

## Statement on the Second Anniversary of the start of the Syrian conflict

As the conflict in Syria enters its third year, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence. Since 15 March 2011 over 70,000 Syrians have been killed while 3 million remain internally displaced and desperate for humanitarian assistance. More than 1 million Syrians are now refugees in neighboring countries with thousands more fleeing daily.

The Syrian government is manifestly failing to protect its population and continues to commit crimes against humanity and war crimes. Displaying unprecedented disregard for civilian life, during the week of 17 February government forces launched four ballistic missiles into residential areas of Aleppo, killing at least 71 children.

The lives of civilians are also endangered by some armed opposition groups. Several of these groups have committed war crimes against government soldiers as well as perceived civilian supporters of the Assad regime. The increasingly sectarian nature of the civil war puts all civilians at greater risk of mass atrocities.

The Responsibility to Protect was unanimously adopted at the UN World Summit in 2005 with the aim to prevent and protect populations from mass atrocity crimes. While the Syrian government has manifestly failed to uphold its Responsibility to Protect, the UN Security Council has also failed in its responsibilities. Atrocity crimes committed over the last two years have been documented and debated, but the Syrian government has not been held accountable.

Three double-vetoes at the UN Security Council by Russia and China have blocked resolutions aimed at halting the violence. Divisions within the UN Security Council have emboldened the Syrian government in its ongoing commission of mass atrocities.

The current diplomatic inertia is unacceptable. In keeping with the Responsibility to Protect, we urge the UN Security Council to:

1. Demand that the Syrian government immediately grant cross-border access to the UN and humanitarian aid organizations to relieve the suffering of Syrian civilians;
2. Demand an immediate ceasefire between all sides in Syria;
3. Authorize targeted sanctions against all government and non-state actors responsible for mass atrocity crimes;
4. Immediately refer the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court for investigation.

At the end of March, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa will gather at the BRICS Summit in South Africa, seeking to “contribute significantly to the development of humanity.” The Summit provides an opportunity for Brazil, India and South Africa – three democratic powers committed to human rights -- to urge Russia and China to take meaningful steps aimed at ending the suffering of the Syrian people.

In keeping with the Responsibility to Protect, we urge the BRICS members to:

1. Demand that the Syrian government immediately grant cross-border access to the UN and humanitarian aid organizations to relieve the suffering of Syrian civilians;
2. Include in their Summit outcome document a condemnation of the ongoing commission of mass atrocities in Syria.