



A human rights approach to combat illicit trade: the case of Syria **On the occasion of the 49th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council** **8 March 2022**

Exacerbated by a complex and intertwined regional conflict, illicit trade flourishes in Syria, increasing criminal and terrorist profits, contributing to political instability and feeding mechanisms that favor impunity and fuel human suffering, ultimately prolonging the conflict. Although the United Nations Security Council has raised its concerns “*about the links between the activities of terrorists and organized criminal groups that, in some cases, facilitate criminal activities, including trafficking in cultural property, illegal revenues and financial flows as well as money-laundering, bribery and corruption*” at least since 2017, with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2347, the massive level of violence witnessed in Syria for the past decade diverted the attention from the economic and trade interests of the warring parties. The conflict has determined the complete collapse of all socio-economic structures within Syria, compounded for the past two years by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergence of an unregulated and informal economic and trade system within Syria, which is fueled on the one hand by the need to acquire financial and economic resources to feed the military operations but also on the will to gain and amass political power to avoid accountability and establish a system of impunity based on the “rule of might”. While the international community has established various mechanisms, such as the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry and the IIIM, to monitor and report the massive human rights violations perpetrated by all warring parties; the focus and attention on the economic and trade repercussions of the conflict have been mostly limited to the exploitation of antiquities, narcotics and sanctioned goods, leaving in the shadow the economic, social, political and humanitarian consequences of illicit trade.

Against this backdrop, it is critical that the United Nations, its specialised Agencies and its Member States develop a human rights approach to the challenges posed by the emergence of war economies and trafficking in conflict situations and look into the necessary tools and mechanisms for effectively addressing these challenges in holistic ways. The nexus between illicit trade, human rights violations against individuals and communities and conflict remains largely untapped territory while synergies and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and international actors active in the domains of human rights protection, development and humanitarian aid remain largely disjointed. It is crucial that the international community, civil society and the private sector acquire an increased awareness on the nexus between illicit trade and human rights violations against individuals and communities as a basis for greater commitment to counteracting illicit trade.

This event aims at highlighting how war economies and illicit trade have serious and tangible costs for human rights and for the erosion of the rule of law, increasing the suffering of civilians, contributing to political instability and feeding mechanisms that favor impunity and underline the need for a human-rights based approach to countering illicit trade and the effects of war economies on the affected populations.



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PROGRAM

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

Panel: Hosam Hafez, Syrian Council for International Relations
Hiba Alhaji, Equity and Empowerment
Luca Poltronieri Rossetti, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies
Assaad Al Achi, Baytna Syria
György Tatár, Budapest Center for Mass Atrocities Prevention
Huda Abonabout, Women's Rights activist

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