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Special Advisers of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Francis Deng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Edward Luck, on the situation in Syria.

(New York 2 June 2011) The Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect and the Prevention of Genocide are gravely concerned at the increasing loss of life in Syria as a result of the continued violent suppression of anti-government protests. We remind the Government of Syria of its ongoing responsibility to protect its population, as all Member States of the United Nations committed to do in the 2005 Summit Outcome Document, and as confirmed in subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

We are particularly alarmed at the apparently systematic and deliberate attacks by police, military, and other security forces against unarmed civilians taking part in the last two months of protests. These attacks have reportedly resulted in many hundreds of deaths. The deployment of armed forces and the use of live fire, tanks and artillery in response to peaceful protests, and the targeting of residential areas where protests have taken place, are unacceptable under any circumstances. In addition to the deaths of protestors, there have also been reports of mass arrests, arbitrary detentions, disappearances and other serious human rights violations in the towns where protests have taken place.

The systematic and widespread attacks that are alleged to have taken place in Syria appear primarily to have targeted the civilian population. This underscores the need for an independent, thorough, and objective investigation into all alleged violations of international human rights law. The alleged killing of security forces personnel should also be investigated. The Special Advisers urge the Government of Syria to allow such an inquiry, to show utmost restraint, and to refrain from further attacks against the civilian population. If it is found that human rights violations or crimes have been committed, those responsible must be held accountable.

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