

Letter to the Middle East and North Africa Section (MENA)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Subject: MENA Consultative Meeting with Geneva-based NGOs, 27 March 2013

Dear Madam/Sir

On 1 March 2013 we have received an invitation for a MENA consultative meeting with Geneva-based NGOs. Although over the years our Network of Arab human rights NGOs used to participate actively and constructively in these meetings, we regret to inform you that we feel it necessary to decline the invitation, given that it would be futile to attend a meeting when the organizers are hopelessly biased from the outset and persistently sidestepping key human rights issues.

Our decision not to attend the MENA consultative meeting was triggered by the failure of the OHCHR to appear at a 6-session conference at the UN that was jointly organized by over 300 NGOs on Thursday and Friday the 14th and 15th of March under the title “*Accountability and Justice for Iraq*”. The MENA section at the OHCHR was invited well in advance of the conference and their attendance should have been a must. Unfortunately, it seems that despite the worsening human rights situation, Iraq is obviously not considered to be a priority to the OHCHR, whose representatives attended other side events but systematically ignored the subject of Iraq. Even those responsible for the Iraqi Unit at MENA did not find it necessary to attend! This behavior is a slap in the face of the people of Iraq, suffering for far too long already from an unjust war and occupation.

The nonattendance was the last straw in a series of disappointments. Since many years NGOs have kept insisting that the topic of Iraq needs to be addressed, given that the HR-situation in Iraq is one of the worst in the world and is the result of a foreign intervention that has internationally been recognized as illegal. Nevertheless, despite comprehensive UNAMI and NGOs reports and the pressure from NGOs, not one single report by the OHCHR has been issued concerning the situation in Iraq. MENA section is responsible for a large portion of this failure. We therefore conclude that the decisions of the OHCHR about whether or not to focus upon situations that require their attention are rather based on political interests than real human rights concerns and humanitarian needs. This certainly contradicts the mission and values the OHCHR stands for and thus undermines its credibility.

Madam/Sir,

The purpose of a consultative meeting should be to discern recent and current issues in order to work all together, hand in hand, on building a better future. There is compiling evidence that the OHCHR is heavily influenced by the interests and policies of Western States, in particular in relation to not reporting on the grave human rights violations and crimes of aggression by superpowers as the United States and Britain in Iraq. Unfair and biased reporting of human rights issues by the OHCHR is not only unbalanced and to the political advantage of few, but also a contributing factor to the increased abuses in some cases, ignoring the facts while covering up for the perpetrators. The Network of Arab Human Rights NGOs has and always will be willing to cooperate with the OHCHR. However, as long as serious humanitarian human rights issues are being ignored because of political interests instead of responding to the well-supported and reported grave violations of human rights, we do not see the use of participating in such a meeting.

Best regards,

Network of Arab human rights NGOs