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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2013]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Syrian Arab Republic: The particular situation of the Kurdish people in the Northeast

The Syrian civil war has killed 100'000 people and caused a refugee crisis in the Middle East that is threatening to destabilize several states in the region.

Minority groups in the Syrian Arab Republic have feared for their security and future since the outbreak of the protests and demonstrations in March 2011. As the sectarian violence escalated during the 2 years and a half of the conflict, their vulnerability has increasingly drawn the attention of international monitoring organizations and experts.

The situation of ethnic and religious minorities, such as Christians, Assyrians, Armenians, Druze and Kurds, is particularly sensitive and dangerous as the minorities often find themselves in-between the fighting forces, where they are forced to choose a side in the bloody conflict - either by the governmental or anti-governmental forces.

The so far relatively most secure and calm region of Syria, the countries northeast Kurdish regions, have been subject to heavy clashes the last month. Clashes erupted on July 17, between the Kurdish armed group called People's Protection Units (YPG) and several jihadist anti-governmental armed groups, most notably Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The latter forces, upon declaring their Kurdish enemies as unbelievers (kuffars) and separatists, launched a broad military assault against the YPG, in al-Hasakah, Afrin and Aleppo.

However, the attacks that has been ongoing since then were not only targeting the YPG fighters but also another Kurdish armed unit, Jabhat al-Akrad, that fought under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army until July 2013. The military attacks in Afrin, Ayn al-Arab, Ras al-Ayn, Tel Abyad, Tel Tamer, Tel Kocher and Malikiya included shelling of civilian infrastructure, besieging towns, attacks on family members of Kurdish fighters and kidnappings of hundreds of civilians on the basis of their ethnic identity.

On 27-30 July 2013, fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS encircled the two villages of Tel Aran and Tel Hasel, two Kurdish enclaves southeast of Aleppo. In what seems to have been a house-to-house search, the fighters from JNB and ISIS threatened and harassed Kurdish families with relatives in any of the Kurdish armed groups. In a dozen of the homes, where young men suspected of being Jabhat al-Akrad members were found, they were summarily executed in front of their families or taken away and executed in a nearby location. As of the day of submission of this contribution (22nd August 2013), a list of 30 victims have been confirmed. However, according to local sources, the number of victims may range between 50-70 Kurdish people. In the following days after the killings, thousands of Kurdish families fled the villages to take refuge in Aleppo, Afrin and Ayn al-Arab.

International calls were made to refer the massacre to UN Security Council and other international bodies, for investigation and condemnations.

In connection to the fighting between the Kurdish armed groups and Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, the two Kurdish cities Afrin and Ayn al-Arab (with surrounding villages) have been besieged. The Afrin region is home to a Kurdish population of at least half a million Kurds. The siege has prevented food, gas and basic necessities from reaching the population, and occasionally cut electricity and water supplies to the region.

Coupled with the broad-spread fighting in the Kurdish regions, this has led to a massive influx of refugees into Iraqi Kurdistan, between 18-22 August, where up to 20'000 Kurds from Syria crossed the Tigris river. UNHCR set up new emergency camps for the newly arrived refugees, mainly women and children.

MRAP called on the Human Rights Council's attention, during the 22nd and 23rd sessions of the Human Rights Council, to the occasional clashes that sparked in the Kurdish regions in November 2012 and Tel Tamer in January-February 2013; and warned for the sudden outbreak of a new frontline in the Syrian civil war, between Kurdish armed groups - who de facto control northeast Syria since the withdrawal of government forces in July 2012 - and Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, who coordinate their attacks and military activities from the Syrian-Turkish border.

MRAP call upon the Commission of Inquiry on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to investigate on the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Kurdish region of Syria and to report to the Human Rights Council at its next session.
