

## UNITED NATIONS

### General Assembly Adopts Resolution Strongly Condemning 'Widespread and Systematic Human Rights Violations by Syrian Authorities

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**Plenary**

**97th Meeting (PM)**

**Text Passes by 137 Votes in Favour to 12 against, with 17 Abstentions**

Strongly condemning continued widespread and systematic human rights violations by the Syrian authorities, the General Assembly today voted overwhelmingly to call on both the Government and allied forces and armed groups "to stop all violence or reprisals immediately".

Adopting an Arab-backed resolution by a recorded vote of 137 in favour to 12 against, with 17 abstentions, the Assembly expressed grave concern at the deteriorating situation in Syria, and condemned a raft of violations carried out by the authorities, such as the use of force against civilians, the killing and

persecution of protestors and journalists, and sexual violence and ill-treatment, including against children.

The Assembly called on Syria to abide by its obligations under international law, and demanded that the Government, in line with the 2 November 2011 Action Plan of the League of Arab States, and its decisions of 22 January and 12 February 2012, without delay, stop all violence and protect its people, release all those detained during the unrest, withdraw all armed forces from cities and towns, guarantee peaceful demonstrations and allow unhindered access for Arab League monitors and international media.

The language of the resolution closely mirrored that of a text vetoed by China and the Russian Federation in the Security Council two weeks earlier. (See Press Release SC/10536) The Assembly's action also followed a special briefing on Monday by Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who expressed outrage at the bloody 11-month crackdown on opposition protesters. She warned that the Council's failure to take action had emboldened the Syrian Government to launch an all-out assault to crush dissent, most evident in its "appalling" siege of the city of Homs. (See Press Release GA/11206)

By other terms of the text adopted today, the Assembly expressed its full support for the Arab League's decision to facilitate a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, pluralistic political system, including through a "serious political dialogue between the [Syrian Government] and the whole spectrum of the Syrian opposition". Reaffirming its strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty,

independence, unity and territorial integrity, it further reaffirmed that all Member States “should refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State”.

The measure requested Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and all relevant United Nations bodies to support the Arab League’s ongoing efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully, including through good offices and the appointment of a Special Envoy. The Secretary-General was also requested to report to the Assembly within 15 days on the status of the resolution. Ahead of the action, the Secretariat announced that approval of those elements of the text would incur \$900,000 in additional budgetary resources for an initial six months of the 2012-2013 biennium.

Egypt’s representative, presenting the draft resolution on behalf of the Arab Group, described the situation in Syria as “critical” and demanded that the Government immediately end the bloodshed. He said the text was based on the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes, which was at the core of efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict. Stressing that the Arab League’s efforts enjoyed unprecedented worldwide acceptance, he expressed hope that today’s vote would show that the international community was speaking with “one voice” on events in Syria.

Syria’s representative took the floor immediately thereafter in response to the points raised by his Egyptian counterpart, and said that the Government was responding in an accelerated manner to demands for reform. A new Constitution

providing for the establishment of a modern democratic State would be put to a referendum on 26 February, as part of “extremely important” developments, in line with popular demands by the majority and the opposition. A comprehensive dialogue had been called for among all those who wished to maintain Syria’s stability and to end the violence.

However, Member States must stop encouraging the violent groups in Syria, he emphasized, declaring that no State would tolerate the presence of armed terrorists on its territory. Unfortunately, certain countries were supporting such armed groups, even as they claimed to be anxious to save Syrian lives. “Stop adding fuel to the fire,” he said, pointing out that the resolution’s failure to call on the opposition to dissociate itself from armed groups “says everything” about the intention of the text’s co-sponsors, as did its failure to condemn terrorist acts. Asking whether anyone had thought about the aftermath, he warned: “This step will not only bring disaster to Syria, but to all international relations.”

Speaking after the vote, in a statement directed largely at the Arab League, he said that a “Trojan horse” had been unmasked today, as the Western co-sponsors of the resolution had paved the way to internationalizing the situation. It was clear that the League — “broken politically and morally” — had been kidnapped by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, he added.

