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Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Welsh, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in Kobane, Syria

(New York, 10 October 2014) The Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, express deep concern about the situation in Kobane, Syria.

The Special Advisers strongly condemn attacks against the lives and physical integrity of populations in Syria, including by terrorist and armed groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The recent offensive by ISIL on Ayn al-Arab, also known as Kobane, on Syria's northern border with Turkey, has resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, as well as the massive displacement of civilians.

“ISIL and other armed groups have reportedly committed grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity,” stated the Special Advisers. They noted that “the situation in Kobane raises the credible prospect that the population is at imminent risk of being subjected to similar acts.” The situation “requires urgent, concerted, and coordinated action from a variety of actors, including regional and global, to ensure the protection of the population and avert the possibility of further atrocity crimes.”

The Special Advisers also raised special concern about the situation of religious and ethnic minorities in the area, noting that members of the Kurdish community have fled the city en masse. They stated that “this latest attack is part of a larger pattern of targeted violence committed by ISIL and other armed groups against religious and ethnic minority communities in both Syria and Iraq.” Given the prevailing context of sectarian polarisation and fear of persecution, the Special Advisers urge all leaders, whether religious, political or military, to avoid rhetoric that could exacerbate violence. They further call on all actors to “give particular consideration to assisting religious and ethnic minorities, which are especially vulnerable.”

The Special Advisers urged all actors “to fulfil the commitment reached by the Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity,” and to cooperate in fulfilling their collective responsibility to protect. In this respect, the Special Advisers reiterated the “primary responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic to protect its population from atrocity crimes” and expressed concern at its continued failure to do so. They further stated that “the ongoing commission of atrocity crimes in Syria underlines the urgent need for the international community to redouble its efforts in order that it may take effective action to resolve the conflict.”

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