



For immediate release

The UN Secretary-General's Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide, Francis Deng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Edward Luck, urge immediate action to end violence in Syria

(New York, 10 February 2012) The Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect are alarmed by reports of the use of indiscriminate fire by Syrian security forces and associated militias against densely populated areas in Homs and other cities, resulting in high numbers of deaths and injuries. As they first warned on 21 July 2011, such widespread and systematic attacks against civilians could constitute crimes against humanity under international criminal law. The presence of armed elements among the population does not render attacks against civilians legal. They underscore that both State and non-state actors have a Responsibility to Protect populations and can be held accountable for inciting or committing atrocity crimes.

The Special Advisers are gravely concerned, as well, by reports of growing tensions among sectarian communities in Syria. They urge proactive and vigorous efforts, including by civil society groups, to restore confidence across ethnic and sectarian lines before tensions escalate further. They call on all parties to take immediate steps to ensure that the human rights of all individuals are respected and protected, regardless of their religious identity or political affiliation.

At the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government made a solemn commitment to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, including their incitement. They agreed, as well, to utilize the full range of regional and global tools under the United Nations Charter to help protect populations from these crimes. Many of these measures would not require authorization by the Security Council. These would include efforts to build trust among communities within Syria, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need, and to encourage regional cooperation in advancing human rights and preventing further rounds of violence against civilian populations.

In the view of the Special Advisers, divisions within the Security Council are no excuse for further violence. Instead, it is now incumbent on the larger international community--global and regional arrangements, governments and civil society alike--to act with a renewed sense of determination and urgency to prevent further atrocities against the people of Syria.

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