Most other delegations hailed the resolution’s strong calls for an end to the violence and for the Syrian Government to protect civilians. Many reiterated their firm belief that the Arab League’s Action Plan, which proposed a negotiated

solution among all Syrian factions, was the best path out of the crisis. Other speakers expressed grave concern about reports of massive human rights violations in Syria, and said that ending them must be the international community's main priority. Costa Rica's representative, who voted in favour of the resolution, emphasized that impunity must not be tolerated and, if necessary, the situation should be referred to the International Criminal Court.

At the same time, several speakers echoed the concerns raised by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who voted against the text and roundly denounced "attempts by imperial Powers and their allies" to trigger regime change in Syria, "even at the cost of further bloodshed". The text represented an intervention in the internal affairs of an independent State, he added. He was also among those who commended the Russian Federation's efforts to produce a more balanced text, by placing demands on opposition forces to disassociate themselves from armed groups, expressing support for that country's peace initiatives in Damascus.

China's representative expressed support for the Arab League's position that the violence must stop immediately and that civilians must be protected. Yet, the international community should respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity fully, he stressed, adding that actions taken by the United Nations should not complicate matters, but be helpful in easing tensions, facilitating political dialogue and resolving differences.

In other action, the Assembly decided that the Marshall Islands, Sudan and the Federated States of Micronesia had all made the payments necessary to reduce their arrears under Article 19 of the United Nations Charter. Under that Article, a Member State in arrears cannot vote in the General Assembly “if the amount of the arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two years”.

Also speaking in explanation of position were representatives of Venezuela, Grenada, Russian Federation, Serbia, Pakistan, Ukraine, Iran, Bolivia, Argentina, India, Singapore, Viet Nam, Chile, Bangladesh and Egypt.

**The General Assembly will reconvene at a time and date to be announced.**

## **Background**

Meeting this afternoon to consider matters relating to the prevention of armed conflict, the General Assembly was expected to take action on a draft resolution on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic (document A/66/L.36).

## **Procedural Matters**

The representative of Syria, recalling the Assembly's previous meeting on the report of the Human Rights Council, said his delegation had informed Member States at the time that the earlier meeting contravened the rules of procedure, and had called on the Assembly President to obtain a legal opinion on the matter. It had been announced during that meeting that a draft resolution on Syria would be presented to the Assembly, but today it was meeting under the item "Prevention of armed conflict". It was "pathetic" that the Syrian issue was being addressed under at least three different agenda items, he said, adding that there was clearly confusion over the matter. The Assembly's legitimacy was at stake, he said, asking the President to provide the rules of procedure governing the current meeting.

GARY FRANCIS QUINLAN (Australia), Assembly Vice-President, responded by saying it was his understanding that the Assembly President could convene a meeting at any time, under any agenda item, to consider a draft resolution presented to Member States.

**The representative of Yemen said his delegation had been surprised by reference to Article 19 of the United Nations Charter.**

### **Action on Draft Resolution**

OSAMA ABDELKHALEK MAHMOUD (Egypt), introducing the draft resolution the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic (document A/66/L.36) on behalf of the Arab Group, said the Assembly was meeting as that country faced “critical circumstances”. The major escalation of violence there had been condemned by the League of Arab States, the Arab Group, the United Nations and the wider international community. Demanding that the Syrian Government end the bloodshed, he said the matter was at the very top of the Arab League’s agenda. That regional body had called for an immediate and faithful implementation of the Arab Action Plan as the only way to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people, he said, stressing the primacy of the Arab solution, under the “Arab roof”, and its rejection of military intervention.

The draft before the Assembly was based on the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes, which was at the core of efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict, he continued. It reaffirmed Syria’s territorial integrity and supported the aims set out in the decisions and resolutions of the Arab League. Stressing that those efforts enjoyed unprecedented worldwide acceptance, he said more than 70 Member States were co-sponsoring the draft, and it was to be hoped that today’s vote would show that the international community was speaking with one voice on events taking place in Syria. Hopefully, the vote would also show broad and commanding support for the Arab Action Plan, he added, calling on all Member States to stand shoulder to shoulder with each other and the Syrian people by voting in favour of the text.

