

Escalating crimes in Syria : UN Security council must take responsibility

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The UN chemical weapons team investigating the August 21st attacks near Damascus will soon leave Syria, and it is expected that when the investigation's findings are released, they will confirm that chemical weapons were used against the Syrian people. A chemical attack of this magnitude raises extraordinary concern and would merit a serious and immediate response from the international community.

These horrific attacks are but the latest violation of international law since the popular uprising began over 2 years ago. The number of casualties in Syria has now exceeded 100,000, a staggering proportion of which are women and children. There are over 1.5 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and more than 4.25 million displaced people within the Syrian territory.

Sadly, this recent chemical attack is not the first example of gross violations of international law in Syria. Over the past two years, reports by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria have outlined an escalation of brutality and gross human rights violations, most of which have been committed by government forces. Anti-government groups have also committed war crimes, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has repeatedly echoed FIDH's calls for the UN to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In spite of the escalating crisis, the international community has failed to act, allowing the situation to worsen. On the one side, radical and criminal Islamist groups have now proliferated throughout the country. On the other side, the continued sale of arms to the regime has allowed the government to undertake ever-more horrific attacks against its own population. FIDH strongly condemns the provision of arms being used to attack civilians, particularly by Russia to the Syrian regime.

The failure of the UN Security Council to take any appropriate action is at the heart of the deteriorating situation in Syria. The UN body charged with maintaining peace and security and protecting civilians has neglected its responsibility, and the world has barely reacted to this shameful silence.

FIDH particularly condemns the abuse of the veto by Russia and China to prevent action despite ongoing crimes against humanity. This is a clear indication that the UN

must reform its procedures, to prevent the ability of certain states to paralyze the Security Council through the misuse of the veto in cases of international crimes.

Today, in the wake of the latest chemical attacks, clearly illegal under international law and just another example of the targeting of civilians in Syria, we must see an immediate and firm response from the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, which has exclusive authority and responsibility for addressing such crimes and situation.

FIDH again urges the UN Security Council to immediately implement all appropriate measures to put an end to the escalating violence in Syria. At a minimum, an arms embargo must be imposed on Syria to prevent further escalation and prolongation of the violence.

In addition, the UN Security Council must refer the situation in Syria to the ICC to investigate all parties to the conflict for crimes against humanity. If those most responsible for the international crimes committed in Syria are not brought to justice, this will be a tacit endorsement for escalating massacres and other international crimes. Any efforts towards a lasting political solution in Syria would be futile without ensuring accountability and justice.

FIDH also calls on the international community to impose targeted sanctions against those individuals in Syria who are deemed most responsible for violations of international law, until these individuals can be tried in court.

As some countries call for a military intervention in Syria, FIDH reminds the international community that the protection of the Syrian people from further atrocities must be at the center of any action in Syria. All States must strictly abide by international law, in particular international human rights, humanitarian and criminal law, and be held accountable in case of grave breaches of such standards.