



**PERMANENT MISSION
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PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN



Government
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**Permanent Mission of Sweden
to the United Nations, Geneva**



FORCIBLE TRANSFER OF POPULATION IN SYRIA

26 February 2018 10:30 – 12:00
Room XXV, Palais des Nations
United Nations Office in Geneva

While the war in Syria approaches its eighth year, civilians continue to bear the brunt of a conflict marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life. According to OCHA, 13.1 million people require humanitarian assistance, including close to 3 million people trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas; 5.5 million people have fled the country and 6.1 million have been internally displaced by violence. Many have been displaced multiple times. Children and youth comprise more than half of the displaced, as well as half of those in need of humanitarian assistance.

Over the years, the forcible transfer of population has become a consistent strategy by the Assad government and his allies to consolidate territory and expel civilians who do not support its rule. ISIS and anti-Assad militias have also forced people to flee their homes in newly occupied territories. Local communities have been encircled, besieged and denied their basic rights, including freedom of movement and access to adequate food and health care, to deliberately inflict conditions of life calculated to bring about their destruction. The forced displacement of civilian population is presented as a humanitarian measure and negotiated and handled by the very same people that determined these humanitarian catastrophes. To the contrary, as stated by the UN Secretary General, “under international humanitarian law, the forced displacement of civilians for reasons relating to the conflict is permissible solely in order to guarantee their security or for imperative military necessity. Forced displacement for any other reason relating to the conflict is prohibited and may constitute a war crime” (S/2017/339).

Exactly one year ago the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) described the evacuation of eastern Aleppo as “forced displacement” and a crime against humanity under international law (A/HRC/34/64). The case of the “Four Towns Agreement” of March 2017 is probably the clearest example of this political and military tactic: under the agreement the populations of Foah and Kefraya, mostly Shia Muslims, and those of Madaya and Zabadani, mostly Sunni Muslims, were exchanged. The conflict has given the Assad government the opportunity and means to implement, accelerate, and expand pre-war demographic changes goals, as in Homs which has been turned into a test-ground for redistributing its population and strengthening the economic and physical control of the city by pro-Assad communities and a blueprint for similar operations in other Syrian regions. The growing relevance of foreign influence over the conduct of military operations has compounded this strategy.

Forced displacements – if made irreversible - will have long-lasting effects on the future of Syria, by altering the demographic composition of key strategic areas and changing the social fabric of the country. By redrawing the geographical distribution of various communities in Syria, the forcible transfer of specific populations represents one of the main ways through which the warring parties are sapping any possibility for meaningful transitional justice processes and a political transition capable of lasting more than few years. In order to ensure that a credible, unbiased and fair political transition will take place in Syria, it is critical that the civil and political rights of the Syrian people are guaranteed today and that decisions and actions taken today will not hamper any possibility for a political transition in the years ahead.

Against this backdrop, this side event will review the fundamental issues of accountability and transitional justice as essential components of any future negotiation on Syria. The meeting will also serve as a reminder that the rights of IDPs and refugees need to be part and parcel of a political settlement and are addressed not exclusively through a humanitarian approach. Proper mechanisms and procedures need to be set up to protect and guarantee property rights and the return of homes and properties to their legitimate owners; to ensure the right to vote to those that have been forcibly removed from their homes and electoral constituencies; and halt resettlement operations that are being carried out in the cities and neighborhoods whose residents have been displaced.





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PROGRAM

Co-Chairs: Hussein Sabbagh, Secretary General Euro-Syrian Democratic Forum
Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General No Peace Without Justice

Welcome remarks: H.E. Anders Samuelsen, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Denmark
H.E. Sigrid Kaag, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, The Netherlands
H.E. Aurelia Frick, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Liechtenstein

Panel: Noura AlJizawi, Start point
Anwar Albuni, Syrian Center for Legal Researches and Studies
James Rodehaver, Coordinator, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (CoI)

Interventions from the floor

Closing remarks: Sébastien Beaulieu, Executive Director for Syria, Canada

By focusing on the forcible transfer of population in Syria, this side event will review the fundamental issues of accountability and transitional justice as essential components of any future negotiation on Syria. The meeting will also serve as a reminder that the rights of IDPs and refugees need to be part and parcel of a political settlement and are addressed not exclusively through a humanitarian approach. Proper mechanisms and procedures need to be set up to protect and guarantee property rights and the return of homes and properties to their legitimate owners; to ensure the right to vote to those that have been forcibly removed from their homes and electoral constituencies; and halt resettlement operations that are being carried out in the cities and neighborhoods whose residents have been displaced.

