



30 May 2012

## Statement on Houla Massacre

The 25 May killing of 108 people in Houla demonstrates that the Syrian government continues to commit crimes against humanity and is manifestly failing to uphold its Responsibility to Protect (R2P). According to reports, following the military's shelling of Houla, paramilitary "shabiha" attacked homes and committed summary executions. According to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, 49 of the dead were children under the age of 10.

Killings such as those in Houla are part of a larger pattern of widespread and systematic attacks against civilians throughout the country that have been carried out for over fourteen months. The violence has now claimed over 10,000 lives and triggered clashes in Lebanon.

Despite claims by the government to be implementing reforms and adhering to a ceasefire, the use of excessive force and deliberate targeting of civilians continue. President Assad has failed to fully implement any of the six terms of the plan of the UN-Arab League Special Envoy, Kofi Annan. Yesterday Annan warned that the crisis is at a "tipping point." Civilian populations in Syria continue to face crimes against humanity perpetrated by the state. It is imperative that the international community, in keeping with R2P, use all available leverage to demand the Syrian government end its crimes.

States have taken steps to uphold their Responsibility to Protect. These include the enactment of targeted sanctions and the recent expulsion of Syrian diplomats from several capitals. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) has passed two resolutions condemning the violence in Syria, while the Human Rights Council (HRC) has adopted four resolutions and mandated the Commission of Inquiry. Individual states should use all measures possible to further isolate the Assad regime and halt the commission of mass atrocities. This should include taking additional preventive and protective action through the UNGA and the HRC.

These efforts, however, are hindered by states that continue to provide critical support to the Syrian government. Russia continues to provide arms, while Venezuela has shipped fuel to circumvent the effect of international sanctions. Iran has, by its own admission, sent troops into Syria to aid in the crackdown. These actions undermine efforts aimed at bringing an end to the mass atrocity crimes perpetrated by the Syrian government.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the appropriate body for responding to threats to international peace and security. Divisions within the UNSC have emboldened the Assad government in its crimes. Russia must now display leadership in upholding its commitment to the Responsibility to Protect and preserve international peace and security. With each passing day the range of options diminishes. The UNSC must break the current impasse and protect the people of Syria.

The UNSC should:

- Call upon the Syrian government to uphold its Responsibility to Protect, cease all attacks and allow the Commission of Inquiry access to all affected areas;
- Impose an arms embargo and individual targeted sanctions;
- Refer the situation to the ICC;
- Strengthen the human rights component of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria.