

15 May 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,  
President of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
before the Vote on Agenda Item 33 (Prevention of Armed Conflict)  
Entitled ‘The Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic’**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Representatives,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather in the Great Hall of the General Assembly to discuss the “Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic” home to a proud and valiant people engulfed in an escalating maelstrom of ferocious violence.

A multi-confessional and multi-ethnic country in the heart of the Middle-East, Syria is inhabited by Sunni, Shi’a, Alawite, and Christian Arabs, together with Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen, Druze, Armenians, Mizrahi Jews, and other communities.

It stands at one of the world’s most important civilizational crossroads, continuously enriching the heritage of mankind for millennia.

Bordered by the Mediterranean basin and the Holy Land to the west, Anatolia to the north, Mesopotamia to the east, and the Arabian Desert to the south, Syria is a place of beautiful mosques erected during the Golden Age of Islam, and home to magnificent churches housing some of the most venerated icons and relics of the Christian faith.

Its capital, Damascus, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited metropolises of the world. The Jasmine City stood at the center of the mighty Umayyad and Fatimid empires, serving as the starting point of the major caravan route for pilgrims making the Hajj. It is where the Apostle Paul experienced his miraculous conversion, and Saladin began his ride onto Jerusalem.

For centuries, equal to Damascus in its splendor was Syria’s largest city Aleppo. As a terminus of the Silk Road, it basked in its greatest glory under the rule of Sayf al-Dawla, whose royal court attracted renowned philosophers and poets such as al-Farabi and al-Mutanabbi.

Yet today, the vitality and grandeur is all but gone. The calls of muezzin and the ringing of church bells have been drowned out by the sound and fury of falling shells, exploding mortar rounds, and machine gun fire. Towns and villages have been razed to the ground, and the fertile countryside now lies fallow.

Excellencies,

At least 80,000 have perished since the start of the hostilities, with most of these casualties believed to be civilians. As the death toll rises with every passing hour, so does the number of refugees and IDPs. The UNHCR has registered close to a million and a half, who now live in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and beyond. Over four million more have been internally displaced since the fighting began, according to some estimates.

Evidence of chemical weapons use is coming to light. Violence is begetting more violence; hatred, more hatred carving deeper and deeper wounds into Syria's society.

Over the past 800 days, the conflict has continued to escalate, threatening the establishment of ethnic or sectarian fiefdoms thus gravely imperiling the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

A threat of full-scale lawlessness looms large, portending to engulf the country in total anarchy and wanton destruction.

What happens in Syria in the weeks and months ahead will profoundly bear upon the security and well-being of the entire region, and possibly beyond.

We must not allow the shadows to lengthen, and mayhem to spread like a contagion.

Succumbing to the despondency of the status quo is a prescription for a disastrous future of growing estrangement, multiplying crises, and uncontrollable revendications.

Excellencies,

Today, we gather in the General Assembly to express the conscience of the international community. But our efforts must be put in the service of endeavors to bring about the immediate unconditional cessation of hostilities and induce the conflicting parties to engage in dialogue. This, however, must not be confused with the hard work to achieve sustainable and lasting peace in Syria.

We should strive to build on the agreement reached by the Action Group for Syria last June in Geneva, and reinvigorated a few days ago in Moscow, to get the political process off the ground, enabling the citizens of Syria to begin reconciliation and freely determine their nation's future.

I believe that it is incumbent on the international community to extend its full support to this course of action, in which all of us should play active and appropriate roles, investing our maximal efforts in the quest to bring this disaster to an end.

In my view, this is a grave test for the UN an institution founded with the express intent of being a "center for harmonizing the actions of nations."

Should we fail to stop the perpetuation of what is fast becoming the most horrific humanitarian catastrophe of our times, then common decency will demand of us to ask, in all candor, quo vadis United Nations?

Excellencies,

I believe that the tides of history are not indifferent to the cause of justice.

If we are unable to do anything to stop this tragedy, then how can we sustain the moral credibility of this Organization?

It is high time to say ‘enough is enough.’

Enough to complacency, and enough to fratricide.

Thank you for your attention.