



AI Index: MDE 24/012/2012

15 February 2012

To All Members of the UN General Assembly:

Dear Ambassador,

Unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, and torture -- have continued unabated in Syria following the veto by Russia and China of a draft Security Council resolution condemning the widespread and gross violations of human rights in the country. We urge the General Assembly to take action by calling on the Syrian government immediately to put an end to all human rights violations, and to demand accountability for the crimes committed.

The veto by Russia and China on 4 February 2012 of a draft Security Council resolution on Syria that enjoyed otherwise unanimous support has been accompanied by a shocking escalation in the use of force by the Syrian authorities against several residential areas of Homs. According to information from the ground provided to Amnesty International, more than 607 people have since been killed in Syria since 3 February, 377 in Homs alone. Amnesty International sources state that a large number of them are civilians caught by the indiscriminate shelling of Syria's security forces. Hundreds of others are reported to have been injured and most are being treated in poorly resourced and massively overstretched makeshift field hospitals or at their homes. Arrests and enforced disappearances continue to be carried out across Syria; thousands are believed to be detained incommunicado and are at high risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

On 6 February 2012, the UN Secretary General called the escalating violence in Syria, particularly the mounting death toll and continued onslaught on the city of Homs, "totally unacceptable before humanity". The Secretary-General reminded the Government that "it is accountable under international human rights law for all acts of violence perpetrated by its security forces against the civilian population". The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said on 8 February she was appalled by the Syrian Government's wilful assault on Homs, and its use of artillery and other heavy weaponry in what appear to be indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas in the city. Like the Secretary-General, she pointed to the obstruction of Security Council agreement on firm collective action, which had seemingly "fuelled the Syrian Government's readiness to massacre its own people in an effort to crush dissent." Speaking at the General Assembly on 13 February, the High Commissioner said: "The longer the international community fails to take action, the more the civilian population will suffer from countless atrocities committed against them."

The Syrian Government continues to ignore international concern over the ongoing repression. For nearly a year, our organizations have reported on the attacks by the security forces

against Syrian protestors and civilians, including unlawful killings, arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances – and most recently the bombarding of civilian residential areas by the Syrian army.

Many children have been among the victims. Amnesty International has received the names of 375 children killed since March 2011. Forty five of these have died since 3 February this year, 29 of them in Homs. Others, some as young as 13, have reported to Human Rights Watch that after they were arrested, officers kept them in solitary confinement, severely beat and tortured them with electro-shocks, burned them with cigarettes, and left them to dangle from metal handcuffs for hours at a time, centimetres above the floor.

Like the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, we have documented crimes in Syria, that in light of their nature and scale, constitute crimes against humanity and we continue to urge the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

The Syrian Government, however, has been emboldened by the vetoes wielded by Russia and China. This makes it essential that the General Assembly strongly affirm that the vast majority of states have not abandoned the people of Syria, and is ready to act to bring an end to all human rights violations, and to ensure that those responsible for crimes under international law are brought to justice.

We therefore urge your government to support a strong General Assembly resolution condemning violations of human rights by the Syrian authorities, stressing the need to end impunity and to cooperate with the independent international commission of inquiry. The General Assembly should monitor closely the implementation of such a resolution with a view to further action.

Amnesty International
Human Rights Watch