

12 March 2012

UNITE FOR SYRIA: STOP ONE YEAR OF BLOODSHED

To the Members of the UN Security Council,

One year after the start of the Syrian uprising, we are saddened to see divisions in the Security Council prevent a unified and proactive international response to the crisis. Responsibility for the current bloodshed ultimately rests with those in Syria ordering, permitting, or themselves committing, horrific crimes. However, splits among the international community have provided the Assad government with a license to kill. This license must be withdrawn.

The Assad government's continued use of lethal force against its own people is among the worst cases of deliberate violence against a civilian population that we have seen in recent years. There can be no excuse for such actions under any circumstances. In light of the heavy shelling of civilian areas and increasing casualties among women and children, we reiterate the conclusion of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: that crimes against humanity have been committed and that those responsible must be brought to account.

We fear that the current impasse in international strategy is leading to an escalation in initiatives, such as arming the regime and the opposition, which could prolong the conflict and the suffering.

To break the stalemate, we must see Russia working alongside other international partners. We urge the Russian Government to join collective efforts to bring a swift end to the conflict and restore peace and stability to Syria and its surrounding region. We warmly commend the appointment of Mr Annan as the joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy on Syria. He must receive strong, unanimous backing from across the international community to engage closely with all governments and non-state actors, including Russia and China, to overcome the present paralysing divide. While we understand that there is no easy way out of this crisis, the moral obligation to bridge the current impasse lies with the members of the UN Security Council. Let there be no mistake, the credibility and international standing of any nation standing idle in the face of the avoidable tragedy unfolding in Syria will be severely damaged.

We urge members of the Security Council to unite and pass a Resolution by consensus:

1. Calling on the Syrian authorities to cease all unlawful attacks against its population immediately, remove abusive military and security forces from cities and inhabited areas, guarantee peaceful protests do not come under attack and release all political prisoners and those held under arbitrary arrest from the beginning of the uprising to the present day. All other actors should also immediately cease all use of violence.
2. Urging the Syrian government to facilitate the delivery of independent and impartial emergency aid, ensure the evacuation of injured people in places of conflict, and call for effective access for humanitarian organizations. Particular attention should be directed to safe access to civil hospitals and adequate delivery of medical care in accordance with international law.

On the anniversary of Syria's uprising, we remember the thousands of lives lost in their pursuit of a more just and hopeful future. It is the responsibility of us all to prevent the potential deaths of thousands more men, women and children who so desperately need our help.

Yours sincerely

Andreas van Agt, Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands

Sadik Jalal Al-Azm, Syrian Philosopher

Lyudmila Alexeyeva, Head of the Moscow Helsinki Group

Kwame Anthony Appiah, Author

Hon Lord Paddy Ashdown, Former High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina

Lloyd Axworthy, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada

Bertrand Badie, Professor, Sciences-Po Paris

Robert Badinter, Former Minister of Justice, France

Souhayr Belhassen, President International federation of Human Rights (FIDH), Tunisia

Pascal Boniface, Director of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations (IRIS)

Dr. Rony Brauman, Former President of Médecins Sans Frontières

Sir Tony Brenton, Former UK Ambassador to Russia (2004-8)

Hans van den Broek, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and European Commissioner for External Relations

Gro Brundtland, Former Prime Minister of Norway

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Former President of the Federative Republic of Brazil

LGen the Honourable Roméo A Dallaire (Ret'd), Senator, Former Commander of UNAMIR, the United Nations peacekeeping force for Rwanda

Basil Eastwood, Former UK ambassador to Syria (1996-2000)

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Laureate (2003) - Iran

Umberto Eco, Author

Jan Egeland, Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

Ali Fakhro, Chair of the Arab Democracy Foundation

Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Laureate (2011) - Liberia

Justice Richard Goldstone, Former Chief Prosecutor of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda

David Grossman, Author

Jean Claude Guillebaud, Former President, Reporters Sans Frontières

Jürgen Habermas, Philosopher

Stéphane Frédéric Hessel, Former UN Ambassador, architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Bianca Jagger, Council of Europe Goodwill Ambassador

Kamal Jendoubi, President of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

Baroness Glenys Kinnock, Former UK Minister for Africa and the United Nations (2009-10)

F W de Klerk, Former President of South Africa

Zaki Laïdi, Professor, Sciences-Po Paris

Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate (1976) – Ireland

Hon Sir John Major, Former Prime Minister of the UK

Clovis Maksoud, Former Ambassador of the League of Arab States

Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel Peace Laureate (1992) – Guatemala

Dr. Pierre Micheletti, Former Président of Médecins du Monde

David Miliband, Former UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Marwan Muasher, Former Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan

C.S.R. Murthy, Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Adolf Muschg, Swiss author and professor of literature

Ana de Palacio, Former Foreign Minister, Spain

Rt Reverend Stephen Platten, Bishop of Wakefield

Hans-Gert Pöttering, Former President of the European Parliament

Reubens Ricupero, former Secretary General of UNCTAD; former Minister of Finance of Brazil

Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland; Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Gesine Schwan, President of the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA School of Governance, Germany

Peter Singer, Philosopher

K.C. Singh, Former Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, India

Aleksander Smolar, Chairman Stefan Batory Foundation, Poland

Pär Stenbäck, Former Foreign Minister, Finland

Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Nobel Peace Laureate

Richard von Weizsäcker, Former President of the Federal Republic of Germany

Jody Williams, Nobel Peace Laureate (1997) - USA

Mokhtar Yahyaoui, President of Tunisia's Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary