

Press release by the Special Advisers of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Francis Deng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Edward Luck, on the situation in Syria. □ □ Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide 21 July

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The Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect are alarmed at persistent reports of widespread and systematic human rights violations by Syrian security forces responding to anti-government protests across the country.

Security forces reportedly continue to target the civilian population in areas where protests are taking place, killing protestors and arbitrarily arresting residents, often from their homes. There have been numerous reports of disappearances and the torture of detainees. Serious violations of international human rights law are reported to have systematically occurred in the context of such attacks on civilians.

Based on available information, the Special Advisers consider that the scale and gravity of the violations indicate a serious possibility that crimes against humanity may have been committed and continue to be committed in Syria. They underline the need for an independent, thorough, and objective investigation of the events in the country. They call on the Government of Syria, as the Secretary-General has done, to allow humanitarian access to affected areas and to facilitate the visit of the Human Rights Council-mandated fact finding mission so that it can complete its work.

Without these steps, it will be very difficult to defuse existing tensions and to prevent the escalation of violence. All actors involved in the current crisis in Syria are urged to refrain from the use of force, from acts of violence, or from incitement to violence.

The Government of Syria is reminded of its responsibility to protect its population, as all heads of State and government pledged to do in the 2005 Summit Outcome Document. They agreed to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. To that end, the Government should work with civil society to encourage understanding and trust between communities, while taking care not to act in a way that could exacerbate possible differences. As a first step, the Government should ensure that security forces and civilian personnel under their command comply fully and consistently with international human rights obligations in the exercise of their functions.

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