

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: 212-290-4700
Fax: 212-736-1300
Fax: 917-591-3452

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www.hrw.org

March 15, 2012

H.E. Mr. Nabil El Araby
Secretary-General
The League of Arab States
Secretariat - Tahrir Square
Cairo, Egypt

Via fax: +20-225779546

Dear Secretary-General,

Human Rights Watch welcomes the Council of the League of Arab States' February 12 call on Syria to end all forms of violence against Syrian civilians and to grant access to Arab and international relief organizations to bring humanitarian assistance to affected populations, and respectfully urges the ministers of the LAS Council to adopt a further resolution that calls upon all member states to provide at least temporary asylum to Syrian civilians fleeing conflict and persecution. Such temporary asylum should include a strict prohibition on refoulement, both at borders and within territories of states, and should be based on the principles of solidarity and burden-sharing, particularly in the circumstances of a refugee mass influx.

While Human Rights Watch recognizes that neighboring states, so far, have kept their borders open to Syrians fleeing violence, we are particularly concerned that the United Arab Emirates has canceled residency permits of Syrian nationals in its territory because they engaged in nonviolent protests against the Syrian government in Dubai. We are also concerned by a report that Jordan has refused entry to a Syrian national seeking safety at its airport and has charged another Syrian in Jordan at the State Security Court with illegal entry. In addition, Lebanon has arrested some Syrians who escaped to Lebanon solely on the basis of illegal entry. While most were subsequently released, at least one Syrian refugee remains in detention solely for his illegal entry into the country.

The Arab League should call upon member states not to expel any Syrian nationals (or Palestinians with Syrian residency or travel documents) from their territories for having peacefully exercised their

rights of free expression, or where there is a risk of their direct or indirect forcible return to Syria.

The provision of at least temporary asylum in mass influx should adhere to the following principles with respect to the rights of Syrian (and Syrian-Palestinian) asylum seekers:

- 1) The principle of nonrefoulement, including non-rejection at the frontier, is scrupulously observed.
- 2) Syrian (and Palestinians with Syrian residency or travel documents) are permitted to enter or stay irrespective of the lawfulness of their entry or stay and will not be penalized or exposed to any unfavorable treatment solely on the ground that their presence in the country is considered unlawful. No restrictions will be placed on their freedom of movement other than those necessary for justifiable security reasons.
- 3) Syrian and Palestinian/Syrian asylum seekers enjoy the fundamental human rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the core international human rights conventions.
- 4) Syrian and Palestinian/Syrian asylum seekers will be provided with the basic necessities of life, including food, shelter, basic health and sanitation.
- 5) Children, and particularly unaccompanied children, will be provided special protection and assistance, including their right to education.
- 6) Syrian asylum seekers are entitled to contact the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNHCR will be given access to them and allowed to exercise its mandate to assist and protect them. Palestinian/Syrian asylum seekers have access to UNRWA or UNHCR, depending on the relevant mandate.

Human Rights Watch encourages the Council of the League of Arab States to call upon the wider international community to assist host states in providing for these humanitarian needs and to help in finding durable solutions for refugees from the conflict in Syria.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'A' followed by a long, horizontal stroke that tapers to the right.

Sarah Leah Whitson
Executive Director
Middle East and North Africa Division
Human Rights Watch

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Frelick". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bill Frelick
Director
Refugees Program
Human Rights Watch