

UN investigators slam slow help for Syria quake victims



United Nations, March 16 (RHC)-- The United Nations and other actors are responsible for delays in getting emergency aid to Syrians after the devastating earthquakes last month, a UN-appointed commission of inquiry says.

The allegations, shared at UN headquarters, add to a growing chorus of criticism of the global body for its role in the immediate aftermath of last month's earthquakes that killed some 6,000 people in Syria, mostly in the rebel-held northwest near the Turkish border.

The actors failed to secure an immediate pause in hostilities, or to facilitate life-saving aid through any available route, including for rescue teams in the crucial first week, the independent three-member panel set up to investigate and record all violations of international law since March 2011 in the country, said.

"Though there were many acts of heroism amid the suffering, we also witnessed a wholesale failure by the Government and the international community, including the United Nations, to rapidly direct life-saving support to Syrians in the most dire need," said Paulo Pinheiro, chair of the commission, in a statement.

The statement added that the identified actors had failed to agree a pause in hostilities and to allow life-saving aid through any available route, leaving Syrians feeling "abandoned and neglected by those supposed to protect them, in the most desperate of times." "Many voices are rightly calling for an investigation and for accountability."

"Syrians now need a comprehensive ceasefire that is fully respected, for civilians – including aid workers – to be safe. Incomprehensibly, due to the cruelty and cynicism of parties to the conflict, we are now investigating fresh attacks even in the very areas devastated by the earthquakes," he added.

The Syrian conflict started in 2011. Since then, nearly half a million people have been killed and about half of Syria's pre-war population has been forced from their homes.

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