EXPLANATORY MEMO

Response of UNESCO to the situation in Syria

1. The United Nations Human Rights Council at its 17th Special Session on 23 August 2011 decided to establish an Independent International Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged violations of human rights in Syria since mid-March 2011. The evidence gathered by the Commission led it to express grave concern that crimes against humanity have been committed by Syrian military and security forces. The Report documents widespread, systematic and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including atrocities which have resulted in the deaths of over 300 children.

2. The Commission called upon the Government of Syria to put an end to the ongoing human rights violations and recommended, inter alia, that the Government allow immediate and full access for the Commission, outside observers and other human rights monitoring bodies. It also called for full access for media without harassment or intimidation (A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1).

3. The United Nations Secretary-General has urged the international community to act to protect the Syrian people and the Human Rights Council has echoed this call. The Council transmitted the Commission Report to all relevant United Nations bodies and recommended that the main bodies of the UN consider the Report and take appropriate action (A/HRC/Res/S.18/1).

4. UNESCO must respond to these appeals for concerted action to address the egregious human rights situation in Syria. Syria, a member of the Executive Board, is also a member of the Board's Committee on Conventions and Recommendations. In that capacity, Syria participates in the examination of cases involving alleged human rights violations under the "104 Procedure". In view of the current situation in Syria, the Executive Board must review the participation of Syria in this aspect of its work.

5. In addition, in view of documented concerns about the effect of the situation in Syria on its people, including, in particular, children and journalists, the Board should review this situation having reference to other areas of UNESCO's competence, namely, education, cultural preservation and press freedom.

6. In order to conduct a review and take appropriate action, (names of co-sponsors) request the inscription of a new item on the agenda of the 189th session of the Executive Board entitled, "Response of UNESCO to the Situation in Syria".