



Security Council

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Letter dated 8 December 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I should be most grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Matthew Rycroft



Annex to the letter dated 8 December 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, I write to draw your attention to a major escalation of indiscriminate aerial bombardment by Russian Federation forces in the opposition-held areas of north-west Syria, in direct violation of international humanitarian law, including Security Council resolution 2139 (2014).

On Sunday, 29 November, more than 40 civilians were killed and dozens more wounded after Russian war planes indiscriminately targeted a marketplace and bakery in Ariha, Idlib. Among the dead were innocent women and children. A food bank run by a humanitarian relief agency, which served internally displaced persons, was also damaged, ending the delivery of bread to more than 45,000 Syrians per day.

Sunday's deadly attacks in Ariha took place within 20 km of the Turkish border, in an area where ISIS has no presence and holds no territory. Like most Russian attacks in Syria, the strikes on Ariha were not designed to eliminate ISIS. Instead, they were intended to terrorize Syria's opposition, kill innocent civilians and mete out collective punishment. In total, Russian forces perpetrated more than 70 airstrikes in Idlib on Sunday, with attacks in Sarmada, Al-Dana, Azaz, Atareb, Binnish and Taftanaz also having been recorded on Saturday, 28 November, killing an estimated 25 civilians.

Russia's attacks in Syria are indiscriminate and illegitimate, and may amount to war crimes. In the two months since Russian air attacks first started across Syria, more than 400 civilians have been killed, among whom were 69 children and 97 women, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Of the armed forces killed by Russian attacks since 30 September 2015, just a small fraction were ISIS terrorists. Most have been members of Syria's moderate armed groups, including the Free Syrian Army.

Russia's intervention in Syria violates international law, including Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), in which the Council demands that all parties "immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment". It also strengthens the position of terrorist extremists. In the two months since Russian forces first began indiscriminately bombarding Syria, ISIS has launched horrific terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut. It took responsibility for downing a Russian airliner over the Sinai. And it has won new territory inside Syria, making inroads in areas where Russian forces have targeted opposition moderates.

ISIS will not be defeated as long as Syrians are being bombed into oblivion. To effectively tackle ISIS and achieve the political settlement Syrians desperately need, members of the Security Council should work without delay to take the following steps:

- **Condemn Russia's indiscriminate aerial bombardment** of civilian-occupied areas and make clear that the Russian Federation must quit its indiscriminate use of force, or be held accountable;

- **Guarantee the protection of civilians** during the Syria peace talks. Only through the promise of civilian protection will the Vienna process lead to a political solution;
- **Enforce a no-bombing zone** to stop the number one killer of Syrian civilians — indiscriminate aerial bombardment;
- **Listen to Syrians** who have been excluded from the Syria peace talks in Vienna. Any political process in Syria must be Syrian-led and owned, as required by Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). Right now, our voices are not being heard.

In 1995 it took a brutal attack on a Sarajevo marketplace to ensure that the international community upheld its responsibility to protect civilians. 20 years later, the international community has all but abdicated that responsibility in Syria. Indiscriminate attacks like those witnessed in Ariha are now commonplace. They fail to inspire collective outrage, let alone collective action. They barely make international headlines. It is time to end that silence. It is time to protect civilians. The Syrian people need protection. Members of the Security Council can provide it. It is high time they did.

(Signed) Dr. Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations
National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces