

Statement by Rwanda at Security Council Meeting on: The situation in the Middle East: Referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court

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(Unofficial Transcript)

Rwanda takes the floor to explain its vote on draft resolution S/2014/348, which requests the referral of the situation of the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court (ICC). I thank Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General, for his statement and acknowledge the presence among us of Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari, Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

Rwanda's position on the ICC, which we have expressed on several occasions in the Council, is well known. The debate on the International Criminal Court is indeed legitimate and should continue within the United Nations with a view to together achieving a fair and more efficient criminal justice system that is better able to fight against impunity for the most serious crimes.

However, we are not here today to hold another substantive debate on the ICC, as Ambassador Samantha Power said. I fully agree with her. Our grandchildren will one day ask us what we did to stop the Syrian tragedy. We are here as fathers, mothers, human beings and representatives of the community of nations, who should listen to the voices of the more than 160,000 people slain over the past three years in Syria. That reminds us that the Council cannot be inured to mass atrocities. We are here as a collective body, vested with the responsibility to maintain international peace and security. That includes the responsibility to protect and the obligation to hold accountable the perpetrators of the most serious crimes. Children are being gassed, women sexually abused and men tortured. Barrel bombs have been used against hospitals and schools. The communities devastated by the terrorist attacks in Syria are living in endless horror.

Rwanda has repeatedly called for a political solution to the Syrian crisis within the framework of the Geneva peace process. We have also endorsed the call of the Secretary-General, urging all concerned States Members of the United Nations to refrain from supplying weapons to aid any side in Syria. We agree that no concerned State has heeded that call. Nonetheless, the magnitude of human rights violations in Syria requires immediate action by the international community, in particular the Security Council. We all know that the Syrian jurisdiction is currently not in a position to hold the perpetrators of mass atrocities in Syria to account.

We therefore thank France for introducing the draft resolution as a strong signal to the warring parties in Syria that the Security Council is committed to accountability. That is why Rwanda voted in favour of the draft resolution. Despite the failure to adopt it, which we regret, Rwanda has not lost hope in justice and accountability in Syria. However, to achieve that goal, we need the permanent members of the Security Council to open their minds and hearts in order to find a solution to such a humanitarian and human rights disaster. Despite the real

achievements in eliminating the Syrian chemical programme, it is clear that the Council's credibility in maintaining international peace and security remains seriously challenged over its inability to end the horror being committed in Syria.

As co-chair of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, and given our own history of genocide, Rwanda takes this opportunity to reiterate its call to all permanent members of the Security Council to consider seriously and carefully the French proposal of a code of conduct among themselves by which they will voluntarily refrain from using the veto in situations of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In that context, pending a meaningful reform of the Security Council, we believe that such a code of conduct could be a necessary tool to enable the Council to re-embrace the moral values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In conclusion, all of us must commit ourselves to putting action for humanity above inaction for interests. That is the only way we can honour the Syrian victims and show to a sceptical world that we, the members of the Security Council, have learned lessons from the past and have decided to live up to the noble mission with which the community of nations has entrusted us.