

WILPF: Statement on Syria, Chemical Weapons, and Avoiding Military Intervention Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

30 August 2013

(...) It has been WILPF's position since the first reports of use of gas that the use of chemical weapons is a serious violation of international law, regardless of which party to the conflict perpetrated the attack. But the use of chemical weapons, however abhorrent and illegal, should not be used as a pretext for military intervention. Other options are available and must be pursued.

(...)

Against military intervention

Rather than rushing to military intervention or war, the international community must respond in conformity with international law. International legal obligations permit military intervention only under specific circumstances, none of which are applicable in this situation.

(...)

Alternative options

Alternatives to armed force have been carefully constructed over decades and there are systems in place that could and should be used.

1. Ensure effective investigation of the attack through an extension of the existing mandate of the UN inspections.

The UN inspections must be allowed to be completed. The inspection team has so far collected samples and interviewed victims and witnesses. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has [argued](#)

that the team must be allowed to do its job and establish the facts, pushing back against the US and UK government's assertions of “

[certainty](#)

” about the facts of the case and their demands that the inspection team leave the country.

Once the inspectors have determined whether chemical weapons were used and perhaps the origins of these weapons, the international community should then act in accordance with international law in its response.

2. Seek a UN Security Council resolution to secure the hand-over of any WMD in the possession of any party to the conflict.

The first obligation on the UN Security Council is to ensure the prevention of further chemical weapons use. Consequently, it should promulgate a resolution to facilitate the seizure of the prohibited weapons. This could get the support of the Russian government, which has supported the prohibition of use of chemical weapons and which seems to have considerable influence over the Syrian government. Because of Russia's strong participation in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, (which has a larger geographical mandate than just Europe), the OSCE may also be able to secure the hand-over of the weapons.

3. Request the UN Security Council refer the matter to the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The ICC has been established to bring justice when a state is unwilling or unable to do so, as would be the case here. There needs to be an investigation into the identification of the perpetrators and the nature of the command responsibility. Syria is not a party to the ICC but the UN Security Council can and should refer the matter to the office of the prosecutor and ensure that funds are available for investigation and indictment.

4. Support a political solution through inclusive peace talks.

The political process developed to provide a political solution to the Syrian crisis through "Geneva I" talks in 2012 and planned "Geneva II" talks this year have been established to provide a political rather than military solution to the crisis. The first set of discussions developed a plan for a transitional government in Syria involving both government and opposition members. This discussion needs to be continued in Geneva II talks with [strengthened support](#) from permanent UN Security Council members. Pressure also needs to be strengthened for an inclusive process involving women on all sides as well as nonviolent humanitarian and women's groups to ensure a strong peace process and outcome.

(...)

Read the [full statement](#).