

PACE: Statement on the situation in Syria

Strasbourg, 09.03.2012 – The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), meeting in Paris at Standing Committee level, today made the following statement on the situation in Syria:

"The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is appalled by the deterioration of the situation in Syria, where more than 8,000 persons have been killed in the last 11 months as a direct result of actions by the Syrian autocratic leadership against a pro-democracy uprising. For the Assembly, a government which systematically bombs and slaughters its own population cannot claim any legitimacy. The killings and related atrocities must end immediately.

The Assembly is shocked by the refusal of the Syrian authorities to allow the UN Humanitarian Chief, Valerie Amos, access to the country and the International Committee of the Red Cross access to the Baba Amr district in the city of Homs, which is devastated by a humanitarian disaster. Now that access has finally been granted, the Assembly emphasises the urgency of addressing the humanitarian needs, facilitating the effective delivery of assistance and ensuring safe access to medical treatment.

The 47-member UN Human Rights Council, in a resolution adopted only a few days ago, strongly condemned the continued "widespread and systematic" violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities, including the use of force against civilians, arbitrary executions, the killing and persecution of protestors, enforced disappearances, torture and sexual violence, including of, and against, children. UN experts have found compelling evidence that Syrian officials may be guilty of crimes against humanity. These should be investigated and the perpetrators should be brought to justice without delay.

However, despite such findings and resolutions condemning the brutal actions of the Syrian authorities by both the top UN human rights body and the UN General Assembly itself, the UN Security Council has so far been unable to agree on action on Syria. The Assembly joins UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in denouncing the international community's failure in its duty towards the Syrian people and in calling for unity.

The Assembly, in particular, regrets the position taken by Russia, the only member state of the Council of Europe to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for Assad to step down. Joining its President, Jean Claude Mignon, in his hope that "Russia does not forget its commitments within the Council of Europe", the Assembly calls on Russia not to veto any future resolution on the subject within the UN Security Council.

The Assembly is convinced that, in combating the dictatorship of Assad, every effort has to be made to reassure all Syrian citizens that, in so doing, it will be possible for them to live together, Christians and Muslims, Kurds and Arabs, Sunnites and Alawites, in a peaceful and pluralist democracy.

The Assembly fully supports the efforts of the League of Arab States to put an end to the violence and open the way for a peaceful transition to democracy. It particularly supports the efforts of the UN-Arab League peace envoy, Kofi Annan. It will follow closely the outcome of the latter's current visit to the region and will keep this issue high on its own agenda, notably through the work of its Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy."