Following that statement, the Secretariat announced that approval of the text, which requested the Secretary-General and all relevant bodies to support the Arab



League's efforts, including through good offices and by appointing a Special Envoy, would incur additional budgetary resources in the amount of \$900,000 for an initial six months in the 2012-2013 biennium. Those requirements would be met through the use of commitment authority granted to the Secretary-General as related to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Speaking in explanation of position, the representative of Syria said his country continued to respond in an accelerated manner to demands for reform, in response to all the points raised by Egypt's representative in presenting the draft resolution. A new Constitution providing for the establishment of a modern democratic State would be put to a referendum on 26 February, as part of "extremely important" developments that responded to popular demands by the majority and the opposition. A comprehensive dialogue had been called for among all those who wished to maintain Syria's stability and prestige and to end the violence. He called on all Member States to encourage the opposition to take part in that dialogue and not to impede participation by others.

In addition, he called on Member States to stop encouraging the violent groups in Syria. No country could tolerate the presence of armed terrorist groups on its territory, he emphasized. Neither would it tolerate attacks against its officials, people and institutions. Unfortunately, certain countries were supporting the armed groups, even though they claimed to be anxious to save Syrian lives. They had also cut relations with Syria without justification, which showed that they did not wish to promote peaceful reform. He called on them to stop adding fuel to the fire, pointing out that the draft resolution's failure to call on the opposition to dissociate themselves from armed groups "said everything" about the intention of

the text's co-sponsors, as did their failure to condemn terrorist acts. They had paid no heed to Syria's plans for reforms, he added.

The Arab League, in its resolution supported by today's draft, had decided to provide all forms of support to the opposition, opening the door to the funding and arming of violent groups for terrorist acts, he said. The League was providing support to countries that had long wanted to undermine Syria, and Member States should instead help Syria's Government and people to face the challenges of extremism and terrorism, which had been documented, but not well publicized. Adopting the draft resolution would only lead to a worsening of the crisis by encouraging extremism, he warned, appealing to all Member States to vote against the text lest they increase the chaos in Syria. Asking whether anyone had thought about the aftermath, he warned: "This step will not only bring disaster to Syria, but to all international relations." It would also play into the hands of Israel and help its efforts to defeat the aspirations of Palestinians and other people under occupation in the region.

The representative of Venezuela, affirming the fundamental importance of sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, denounced the attempt by imperial powers and their allies to trigger regime change in Syria, even at the cost of further bloodshed, reproducing the dire consequences of the Libyan situation. Those Powers sought to occupy Syria, to foment a coup against its legitimate authorities and to turn the country into a protectorate. The draft resolution, with its mentoring and monitoring mechanisms, represented an intervention in the internal affairs of an independent State, he said. The text also attacked the Government for human rights abuses while hiding the heinous crimes

committed by terrorist groups against civilians, as well as attacks with varied weaponry against public officials and facilities.

He went on to note that the draft ignored the Government's initiatives to promote inclusive political dialogue and its call for a referendum on a new Constitution, which were the best options for moving forward. The draft denied the Syrian State's right to protect its population and ensure internal peace and security, he said, adding that it did not call for opposition groups to dissociate themselves from groups engaged in violence. Commending the Russian Federation's efforts for a more balanced text, he supported that country's peace initiatives in Damascus as well its efforts, with China, to prevent the Security Council from being used to violate Syria's sovereignty. "It is not desirable that the logic of war, which imperialists intend to impose on Syria and the world, prevails," he said. Instead, the Assembly should be concerned about recognition of a Palestinian State, the end of Israeli rights violations and ending the blockade on Cuba.

The representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea said that any issue relating to a Member State must be discussed in line with the principles of territorial integrity and State sovereignty. As a full-fledged member of the United Nations, Syria was no exception to that rule, he said, emphasizing that all violence in Syria must stop. The issues in that country should be settled in the best interest of its people. The country's fate and future should be in their hands and they alone should lead the process towards a peaceful negotiated solution, which should be reached without outside influence. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea would vote against the text, he said.

The representative of Grenada offered condolences to the families of all those who had lost loved ones in Syria and stressed that the United Nations must act — and be seen to act — in line with the tenets of its founding Charter. Grenada was proceeding with the understanding that the draft resolution would “do only what the text says” — provide diplomatic support to Syria, the Arab League and the Secretary-General in order to help the Government and people of Syria to end all bloodshed, while finding an agreed solution. It also understood that the Assembly was not voting on or for a text that could in any way be interpreted as a basis for the removal of the Government, military intervention or any act against the spirit and letter of the Charter, she said. With that understanding, Grenada would vote in favour of the draft resolution, she added.

**The Assembly then adopted the resolution by a recorded vote of 137 in favour to 12 against, with 17 abstentions.**

**The representatives of Burundi, Kyrgyzstan and Comoros informed the Secretariat that they had been unable to cast their votes properly.**

The representative of the Russian Federation said he had opposed the resolution because it clearly did not meet the criteria for ending the violence in Syria. The Russian delegation had proposed to place reasonable demands on opposition forces to disassociate themselves from armed groups and to demand that those groups themselves stop their attacks, he said, noting that those

amendments had not been accepted. The Russian Federation would continue to work with all those striving for regional stability, he stressed.

The representative of China said his Government had closely followed developments in Syria and was deeply worried about the escalating crisis that had caused civilian casualties and affected peace and security in the wider Middle East. China condemned all acts of violence against innocent civilians and urged the Syrian Government as well as all political factions to “immediately and fully” end all acts of violence and quickly restore order. It also called on the political factions in Syria to express their political aspirations through non-violent means under the rule of law.

He went on to urge all parties concerned immediately to launch an inclusive political dialogue, without preconditions, hold a referendum on the new draft Constitution, as well as early parliamentary elections, and establish a national unity Government that included all factions. “We understand the concern of Arab countries and the League of Arab States on seeking a quick resolution to this issue,” he said, expressing support for their position that the violence must stop immediately and that civilians must be protected. Emphasizing that the international community should respect Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity fully, he said: “We do not approve of armed intervention or forcing a so-called regime change in Syria.”

Neither did China believe that sanctions or the threat of such measures would be helpful in achieving an appropriate solution, he continued. The actions of the

United Nations and the wider international community should be helpful in easing tensions, facilitating political dialogue and resolving differences. Instead of complicating matters, such actions should promote the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East, he said, adding that he had voted in accordance with those principles. As a friend of the Arab people, China had always followed the purposes and principles of the Charter and would continue to work with the international community to resolve the situation in Syria.

The representative of Serbia said he had voted in favour of the text, adding that all international efforts should aim solely for an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. At the same time, Serbia would have wished that the proposals and amendments put forward by some delegations had been considered and evaluated. In particular, the resolution would have been enriched by some of the changes submitted by the Russian Federation, which were “truly constructive”, he said, adding that they could have led to the consensus adoption of the text. He expressed hope that the international community would nevertheless take notice of those proposed amendments as the diplomatic process progressed. “Their content cannot be avoided, and sooner or later will need to be addressed,” he said.

The representative of Pakistan said he supported the Arab League position and had voted in favour of the resolution, but condemned the use of violence on all sides. An immediate end to violence and killing, as well as a peaceful resolution were aims upon which all Member States agreed. In that light, Pakistan had been stressing the need for consensus on the Syrian situation, he said, noting that there could have been better efforts in the Assembly and the Security Council to reach

consensus and to fully assure delegations that there was no intention to carry out a hostile intervention. Reiterating his call for the Syrian people to be respected, he said they must be allowed to resolve their crisis, and he reaffirmed the absolute importance of respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of all States.

