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UN Security Council must take action over Syria bloodshed

The UN Security Council must urgently respond to the ongoing crackdown in Syria by referring the situation to the International Criminal Court, Amnesty International said today, amid reports that security forces continued to shell the city of Hama, where dozens of people have now been killed.

The Security Council is expected to meet today to discuss the ongoing violence across Syria which saw two people reportedly killed in fresh violence in Hama today, while at least 52 people, including four children, were believed to have been killed there yesterday.

Elsewhere across Syria, people took to the streets today in massive protests against the latest killings.

“The Syrian authorities have unleashed their deadliest assault yet on mainly peaceful protesters calling for reform,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“It’s clear that President Bashar al-Assad is unwilling to halt his security forces, so the UN must take decisive action to stem this violent campaign of repression.”

“This should at the very least include imposing an arms embargo, freezing the assets of President al-Assad and other officials suspected of responsibility for crimes against humanity, and referring the situation to the ICC Prosecutor.”

Syrian troops had pulled out of the city of Hama – a focal point of pro-reform protests in recent months – a month ago, but returned in force in recent days.

Troops and tanks reportedly attempted to re-enter the city early yesterday morning, attacking residential areas with shells and machine-gun fire. Dozens died as residents attempted to halt the troops’ advance, and local people reported having to bury the dead in their neighbourhoods.

In other parts of Syria, including the eastern city of Dayr al-Zor where intense shooting was reported yesterday, clashes with security forces left 11 people dead.

A human rights activist told Amnesty International that some security personnel had also been killed or kidnapped in both Hama and Dayr al-Zor.

An employee at one of Hama’s four hospitals informed Amnesty International that the facility had received 19 corpses since yesterday, including 18 civilian men and one policeman. All had been shot in the head and the chest.

The policeman, Mahmoud ‘Abboud, was reportedly mediating between the protesters and the police station in the city when he was shot in the head and brought to the hospital by protesters.

According to state news agency SANA, “armed groups” in Hama and Dayr al-Zor shot dead six members of the army and security forces and attacked public and private property. The news agency also reported that Syrian President al-Assad praised troops for “foiling the enemies of Syria” in the weekend’s operations, which coincided with the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Amnesty International has received the names of more than 1,500 people believed to have been killed since pro-reform protests began in mid-March. Many of them are reported to be protesters and local residents shot by live ammunition from the security forces and the army.

Thousands of others have been arrested in the wake of protests, with many being held incommunicado and many reported to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated in custody, in some cases resulting in death. Based on its research, Amnesty International has concluded that crimes committed amount to crimes against humanity as they appear to be part of a widespread, as well as systematic, attack against the civilian population.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, as it did with Libya’s government in June, following the violent repression of protests there.

“It is long past time for the UN Security Council to take concrete steps to end the bloody crackdown in Syria that continues to claim countless lives amid peaceful protests,” said Philip Luther.