported that 1,147 cases were under investigation and approximately 1,333 cases were before the Public Prosecutor.

Syria stated that it was “determined to move from a stage of indifference and denial when it comes to violations to a new stage” based on assuming responsibility and ensuring justice for victims.

With regard to missing persons, the delegation reported the establishment of the National Missing Persons Commission. It stated that the Commission had undertaken broad consultations in which victims and their families could participate, established counselling and reception centres, and introduced mechanisms to facilitate the collection of witness

testimony. According to the delegation, 194 cases concerning missing persons had been initiated, some in cooperation with international organisations and other bodies with relevant mandates.

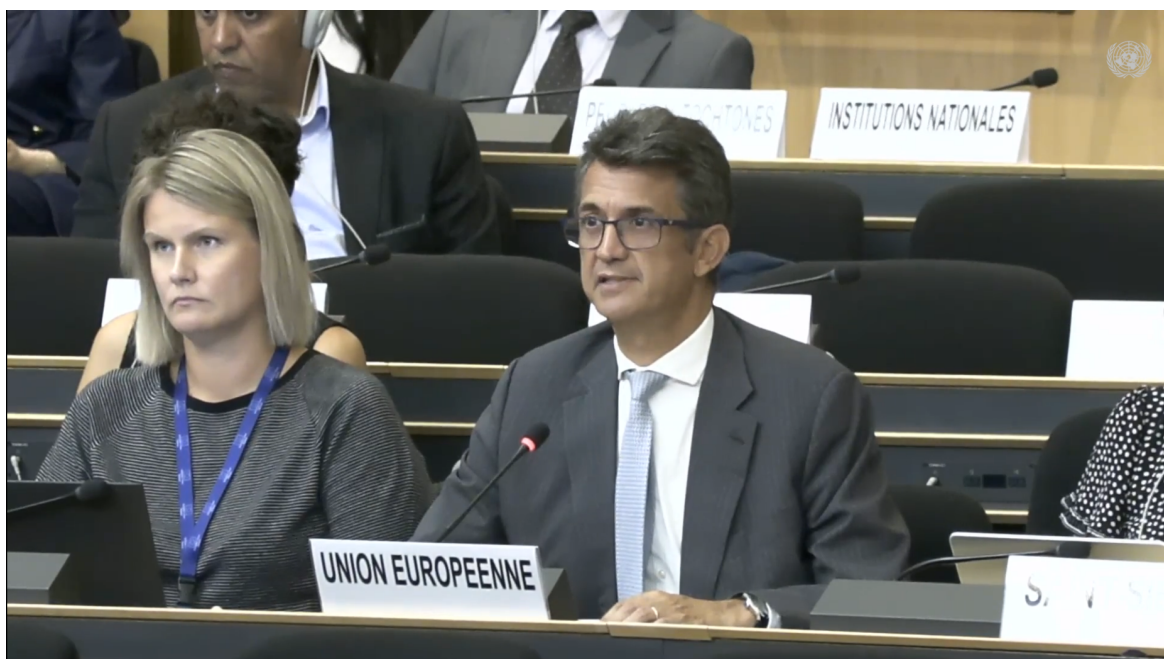
The Syrian Government also reported that it had drafted a national strategy to combat torture and address proven cases of torture committed during the former regime. It presented these measures as part of its broader efforts to address past violations and prevent their recurrence.

Turning to the situation along the disengagement line, Syria stated that it remained committed to stability and international cooperation while continuing to address violations committed against civilians. It called on Israel to cease what it described as violations of international law, respect the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and release Syrian civilians detained by Israeli forces.

In concluding its statement, Syria acknowledged that significant challenges remained, particularly regarding accountability, evidence collection and ensuring justice for victims. Nevertheless, it welcomed the establishment of early-warning mechanisms and reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation with the Commission and other States. The delegation stressed the importance of protecting victims and witnesses and strengthening national institutions as part of Syria's path towards peace, justice and development.

3. Statements by Group of States

The European Union



Speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU), the delegation noted that Albania, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro and North Macedonia aligned themselves with the EU's statement.

More broadly, the EU called on States to ensure the integrity of the human rights pillar, including by paying their assessed contributions. It also expressed concern regarding the reported increase in executions.

Regarding Syria, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to supporting a peaceful and inclusive transition that upholds human rights. It stressed the importance of ensuring that the transition is grounded in respect for human rights and international law.

