



H.E. Mr. Gerard van Bohemen
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the United Nations
President of the UN Security Council

22 July 2015

Your Excellency,

Ahead of the Security Council's open debate on the Middle East, it is with great alarm and urgency that I draw your attention to the rising civilian death toll in Zabadani, Syria. For close to three weeks, Syrian regime forces and Hezbollah terrorists have overseen a murderous assault on Zabadani, pounding the Syrian town with more than 600 barrel bombs, at a rate of more than 30 bombs a day.

According to the UN Special Envoy to Syria, the regime's indiscriminate aerial attacks on Zabadani have caused "unprecedented levels of destruction and many deaths among the civilian population." The regime's calculated siege of Zabadani, along with its targeting of civilian occupied areas through warplanes and helicopters, have turned the town into rubble and left thousands without access to food, water and medical care.

In a statement issued on 22 June 2015, the Special Envoy to Syria called "on the Syrian government to halt the use of crude and indiscriminate weapons such as the barrel bombs on its own cities." It is imperative that the Security Council issue a similar demand and condemn the Syrian regime's ruthless targeting of civilians inside Zabadani. It is also imperative that the Security Council condemn the atrocities perpetrated by Hezbollah terrorists and Iranian forces across the Qalamoun region.

Located northwest of Reef Damascus, near the Lebanese border, Zabadani has emerged as the centrepiece of the regime's collusion with Hezbollah terrorists and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Hezbollah terrorists and Iranian forces now operate freely across Syria, brazenly perpetrating atrocities against Syrian civilians, with the full knowledge and consent of the Assad regime.

Tragically, foreign meddling in Zabadani is just the latest example of the Syrian crisis's growing regional ramifications. For over four years, Syria's neighbours have had to bear the burden of Syria's humanitarian crisis—becoming home to a record 4 million refugees. Over the past 18 months, Syria itself has become home to the heinous terrorist group, ISIL, which now controls a third of Syrian territory and oversees a population that spans some 6 million people, more than 350,000 of whom are children.

The regional escalation of the Syrian crisis represents a direct threat to international peace and security. The Security Council has thus far failed to address or prevent that threat. It is critical that the Security Council do so now, including by adopting the following measures:

- i. **Condemn the atrocities perpetrated by Hezbollah** inside Syria, and demand Hezbollah withdraw from Syrian territory;
- ii. **Ensure utmost vigilance in the monitoring of the Iranian nuclear deal** and Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), which, when implemented, will potentially release billions of dollars to the

Iranian regime, which the Security Council must ensure is not used to fuel and arm the Syrian regime's killing machine;

- iii. **Stop the Syrian regime's indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Syria**, which is responsible for more than 60 percent of all civilian deaths in Syria and the vast majority of deaths in Zabadani by authorizing a safe zone.

Your Excellency, on 2 June 2015, Iranian General Qasem Suleimani warned that "The world will be surprised by what we [Iran] and the Syrian military leadership are preparing for the coming days." Today, we know what that surprise entails. In Zabadani and elsewhere, Iran is working to fund, fuel, and facilitate Assad's atrocities, at the expense of ordinary civilians. Any agreement to ease sanctions against the Iranian regime must not come at the expense of the Syrian people.

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, and the thousands of innocent men, women and children trapped inside Zabadani, I therefore ask that the Security Council condemn Iranian aggression in Syria and adopt the measures needed to save lives in Syria and stop the Syrian crisis from escalating further.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Dr. Khaled Khoja
President