United Nations Human Rights Council
25th Regular Session, 3–28 March 2014
Agenda Item 4

ICJ Oral Statement in the Interactive Dialogue under Item 4 with the Commission of
Inquiry on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic

SYRIA: THREE YEARS OF FAILURE TO PROTECT THE CIVILIAN POPULATION
18 March 2014

Check against delivery

Distinguished members of the Commission of Inquiry

For more than three years, the international community has failed to respond in a meaningful
or effective manner to serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law
and other human rights abuses committed in the context of the Syrian conflict, to ensure that
perpetrators on all sides are held accountable, and to implement concrete measures towards
justice for victims.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) calls on the Human Rights Council to act
decisively to address the human rights impact of the conflict, including by requesting the
Security Council to take effective measures, in accordance with the UN Charter, to protect the
civilian population, bring an end to the conflict, and restore and maintain peace and security
in the region. States, including the member States of this Council, should also act to provide
urgent humanitarian relief to refugees, IDPs, and those trapped in besieged areas.

As the armed conflict continues to escalate, government forces and opposition groups have
both been responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other crimes under
international law, including murder, hostage-taking, torture and other ill-treatment (including
rape and other sexual violence), enforced disappearance, recruiting and using children in the
hostilities, and disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian
objects.

As the Commission of Inquiry has noted, the parties do not presently fear that they will be
held accountable. To address the pervasive and structural culture of impunity, the ICJ calls on
the Council to request the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International
Criminal Court. States, individually and collectively, must also comply with their obligations
under international law to prevent war crimes and crimes against humanity and to exercise all
grounds of jurisdiction at their disposal to investigate and prosecute anyone suspected of
responsibility for such crimes.

I thank you.

Statement delivered by:
Matt Pollard, ICJ Representative to the UN (matt.pollard@icj.org; +41 79 246 54 75)
Further contact: Said Benarbia, ICJ Middle East & North Africa Programme
(said.benarbia@icj.org; +41 22 979 3817)