



Chemical Attack in Syria

The U.N. Security Council meets in response to an attack that left dozens of people dead

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DURSUN AYDEMIR—ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on Wednesday to address a suspected chemical attack on Syrian civilians that occurred on April 4. At least 72 people, including 20 children, died in the attack, which took place in Khan Sheikhoun, a town in northern Syria. Hundreds of survivors were left convulsing and gasping for air.

The United States, France, and Britain called for the Security Council meeting. The three nations drafted a resolution, which “expresses its outrage that individuals continue to be killed and injured by chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and expresses its determination that those responsible must



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Protesters at a demonstration on April 4 in Istanbul, Turkey, condemn Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s forces for a suspected chemical attack against civilians in Syria.

be held accountable.”

President Donald Trump denounced the attack as “heinous” in a statement. “Today’s chemical attack in Syria against innocent people including women and children is reprehensible and cannot be ignored by the civilized world,” Trump said.

Some sources, including Staffan de Mistura, the U.N.’s special representative to Syria, said the chemical attack came from the air. According to a statement from the Russian Defense Ministry, the toxic chemicals were released when a Syrian airstrike struck a rebel weapons storage center. However, survivors have said that they saw chemical bombs being dropped from planes.

The draft resolution places blame on Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s military forces for the attack. It demands that Syria’s government provide international investigators with flight plans, names of squadron commanders, and access to air bases where chemical attacks were believed to have been launched. The resolution also calls on U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to conduct a fact-finding mission into the use of chemical weapons in Syria.



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Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations representative to Syria, discusses the crisis going on in the country during a press conference in Brussels, Belgium, on April 4.

According to the World Health Organization, victims of the attack show symptoms of exposure to nerve agents, highly toxic chemicals that affect the nervous system. The international community banned the use of chemical weapons in armed conflicts in 1925, with the Geneva Protocol. But chemical weapons have continued to be a global threat.

The UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons found Syrian government forces responsible for three chlorine gas attacks in 2014 and 2015. Syria agreed to destroy its chemical weapons in 2013. On Tuesday, Syria’s government denied that it used chemical weapons against civilians.

But Britain’s foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, said “all the evidence” he had seen so far suggests that the chemical attack was the work of Assad and his forces. “[They] did it in the full knowledge that they were using illegal weapons in a barbaric attack on their own people,” Johnson said. The U.N. Security Council has five permanent members—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Russia, an ally of Assad, has threatened to veto the resolution.

The civil war in Syria has been raging since 2011. As the UN’s special envoy to the country, de Mistura has been charged with finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

“Every time we have a moment in which the international community is capable of being together, there is someone, somehow, that tries to undermine that feeling of hope by producing a feeling of horror and outrage,” he told reporters. “But we are not going to give up. On the contrary, we make use of all these horror moments to show they cannot prevail.”

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