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Syria: Chemical weapons deal “positive”, but must be only first step

Amnesty International welcomes steps announced today which would pave the way for Syria’s chemical weapons to be placed under international control and destroyed. It follows the Syrian government’s decision earlier this week to join the Chemical Weapons Convention.

“Any move that could lead to the removal and eventual destruction of internationally banned weapons is undoubtedly a positive step, even if there are major challenges with doing so in the context of the ongoing conflict in Syria,” said Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International.

“However, it does not remove the need for accountability for both the alleged chemical weapons attacks on 21 August and the other crimes against humanity and war crimes being perpetrated with conventional weapons on a daily basis in Syria.

“The attacks were a shocking wake-up call, if one was really needed, that the persistent failure to address impunity in Syria has had increasingly more alarming consequences.”

The steps announced today must be the first of many more concerted actions taken by the international community to ensure both accountability and an alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in the country.

Amnesty International has been calling on the UN Security Council to demand that the Syrian government allow the UN-mandated Commission of Inquiry on Syria access to investigate all human rights violations being committed by all parties to the conflict it.

The organization has also been urging the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, a call that has been echoed by an increasing number of governments internationally.

Today’s agreement should also be a spur for the international community to redouble efforts to ease the suffering of the millions of civilians affected by the conflict.

“The international community must now pressure Syria to allow humanitarian organizations and agencies unfettered access to assist the civilian population without discrimination, including granting cross-border access, as well as cross-line access,” said Philip Luther.