

The President of the Security Council presents his compliments to the members of the Council and has the honour to transmit herewith, for their information, a copy of a **letter dated 16 November 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations** addressed to the President of the Security Council, and its enclosures.

This letter and its enclosures will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2015/882.

16 November 2015



**LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS NUOLATINĖ MISIJA JUNGTINĖSE TAUTOSE
PERMANENT MISSION OF LITHUANIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

No. SN78-270

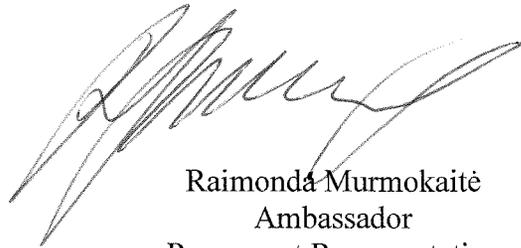
16 November 2015

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter from the special representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces dated 16 November 2015.

I would be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

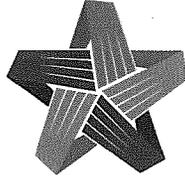
Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.



Raimonda Murmokaitė
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

H.E. Mr. Matthew Rycroft, CBE
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations
President of the UN Security Council

الاتحاد الوطني لقوى
الثورة و المعارضة السورية



National Coalition of Syrian
Revolution and Opposition Forces

Representative Office to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Matthew Rycroft
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations
President of the UN Security Council

16 November 2015

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the people of Syria and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with grave alarm and urgency that I draw your attention to the root cause of the worsening crisis in Syria, ahead of the Security Council's open debate on "the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: security, development and the root causes of conflict" on 17 November 2015, as well as the Security Council's briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria, on 16 November 2015.

Now into its fifth year, the crisis in Syria is rapidly deteriorating. For the second year in a row, Syria is the world's most dangerous country. Half the country has been displaced or driven into exile. One in 20 people has been wounded or killed. One in two is in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. And five Syrian children now die due to the violence every day.

The situation in Syria is an undeniable threat to international peace and security. It is now the main driver of the global refugee crisis, with more than half of all refugees to Europe stemming from Syria. It is also the primary source of extremist terrorist groups, with Syria serving as a safe haven for ISIL terrorists. As the UN Secretary-General has stated, "Syria is now the biggest humanitarian and peace and security crisis facing the world."

At the root of the crisis in Syria is indiscriminate killing, in particular aerial bombardment. Since the start of 2015, indiscriminate aerial bombardment has emerged both as the leading killer of Syrian civilians, responsible for a majority of all civilian deaths in the country, and the chief radicalizing factor on the ground—encouraging new recruits to join terrorist ranks in record numbers. Despite the adoption of repeated Security Council resolutions prohibiting the use of indiscriminate weapons, including Security Council resolution 2139 which 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, such as the use of barrel bombs, and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering," indiscriminate aerial bombardments have only increased in recent weeks—in large part due to the indiscriminate nature of Russian airstrikes in Syria.

In October 2015, a total of 629 civilians died from indiscriminate airstrikes in Syria. Airstrikes by Russian and Syrian forces thus accounted for 62 percent of all civilian deaths in October 2015, according to data compiled from the Violations Documentation Centre. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, of the 276 individuals killed by Russian forces in October 2015, a staggering 95 percent—or 263 people—were civilians. Just 13 armed men were killed by Russian airstrikes in October—as compared to 86 children and 44 women. Russian air strikes have targeted civilian homes, hospitals and displaced persons camps. On October 2 and 3, Russian warplanes launched airstrikes on hospitals, ambulance depots and emergency response centres in Idlib,

Hama and Latakia, according to Physicians for Human Rights. And in recent weeks, reports have emerged of Russian forces replacing the Syrian regime's prolific use of barrel bombs with the indiscriminate use of deadly cluster munitions and white phosphorous. As recently as 12 November, reports emerged from Benin, Idlib of white phosphorous dropped by a Russian Mi-24 attack helicopter. A more detailed accounting of the impact of Russia's strikes in Syria can be found in Annex I.

Russia's intervention constitutes a clear breach of international law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, military necessity and humanity. It has also impeded the delivery of humanitarian assistance, thus forcing on 12 October the Special Envoy for the Syrian Arab Republic, Staffan de Mistura, to appeal to the Government of the Russian Federation to allow critical humanitarian support to reach those in need. Such actions may amount to war crimes and will only impede efforts to achieve a political solution for Syria.

Your Excellency, the Syrian National Coalition remains committed to a political solution to the crisis. But we know that to solve the crisis in Syria and to reach the political solution the Syrian people need, the international community must address the crisis at its roots. This requires that the international community:

- **Guarantee the protection civilians** throughout peace talks in Vienna. Only through the promise of effective guarantees will the Vienna talks work. This is what Syrians want and need;
- Stop the leading killer of Syrian civilians—indiscriminate aerial bombardment—by enforcing a **no-bombing zone** which would deter indiscriminate air strikes by any party to the conflict;
- Ensure that any political solution is **Syrian led and Syrian owned**. Syrians themselves have thus far been excluded from the talks in Vienna. This undermines their legitimacy, and makes them less likely to succeed.

Your Excellency, Syrians need protection now. The conflict in Syria is entering its fifth year and Syrians are losing hope that a solution to their suffering will ever materialize. Syrians must be given a clear signal that their calls for protection are at last being heard. Anything less will derail the talks in Vienna, and keep a political solution out of reach. Solving the crisis in Syria starts by addressing its root cause – the Assad regime's aerial bombardment – and assuring Syrian civilians much-needed and much-wanted protection. On behalf of the people of Syria, I urge you to protect Syrians and ensure that their voices are heard.

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



Dr. Najib Ghadbian
Special Representative to the United Nations

Annex I: Impact of Russian Strikes in October 2015

- A total of 1,021 civilians were killed in Syria in October 2015, according to data collected from the Violations Documentation Center.
- 62 percent of all civilian deaths in October (or 629 of 1021 civilian casualties) were due to airstrikes, according to data collected from the Violations Documentation Center.
- Civilian deaths due to airstrikes increased by almost a third in October 2015 as compared to previous monthly averages in 2015, according to data collected from the Violations Documentation Centre.
- 263 civilians including 86 children and 44 women were killed by Russian airstrikes, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- Russian air strikes have overwhelmingly affected civilians, with a total of 95 percent of deaths due to Russian strikes being civilians, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights.
- As the use of barrel bombs diminished, the use of cluster munitions increased. At least 120 cluster munitions were reported by the Syrian Civil Defence, with the majority taking place on 24 October 2015.