



## **Statement by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom on the Situation in Syria**

Since the large-scale demonstrations, which began on 16 March 2011, the Syrian security forces have been repeatedly using lethal force against peaceful protesters throughout Syria. The silencing of the media has made independent verification difficult, but the evidence of human rights violations is becoming overwhelming: over 400 protesters killed since March, innumerable arrests of both protesters and human rights defenders, and allegations of torture. Although President Bashar al-Asad initially promised that the shooting of protesters would be investigated, he has failed to take effective measures to address the issue so far. Instead, Syrian officials have accused unknown "armed groups", although it is evident that the majority of the shootings are by Syrian security forces. In any event, the killing continues.

It is recognised that there is no easy solution: there is fear, amongst many minorities, including Christians and Kurds, of chaos and a possible civil war which would pit the majority Sunni population against the ruling minority Alawis.

It is understood that neighbouring States: Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan and Israel (via the Golan Heights) have serious concerns as to the consequences of Regime change in Syria. The political concerns are real: potential repercussions in terms of Arab-Israeli, Arab-Iranian (Iran is a strong ally of Syria), inter-Arab and Arab-Western relations. It is almost inevitable that many will pursue their partisan and national goals, (Saudi Arabia, for example might be attracted to fund opposition Sunni groups as they did in Iraq in order to get rid of a pro-Shia, pro-Iranian regime).

Interference might already be underway. Who are the armed gangs referred to by Asad? Rumours abound but given the interests of neighbouring states and religious affiliations: they could be Lebanese Sunnis or Lebanese Phalangist Christians (both traditional enemies of Damascus). They could also be radical Sunni Islamic groups funded by Saudi Arabia, Kurds, members of Israel's Mossad or even fringe elements in the Syrian armed forces. The truth is not known and must be established so as to lead to effective prevention of further atrocities and accountability.

The situation is fuelled by the arms trade, both legal and illegal, which has led to the region being awash with weapons.

There are reports that food supplies are becoming scarce in some areas such as Deraa. This probably extends to medical supplies particularly in areas where violence has been at its worst. Syria's economy is weak with 32% of Syrians living on 2\$ a day. The prime sufferers are women and children. It has been reported that 1500 Syrian women and children had left their men and homes and crossed into Northern Lebanon. If the violence continues, many more will follow.

### **Recommendations to all States:**

*WILPF calls on the HRC* to assert its authority to demand that human rights concerns, human rights law and international humanitarian law are upheld and that the perceived nationalist and partisan, interests of neighbouring states be subordinated to their international legal obligations.

To invoke the doctrine of the responsibility to protect to require neighbouring States not to engage in actions which will lead to violations of both human rights and IHL and possibly lead to a broader conflict.

WILPF calls for a cessation of any trading or supplying of arms into the region so as to reduce the possible escalation of violence and human rights violations.

**Recommendations to the Syrian authorities:**

*WILPF calls on the HRC* to include in any resolution a demand for a cessation to all violence, in particular on the part of the Syrian authorities.

An end to the arbitrary and unlawful detention of human rights defenders, and their unconditional release.

Negotiations between the government and representatives of the protesters to reach an end to the violence, with the observance of friendly States and appropriate UN bodies, to address grievances.

The negotiations to include the full participation of women.

The negotiations to end the violence to be immediately followed by a process of consultations with civil society representing all sectors of society and with a particular reference to the rights of women and the commencement of a peaceful process towards democracy and actions to uphold the rule of law in accordance with human rights.

**Recommendations to United Nations:**

*WILPF calls* for the special procedures of the HRC to be invited to investigate the ongoing situation in Syria.

The Human Rights Council to transmit the report of the special session to the General Assembly prior to the election for the HRC schedule for May 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.