The representative of Costa Rica expressed his delegation's deepest concern about the gruesome human rights violations being carried out in Syria. The international community could not remain silent, he stressed, calling on the Syrian authorities to definitively end attacks against civilians and other human rights violations. Condemning reports of sexual violence, including that perpetrated against girls and boys, he said all international stakeholders should work towards a swift and peaceful solution to the crisis, in line with the Arab League's Plan of Action. The Human Rights Council had been playing its role of promoting a peaceful solution and, with the appropriate tools already at its disposal, it should move to create the position of Special Rapporteur on the situation in Syria, he said, calling attention to that Council's report on the very serious acts — pointing to possible crimes against humanity — being carried out in Syria.

Expressing concern that the Security Council had been unable to act on the matter, he said it had been prevented from acting by the use of a veto. The Council required deep reform, chiefly so that such measures could not be used to stymie action in the face of the worst international crimes, he emphasized. Stakeholders might disagree on certain matters, but the international community must speak resoundingly when human rights violations and acts of violence against civilians were committed. The international community should explore all avenues

to reach a solution and ensure that those who had committed grave crimes were held responsible, including through referring the Syrian issue to the International Criminal Court. Finally, he said the “voices of change cannot be silenced with violence”, and called for a solution that met the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The representative of Ukraine said that the Arab League’s peaceful efforts for a negotiated settlement deserved the Assembly’s support. Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs had issued a statement last week in which it had expressed grave concern at the escalating violence in Syria, “which threatens to grow into a full-scale civil war, with unpredictable consequences in the entire Middle East”. Ukraine urged all parties in Syria to cease the violence and begin a dialogue, with the aim of finding a mutually acceptable and effective way to resolve their differences.

The representative of Iran said he had voted against the resolution, in line with his delegation’s position that the Syrian people’s legitimate demands must be addressed through a peaceful and domestically led political process and without foreign intervention in the country’s internal affairs, which would only worsen the crisis and have ramifications on the region as a whole. He regretted, in addition, that the Assembly’s consideration of the Syrian crisis had not followed proper procedure, including the vote under the agenda item “prevention of armed conflict”, which did not apply.



It was even more regrettable, he continued, that the resolution's co-sponsors had chosen not to accommodate any amendments that might have made it more balanced, comprehensive and suited to the real situation on the ground. In that light, it was necessary to be clear and steadfast in condemning any act of violence and terrorism, in any form and manifestation, he emphasized. As long as armed groups continued to resort to violence, the crisis would continue, serving the interests of the Zionist regime. All States must work together in a practical manner to assist a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The representative of Bolivia, stating that he had voted against the resolution, asked the Assembly to consider exactly what was happening in Syria. With the many possibilities and few answers, it was clear that no one really knew exactly what the real situation was. All that was known was that there was a recognized opposition and a Government that was prepared to undertake meaningful reforms. Indeed, Syria's representative had twice informed the Assembly that such reforms, including constitutional changes, had been agreed and were under way. Saying he understood that such reforms were a work in progress, he added that Bolivia knew the dangers of a political vacuum, which could lead to destabilization of the entire region.

He said there were two possible ways in which the Syrian situation could end, the first being "the way of Libya", in which the United Nations had facilitated a "recipe for intervention" to justify regime change through a Security Council resolution. That text had actually promoted further destabilization and civil unrest, he pointed out, warning: "I fear we have not learned our lessons from that situation." He added: "Last year, it was the Security Council and this year it

appears to be the General Assembly.” Bolivia seriously hoped that that was not the case, but had voted against the resolution just the same. The other possible ending was through a peaceful resolution, as had occurred in Egypt and Tunisia, he said. In those cases, efforts had been channelled towards democracy and changes of Government borne by the will of the people, not foreign intervention. Hopefully, the winds of the “Arab Spring” would blow in Syria’s direction and stir peaceful change, he said, adding that, had the amendments put forward by the Russian Federation been integrated into the resolution, it would have been adopted by consensus.

The representative of Argentina said he had voted in favour of the resolution and emphasized the utmost importance of ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights in Syria. It was necessary to preserve the fundamental rights of free association and expression, he said, adding that the crisis in Syria should be resolved through dialogue and democratic negotiations involving all sectors of society.

