

## Statement on today's reported chemical weapons attack in Syria

Various eyewitness accounts indicate that a major chemical weapons attack took place in Damascus, Syria this morning. According to initial reports and video evidence, hundreds of civilians, including children, from around the Ghouta region have been killed after rockets armed with chemical agents were fired at the east Damascus suburbs of Ain Tarma, Zamalka and Jobar. If verified, today's events represent the most deadly chemical weapons attack against civilians in decades and a terrifying escalation of the Syrian conflict.

These allegations come two days after a United Nations (UN) team of chemical weapons experts arrived in the country to investigate previous reports of chemical weapons use at three separate sites. Without government permission, however, the team will be unable to visit the Ghouta region under the current terms of their mission.

The use of chemical weapons is a clear violation of International Humanitarian Law and constitutes a war crime. While the Syrian government vehemently denies the use of such weapons, this latest attack on civilians comes after more than two years of the government perpetrating ongoing crimes against humanity and war crimes. Armed opposition groups have also committed war crimes, albeit on a smaller scale than that of the government.

Despite the ongoing commission of mass atrocities and grave breaches of the laws of war, the UN Security Council has so far failed to pass a single resolution aimed at holding perpetrators in Syria responsible for their actions. Meanwhile, as the conflict intensifies, scheduled "Geneva 2" peace talks between the government, opposition and international actors have been postponed for several months. Further delay will only contribute to the mounting death toll, which now exceeds 100,000 people, and reinforce the perception that the world tolerates impunity for mass atrocity crimes, including large-scale chemical weapons attacks on civilians.

In keeping with the 2005 commitment by all states to uphold their Responsibility to Protect, members of the UN Security Council, who are holding emergency consultations this afternoon, must:

1. Demand immediate access for the UN chemical weapons team to the areas where the latest attacks have been reported;
2. Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court for investigation;
3. Call upon all concerned parties to set a firm date to advance the "Geneva 2" peace talks.