

Statement by H.E Mr. Mothusi B. R. Palai, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the UN Office in Geneva

During the Urgent Debate on the deteriorating human rights situation in Syria, and the recent killings in Al Qusayr, at the 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council: (27 May – 14 June 2013)

1. **Mr. President,** Botswana associates herself with the statement read by Gabon on behalf of the Africa Group. We wish to thank the delegations of Qatar, Turkey and the United States for their initiative to convene this Urgent Debate on the situation in Syria.
2. Since the start of the conflict, more than 80,000 Syrians have lost their lives. More than 1.5 million Syrian refugees have fled the country to neighbouring countries.
3. In most cases, this is to the detriment of the neighbours internal security and stability as the refugees continue to impose extensive economic, social and political pressures on the host countries.
4. Botswana wishes to join other delegations in condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the blatant disregard for human life and dignity in Syria by those involved in the conflict.
5. What is even more alarming is the indiscriminate targeting and killing of small children, women and unarmed civilians, as well as the shelling of hospitals and schools. Lately, we receive reports, though still unconfirmed, that chemical weapons have also been used in Syria.

6. It is also clear that sectarian tensions are on the rise, with cross border implications.

7. The recent launch of an offensive against the town of Al Qusayr, with reported heavy loss of life from indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombardments is alarming. We call upon the Government of Syria to cease its onslaught on innocent people.

8. We have also received reports that armed opposition groups also continue to commit serious human rights violations, including torture, extra judicial executions, the use of civilians as human shields, and forcing young women and minor girls to marry combatants. These we condemn.

9. Botswana supports recommendations by the High Commissioner for the Syrian situation to be referred to the ICC.

10. We also wish to reiterate our support for efforts by Special Envoy to Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his tireless efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict. In this regard, we are hoping for the resuscitation of the Geneva Plan.

11. Finally, we remain hopeful that members of the Security Council will continue to review their positions with a view to assisting the people of Syria. Indifference and tolerance of the status quo by any country is unpardonable.

I thank you!