

## **Zeid urges Libyans to oppose extremism after “vile” murder of Coptic Christians**

GENEVA (17 February 2015) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein on Tuesday said the mass beheading of 20 Egyptian Coptic Christians and apparently another Christian man in Libya was a “vile crime targeting people on the basis of their religion” and urged Libyans to unite against extremists launching attacks based on religious, ethnic, national, racial or political grounds.

“The brutal murder of these men, and the ghastly attempt to justify and glorify it in a video, should be roundly condemned by everyone, in particular by the people of Libya who should resist the urgings of *takfiri* groups,” High Commissioner Zeid said. “Murdering captives or hostages is prohibited under international law and Islamic law.”

“This is not the first time that Coptic Christians have been targeted in Libya or elsewhere in the region. As described in a report we published last week, UN human rights staff have documented several incidents involving abductions of Egyptian Copts in Libya. In one incident, in December last year, the bodies of three members of a Coptic Christian family were found in Sirte. Churches and other religious sites have also been attacked in Libya over the past three years.”

In their response, Zeid said, the Egyptian air force must ensure full respect of the principles of distinction between civilians and fighters, and civilians objects and military objectives.

The beheading of the 21 men took place against the backdrop of increasing lawlessness amid the armed conflict in Libya. The UN Human Rights report\* published last week detailed the rampant violence and fighting in the country, which is badly affecting civilians in general and specific groups in particular – including Coptic Christians, other minorities, migrants, journalists and human rights defenders.

On Saturday, UN staff received reports that the director of the human rights group, the National Commission for Human Rights, Dr. Hadi Ben Taleb, and one of its board members, Mr. Ahmed Osta, had been abducted by the al-Sa’dawi armed group in the Ain Zara neighbourhood of Tripoli. Since then, their relatives and colleagues have received no further information about their fate or whereabouts. Zeid called for the two men’s release, and pending this, for their relatives to be informed of their location.

The High Commissioner urged all parties in Libya to work towards a meaningful dialogue to bring to an end the current conflict, and in particular to engage constructively with the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernardino León to

advance an inclusive political process aimed at addressing Libya's daunting political and security challenges.

“This is the only solution. The path to a peaceful and prosperous Libya – like anywhere else -- involves upholding everyone's human rights, irrespective of faith, ethnicity or political affiliation. Joining, copying or giving in to groups that glorify blood-letting is akin to buying a one-way ticket to disaster, not just for yourself, but for your relatives and your entire society. Adopting extremist *takfiri* behavior will simply add layer upon layer of suffering on an already suffering country – as we have seen all too clearly in Syria and Iraq.”

*\* The full report of the High Commissioner, prepared by the UN Human Rights Office in cooperation with the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) can be found here: [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session28/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_28\\_51\\_ENG.doc](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session28/Documents/A_HRC_28_51_ENG.doc)*

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