

PRESS RELEASE: Acting Secretary of State John J. Sullivan must tackle Russian belligerence and Syria together if G7 ministers are to achieve peace and security

For immediate release

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The war in Syria and increased Russian belligerence are two of the greatest threats to international peace and security, and are highly interlinked, a global coalition of organisations including Avaaz, the White Helmets and the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies said today. In advance of a major foreign ministers' summit happening in Toronto this weekend, the organisations called on the Government of the United States to develop a more robust and coherent response to both – and how they might use the upcoming World Cup in Russia for political leverage.

On April 22 in Toronto, Acting Secretary of State John J. Sullivan will meet his international counterparts at the G7 group of Foreign Ministers under the theme of 'Building a more Peaceful and Secure World'. The coalition urged the Minister to use the summit to develop a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to deliver a nationwide cessation of hostilities in Syria, increased humanitarian access, a revitalized peace process and accountability for gross violations of international humanitarian law.

"For seven years the Syrian government has committed mass atrocities with impunity," Dr Simon Adams of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect said. "The world needs the G7 to develop a more coordinated and consistent strategy for defending international norms and laws. Syria must not be allowed to become the graveyard of the global principles of human rights and humanitarianism."

In recent weeks, we have seen both the extent of Russia's disregard for the rules-based international order and the power of a united global response. From the quiet streets of a British town to the war-torn Damascus suburb of Douma, Russia has allowed chemical weapons to inflict immense suffering on civilians. To ensure this horrific trend does not continue, the United States must show leadership to bring about a coordinated, coherent strategy for Syria.

Since late February, President Assad's onslaught on the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta, backed by Russia, has killed 1600 civilians, left over 5000 wounded and 130,000 internally displaced. Meanwhile, US Congressional and UK Parliamentary inquiries have shown that the Kremlin is subverting the democratic processes of G7 nations, conducting misinformation campaigns to sow division and discord, and even attempting assassinations on foreign soil.

"For Russia, the World Cup is a 'tournament of dreams' but in Syria, there is no cause to dream," said Fadel Abdul Ghany, Chairperson of the Syrian Network for Human Rights. "President Putin should not be allowed to use the World Cup to whitewash his record of wreaking carnage in Syria and sowing division everywhere else. The World Cup must be seized as an opportunity to secure progress for Syria."

Kyle Matthews, Executive Director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, said: "Russia's appalling behaviour must not be rewarded by the sight of G7 leaders forming a chorus of cheerleaders at the opening ceremony of the World Cup. By threatening to withhold the government's representation from the World Cup opening ceremony or by making clear that leaders will speak publicly about Russia's conduct in Syria, Sullivan should make it clear that there is a price to pay."

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