

UN Secretary-General Should Activate Independent Mechanism to Attribute Responsibility for Chemical Attacks in Syria

On April 7, the world once again was shocked by the heart-wrenching images of Syrian men, women and children who appeared to have suffocated in their houses in Douma, a suburb of Damascus that has been under furious attacks for weeks by the Syrian-Russian military alliance.

While investigations are still pending, claims have been made that the Syrian government has again used chemical weapons against its own people. The Syrian and Russian governments have vehemently denied that a chemical attack occurred.

The use of chemical weapons constitutes a war crime. The international prohibition on the use, development, production, stockpiling, and transfer of chemical weapons is absolute and cannot be left to political wrangling.

Since 2013, the UN Commission of Inquiry has recorded over 35 chemical weapons attacks in Syria. After refusing to accept findings on Syrian government responsibility for last year's attack on civilians in Khan Sheikhoun, Russia used its Security Council veto to block the UN from maintaining a UN-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons joint investigative mechanism working independently and impartially to uncover the perpetrators for such attacks. On April 10, Russia again vetoed a resolution that would have established a UN mechanism to attribute responsibility for chemical attacks in Syria.

As a result, there is no longer a UN mechanism with the independence, technical expertise, and mandate working to promptly identify who is to blame for these chemical weapons attacks.

We, the undersigned organizations, urge UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to step up in defense of civilians everywhere by activating an independent UN mechanism to attribute responsibility for chemical attacks in Syria.

Previous UN Secretaries General created similar inquiries. We cannot afford more Security Council deadlock, paralysis, or vetoes. Taking this step is fully in line with the Secretary General's authority and would help ensure that the perpetrators of these atrocities are exposed.

It is incumbent on the UN Security Council to hold perpetrators of these crimes to account and make clear to the world that the use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated.

Signatories:

1. Adopt a Revolution
2. American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS)
3. Amnesty International
4. ASML/Syria
5. Basmet Amal
6. Baytna Syria
7. Bridge of Peace Syria
8. CAFOD (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development)
9. CARE International
10. Christian Aid

11. CIHRS (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies)
12. FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)
13. Ghiras Alnahda
14. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
15. GOAL
16. Hand in Hand for Syria
17. HelpAge International
18. Human Appeal
19. Human Rights Watch
20. Humans of Syria
21. IDA
22. Islamic Relief UK
23. Just Foreign Policy
24. Karam Foundation
25. Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (Concordia University)
26. Nonviolent Peaceforce
27. PAX for Peace
28. Physicians for Human Rights
29. Protection Approaches
30. Relief & Reconciliation International AISBL
31. Rethink Rebuild Society
32. SCM
33. Society for Threatened Peoples
34. STAND (The Student-Led Movement to End Mass Atrocities)
35. Syria Charity
36. Syria Relief
37. Syrian American Medical Society - SAMS
38. Syrian Forum USA
39. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
40. Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ سوريايون من أجل الحقيقة والعدالة
41. Trocaire
42. Vision GRAM-International
43. War Child UK
44. World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP)
45. 11.11.11