

22/05/2014 Lithuania's statement after the vote on SC resolution on the referral of the situation in Syria to ICC

We all knew what the outcome of this vote would be, and yet it is profoundly disappointing and disturbing to see a fourth veto on the situation in Syria, this time on the referral of Syria conflict to the ICC.

We thank France for drafting this resolution which was co-sponsored by more than 60 states, including my own.

With more than 160,000 lives lost, 2.7 million refugees and closely 6.5 million displacements, this veto is what it is- an endorsement of impunity.

It is a license to all the perpetrators of human rights violations, mass atrocities, crimes against humanity, and war crimes - in Syria and elsewhere - to kill, torture, and rape at will.

Gross violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law continue in Syria on a daily basis.

Barbaric crimes are being committed on a massive scale - crimes that should have no place in the 21st century.

Starvation is used as a weapon of war. Humanitarian access is denied and humanitarian aid manipulated to force surrender.

The level of physical destruction and devastation is beyond description.

A lost generation of Syria's children- 5.7 million, according to UNICEF- are growing up robbed of a childhood, education, home, and as a consequence, of their future.

Last month, during Arria formula meeting, many of us were shocked into silence by the stomach-churning images contained in the Caesar report- of thousands of emaciated bodies bearing multiple signs of horrific torture. To us, shocking as they were, these were just images. To countless victims in Syria- gruesome facts of their daily lives.

Just recently, many of us witnessed another testimony to the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime, resulting from the indiscriminate use of barrel bombs. Again, images too shocking to bear- and gruesome facts of daily lives to the people of Syria.

And yet, none of this seems to move those who once again have chosen to veto a Council resolution on Syria, who by doing so chose to protect the victimizers, not the victims, opening even wider the floodgates of bloodshed and impunity.

The Syrian regime had ample opportunities to first prevent and then stop the bloodshed. It never sought to do so. A referral to ICC could not have impeded any process towards peace and reconciliation because no such process is taking place. All sides think they can win the battle by force, which means even more civilian deaths, even more destruction. The long-suffering people of Syria deserve better.

As a permanent international court with a mandate to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity when national authorities are unable or unwilling to do so, the ICC was created to address exactly the type of situation that exists in Syria today.

Though the court's work can be only one piece of the larger justice and accountability effort needed in this war ravaged country, Syria's referral could have been a crucial first step in the right direction.

By today's veto, that first crucial step towards justice and accountability was callously denied.

Today's veto, ladies and gentlemen, is a stand on the wrong side of justice and accountability, a stand on the wrong side of humanity.

And yet, I am happy that today, so many more chose to stand on the right side of history.