The representative of India noted that his country had condemned all violence in Syria, no matter by whom it was committed, and had been supporting a peaceful, inclusive and nationally led political resolution of the crisis. India had voted in favour of the resolution, in accordance with its support for the Arab League’s efforts for such a political resolution. Regrettably, however, there had been exceptions to established General Assembly procedures during the week, he said, expressing a wish that there had been greater readiness from all quarters to negotiate a text with a view to reaching consensus.

He went on to note that the resolution expressly reaffirmed that all countries should refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. It condemned all violence, irrespective of its origin, and called for serious political dialogue under the Arab League. The country's leadership was a matter for the Syrian people to decide, he stressed, calling on all opposition forces to engage peacefully in constructive dialogue with the authorities. In that connection, he noted the Syrian leadership's decision to hold a referendum and multi-party elections, expressing hope that that decision would create an environment of peace and facilitate a political process.

The representative of Singapore said he had voted in favour of the resolution because it was not a politically motivated text, but instead dealt with a unique emergency in an appropriate manner. He joined with all in calling on all stakeholders to end violence and resolve the situation peacefully.

The representative of Viet Nam, affirming his country's concern about developments in Syria, joined the call for all parties in Syria to exercise self-restraint, end the violence and find a political solution through a domestically led constructive dialogue and national reconciliation, in conformity with the people's aspirations. He also underlined the importance of respecting the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States. Viet Nam supported efforts by the international community, including the Arab League, to contribute constructively to the restoration of stability and the promotion of national reconciliation in Syria, he said.

The representative of Chile said he had voted in favour of the text, adding that the Assembly had raised its voice to “energetically” condemn the “grave and massive” violations of human rights under way in Syria. Serious acts, such as torture, sexual violence and arbitrary detention, including those highlighted by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in her briefing earlier in the week, must be denounced and those responsible brought to justice, he emphasized. All parties in Syria must open a true dialogue, and the authorities must allow access to those in need, he added.

The representative of Bangladesh said he had voted in favour of the resolution. Despite its principled position of abstaining when texts targeted human rights situations in specific countries, Bangladesh had voted in favour of today’s resolution to end the shedding of the Syrian people’s blood, he said. The Assembly’s decision earlier in the week to consider the report of the Human Rights Council had contravened its rules of procedure, he said, expressing hope that no precedent would result from that action. The resolution had been drafted in line with the aims of the Arab League Action Plan, but Bangladesh would have hoped for the inclusion of the amendments submitted by the Russian Federation, he said, emphasizing that any actions taken in Syria must be in line with the aspirations of its people and lead towards a peaceful resolution.

The representative of Egypt then made a general statement, saying that the international community had made its views known through its overwhelming support for the resolution. It had reaffirmed the need for a peaceful solution to

the Syrian crisis and sent a clear message to the Government to listen to the voice of the Syrian people and implement the decisions of the Arab League. The situation was deteriorating and all should now focus on ending the violence and meeting the people's aspirations in order to avoid a worse situation, which would have effects in the region and lead to a humanitarian crisis. Egypt would continue to work with the League in that effort, he pledged.

The representative of Syria also made a general statement, saying that a "Trojan horse" had been unmasked today as the resolution's Western co-sponsors had paved the way to internationalizing the situation. It was clear that the Arab League had been kidnapped by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, he added. Syria had left the Arab League temporarily; it was broken, politically and morally, he said, congratulating it on its new alliance with Israel. Syria no longer wanted the League to stand by it following its shameful actions, but it did want them to save whatever face it had left and cease the plotting against other Arab States.

He went on to warn that the wealth of all the Gulf Cooperation Council countries would be squandered on losing causes and the price would be borne by all Arabs, who would be used as fuel to obtain the objectives of Israel and the West. Had the co-sponsors retained any credibility, they would have accepted the Russian amendments and worked to counter support for armed groups in Syria. In addition, the United Nations was betraying its own principles, and if that continued, the Organization would collapse, destroying the normative efforts of the past 66 years, he said. That would be the end result of intervention in the internal affairs of others.