3. Statements by other States

The State of Qatar



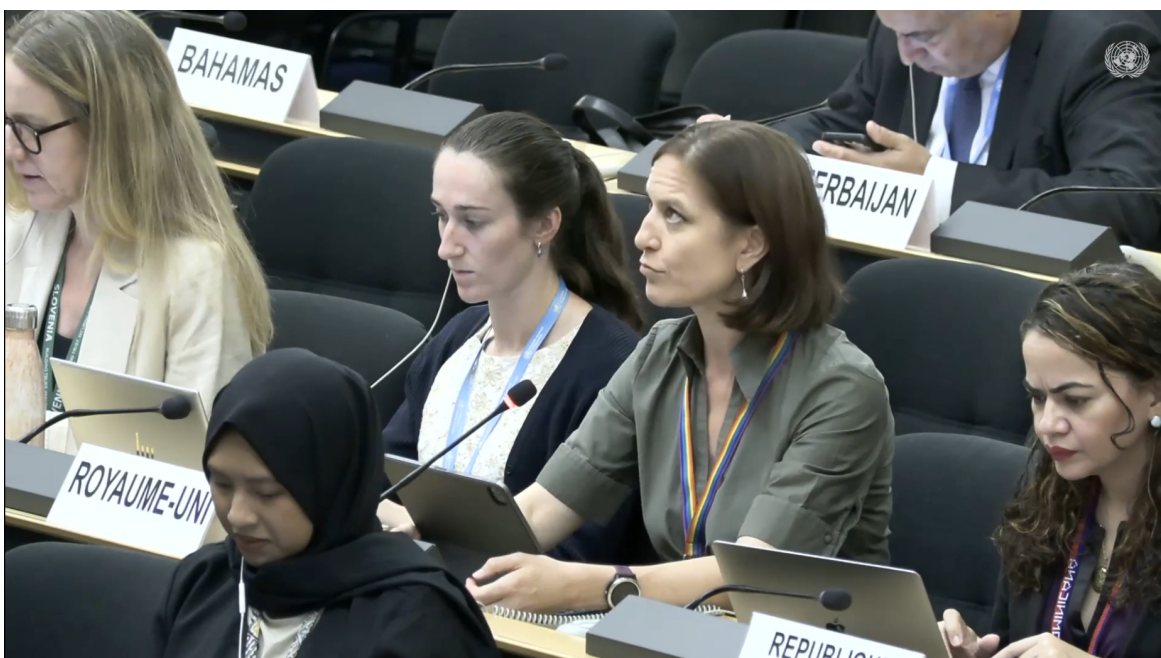
In its statement, Qatar began by condemning the Israeli settlement activities, especially in one area, as well as the attacks on Syrian territory. Nonetheless, the state “welcomes the new era in the country”. It also insists on the necessity to make progress concerning transitional justice and the issue of missing persons as well as on the continuation of political, economic and humanitarian support.

4. Japan



Japan stated its general support to every country's voluntary efforts to advance human rights, under the basic principle of dialogue and cooperation. Regarding Syria, they welcome the progress made, including steps toward developing a transitional justice law, and highlight the urgent need to advance accountability and protect detainees' rights. It insists all parties must fully respect international human rights and humanitarian law and protect victims. Finally, Japan declared its support to international efforts for the improvement of the humanitarian situation and for peace and stability in the Middle East.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland



The United Kingdom also welcomes the steps being taken by the government of Syria on its political transition, including a new parliament, addressing the Assad era legacies, and engaging the international community. However, it notes that the “situation remains delicate”. Hence, it urges Syria to proceed in an inclusive and representative way, protecting the rights of all Syrians.

IV. Conclusion

As this session consisted of an oral update by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, rather than a conventional interactive dialogue with a concluding intervention by the mandate holder, no separate concluding remarks were delivered by the Commission. The discussion nevertheless highlighted the central challenges facing Syria's transition, particularly accountability for past and ongoing violations, transitional justice, the situation of missing and detained persons, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Syrian delegation reaffirmed its commitment to cooperation with the Commission and other UN human rights mechanisms, while States broadly emphasised the importance of an inclusive transition grounded in human rights, international law and accountability.

V. Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) Position

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) supports a peaceful transition in Syria grounded in international law, human rights and accountability. GICJ welcomes the cooperation of the Syrian authorities with the Commission of Inquiry, including its continued access to the country.

GICJ remains deeply concerned by continued Israeli violations in Syria and calls for their cessation in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. GICJ further stresses the importance of accountability for human rights violations and urges that such violations be effectively addressed. GICJ acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the Syrian authorities and encourages continued cooperation with the Commission to advance human rights, accountability and non-recurrence.

VI. Sources

[1] “Syria Embassy Legalization Services in the U.S..” *Syriaembassy.Org*, 2025, <https://www.syriaembassy.org/>. Accessed 16 Sept. 2026.

[2] UN News. “Syria’s Transition Hinges on Justice for All, UN Human Rights Council Hears.” *UN News*, 8 Sept. 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/09/1168292>. Accessed 16 Sept. 2026.

[3] UN News. “Syria’s Transition Hinges on Justice for All, UN Human Rights Council Hears.” *UN News*, 8 Sept. 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/09/1168292>. Accessed 16 Sept. 2026.

