Families of the victims of enforced disappearance call for independent mechanism with international mandate regarding missing persons

Madam President,

My name is Lamis Al-Khateeb; I am a Palestinian refugee who used to live in Syria. Like the people of Syria, we as Palestinian refugees have suffered from the violations and brutality of the government of Bashar al-Assad. My husband Niraz Saied was arrested by the government on 2 October 2015, only because as a photojournalist, he had tried to convey the truth of what was happening in Syria to the world.

I am not alone in this ordeal. Over 150,000 families are waiting for their loved ones, who are detained in prisons under the control of the Syrian government or other parties to the conflict. These families live in daily angst throughout years of futile searches, while the government and other parties refuse to disclose any information about the fate and whereabouts of detainees.

The issue of detainees in Syria cannot be deferred, as each and every day all forms of torture are inflicted upon our captive loved ones, which may cost them their lives.

For the sake of those we hold close to our hearts, we call upon the international community to pressure the Syrian government to allow impartial international bodies access to all detention centers in order to prevent torture, abuse, and arbitrary trials.

We urge UN member states to implement the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria to establish an independent mechanism with an international mandate to coordinate and consolidate claims regarding missing persons; the mechanism would be tasked with “defining the elements required to efficiently and effectively track and identify those missing and disappeared.”

Our organizations reiterate the importance of an independent humanitarian mechanism which ensures the participation of detainees’ families; takes immediate measures to release detainees; works to reveal their fate and whereabouts; and in the event of death, identifies their remains and returns them to their families.

Our detained loved ones are not numbers. They are human beings with full lives and countless dreams – and not all of these lives and dreams are yet lost. We miss them and will not stop demanding their return every day.

Thank you.