

UNITED NATIONS PRESS RELEASE



Statement by the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Ms. Jennifer Welsh, on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria.

(New York, 22 August 2013) - The Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Ms. Jennifer Welsh, condemn the reported killing of hundreds of civilians in the suburbs of Damascus on 21 August, and call for immediate access for a United Nations investigation of allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria.

“The use of chemical weapons during armed conflict is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime, regardless of who the targets or the victims of the attacks are. There is never any military justification for the use of chemical weapons – whether by Governments or anti-government armed groups - given their horrific and indiscriminate impact.”

In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, all heads of State and Government affirmed their responsibility to protect populations from war crimes, wherever they may take place. The Special Advisers call on the Syrian Arab Republic to immediately grant the United Nations independent access to the sites where attacks are alleged to have taken place, as well as to victims of the alleged attacks, so that investigators may collect evidence in a timely manner. The Special Advisers also call on all other armed actors to ensure access for the United Nations, and on parties to the conflict to create secure conditions for an investigation.

The Special Advisers furthermore call on the Member States of the United Nations to utilize appropriate measures to immediately bring to an end any use of chemical weapons in Syria, if such use is confirmed, as well as to halt all other acts that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, and which continue to threaten not only thousands of lives, but also peace and security in the region.

“We call on the relevant actors in Syria to act responsibly in the face of these extremely serious allegations, and to grant and ensure immediate access for the United Nations to investigate the circumstances of the alleged attacks with chemical weapons in Damascus. Given the nature of these weapons and the limited timeframe for a comprehensive and accurate investigation, access needs to be granted now.

“The alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria is yet another example of the crimes taking place in the country. All these crimes must be investigated immediately, and those responsible for committing them held to account, as an integral part of a peaceful and sustainable political solution to the disastrous conflict in Syria.”

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