

## **Third Regional Conference on Enhancement and Protection of Human Rights**

### **“Impact of Occupation and Armed Conflict on Human Rights in Specific Women and Children”**

**Cairo, 28 July 2019**

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to His Excellency, Mr. Ahmed Abu El Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for hosting the **Third Regional Conference on the Enhancement and Protection of Human Rights in the Arab Region** in cooperation with my office.

It is with great pleasure that I address this important high-level meeting, dedicated to discuss a topic of great importance to me: the impact of armed conflict on human rights and, in particular on women and children.

Civilians in this region have been deeply affected by on-going conflicts. Ethnic and religious groups have been subjected to human rights abuses perpetrated by extremist armed groups. Despite the suffering of many, parties to conflicts continue to disregard the relevant international human rights and humanitarian law norms. Sexual and gender-based violence and the vulnerability of girls and boys, in the context of armed conflicts, are a source of concern. Young boys and girls are exploited as combatants, violating, impairing and nullifying their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Women and children deserve special attention in healing communities, both as victims of violations and abuses and actors in peace and reconciliation. Their contributions to peace building must be recognized and upheld. The cooperation between my office and the League of Arab States is fundamental for preventing conflict and sustaining peace in the region that is facing complex challenges.

More focus is needed on determining what we can do together to prevent violence, recurrence of violations and to protect – in particular – the most vulnerable individuals. The focus on prevention of human rights violations and abuses is crucial, as it enables rapid reaction to a crisis and constant follow-up. It is also essential to address post-conflict situations, notably through relevant accountability and transitional justice mechanisms.

My office has developed tools aimed at generating better respect for international law before, during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts. We have a shared role in fostering a more inclusive vision of respect for human rights. We must emphasise that rebuilding war-torn societies should include providing redress for the gross human rights violations endemic to these conflicts. We also need to work together to expand equal opportunities, advance respect for all human rights, ensure accountability and build inclusion.

People are looking for our organizations to be on their side in the fight for justice, dignity and social equity. Within the challenges faced by the region lies the opportunity to build on our common goals for action that will bring real change to the people of the region. I look forward to continuing this engagement.

The respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms must prevail in all circumstances, including when States are countering terrorism. The support and active engagement of the international community, including the Member States of the Arab League, is vital.

I am sure that our Conference will offer many opportunities to build on our successful and inspirational cooperation, and wish you a productive discussion.

Thank you.