

8 July 2014

To the BRICS Sherpas from Brazil, India and South Africa

Re: A Call for Human Rights Concerns to be reflected in the Fortaleza Declaration of Sixth BRICS Summit

Dear Excellencies,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations from Brazil, India and South Africa, call upon our governments to **ensure that the Fortaleza Declaration addresses the following issues: 1) the Syrian crisis and the urgent need to secure greater humanitarian aid; 2) the Implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT); and 3) the role of civil society in BRICS agenda setting.** We support and encourage our countries' collective commitment to promote and protect human rights worldwide, including at the upcoming Sixth BRICS Summit to be held in Brazil from 14 to 16 July 2014.

Syria Crisis and Humanitarian Aid

We urge BRICS to do more in committing financial support for humanitarian aid for civilians affected by Syrian crisis.

The armed conflict in Syria is the gravest humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that approximately 150,000 people have died since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. There are 10.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 4.7 million are in hard-to-reach areas. More than 6.5 million more are forcibly displaced from their homes, representing twenty percent of all internally displaced persons worldwide.

BRICS members have expressed their concern for the Syrian humanitarian crisis. The Statement emanating from the Fifth BRICS Summit indicated their "deep concern with the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Syria" (e-Thekwini Declaration, May 2013). Yet these statements of concern have not been backed by concrete measures. During the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in January 2014, just three BRICS members made pledges of humanitarian assistance to Syria and neighboring countries. Together, China, India and Brazil committed a total of US\$ 6.2 million, just 0.18% of the total pledged (US\$ 3.44 billion).

We urge the BRICS countries to reaffirm their commitment to safe and unimpeded humanitarian access in Syria and strongly condemn the use of barrel bombs and any other indiscriminate explosive weapons by all parties involved in the conflict.

The deployment of hundreds of barrel bombs against defenseless civilians, including unarmed women and children, is an especially concerning feature of the Syrian conflict. These weapons are being used in populated neighborhoods of Aleppo, Ghouta and Darayya and constitute flagrant violations of international law, including war crimes. The United Nations Secretary General's report¹ highlighted the dangers this relentless and illegal practice poses to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

The lack of agreement between warring parties and continued fighting is delaying and obstructing the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance. Likewise, the refusal of the Syrian government to ease the bureaucratic obstacles imposed on humanitarian aid is also playing a role in aggravating the suffering of civilians. The continued use of barrel bombs and other indiscriminate explosive weapons is severely compromising already precarious humanitarian access in Syria. BRICS countries must be responsible stakeholders and condemn these inhumane practices. They should work with regional partners to proscribe such weapons and their indiscriminate use in heavily populated urban centers.

We urge the BRICS to align themselves with the recommendations made by the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and act to curb the

¹ S/2014/427 (20 June 2014).



proliferation and supply of weapons to the Government of Syria as well as non-State armed groups, and address the sources thereof.

Implementation of Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

We strongly emphasize the essential role of the BRICS in implementing the ATT, a critical step in promoting international peace and security.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is a groundbreaking international agreement designed to regulate the transfer of conventional weapons from handgun to missiles. It is intended to curb the illicit trade of arms and ammunition and prevent their diversion from legal to illegal markets. The ATT is expected to reduce the use of weapons in acts of genocide, mass atrocities and war crimes while also curbing supplies to terrorists and international organized criminals. If properly applied, the treaty can help reduce armed violence around the world and contribute to guaranteeing respect for human rights.

It is important that BRICS members demonstrate a robust commitment to the ATT. Brazil was one of the first supporters of the establishment of the ATT and sided with 117 other signatory states, including South Africa. Ratification, in both cases, is still pending. However, the remaining BRICS countries have not yet signed the treaty. Other BRICS members should follow the example set by Brazil and South Africa. They should do so recalling that the BRICS include the 2nd and 5th largest exporters of arms and ammunition in the world (Russia and China, respectively) and the 1st and 2nd largest importers (China and India) in conventional weapons. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Brazil is the 2nd largest exporter of small arms and ammunition in the Western Hemisphere and South Africa is the largest exporter of conventional arms on the African continent.

Commitment to Involve Civil Society in BRICS agenda setting

We urge that civil society be considered an essential component of BRICS

Finally, we call upon you to involve civil society in the agenda setting of BRICS. We urge that civil society groups in all their diversity including NGOs, trade unions, community based organisations, social movements along-with think tanks and research institutes be substantively involved in BRICS related activities. We hope that the role of civil society as key development partners will be recognised in the Summit Declaration along-with the commitment to create an “enabling environment” for civil society to participate in BRICS affairs.

As members of the IBSA Group, Brazil, India and South Africa have repeatedly stressed their commitment to advancing peace and justice worldwide. In the coming weeks, these countries have another chance to fulfil those promises. We urge you to use this opportunity to take rights-based positions on these pressing global issues.

We are grateful for your attention and look forward to your taking bold steps forward.

Co-signing organizations in alphabetical order:

Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
Conectas Direitos Humanos
Instituto Igarapé
Instituto Sou da Paz
Southern Africa Litigation Centre