

A Call for Peace: Concerned Africans call on US Congress to Reject Obama's Military Strikes on Syria

Statement by The Concerned Africans Forum

By [Global Research News](#)

Global Research, September 09, 2013

The Concerned Africans Forum

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

The Concerned Africans Forum has noted with grave concern the US senate Foreign Relations Committee's draft resolution authorising military strikes on Syria.

The Concerned Africans Forum believes that military strikes, even if 'limited', will not take Syria any closer to resolving a tragic conflict where over 100 000 lives have already been lost and in excess of 6 million Syrians have been internally displaced.

Yet US President Barack Obama appears resolute about pressing ahead with a military strike amid growing scepticism about the wisdom and prudence of such a move. The British Parliament's vote against any involvement in military action signalled growing popular fatigue with such misguided adventurism following the debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is also mounting citizen pressure in the United States, which helps to account for Obama seeking a Congressional mandate and approval for the use of force as he "determines to be necessary and appropriate".

Obama and his allies appear to be unfazed by the growing international outcry against a war on Syria. We appeal to President Obama to consider the dangerous implications of his intended military action, which without UN Security Council approval, will be a violation of the UN Charter and international law.

We join millions of people around the world in appealing to the House of Representatives, which is set to vote on 9 September 2013, to reject such misguided action which will inevitably lead to mass destruction of human lives and property in Syria. Lessons should be drawn from the wars on Iraq and Libya.

In this regard, we fully support the statement by the Forum for Former African Heads of State and Government, which is posted on: <http://www.polity.org.za/article/af-statement-by-the-africa-forum-informal-network-of-former-african-heads-of-state-and-government-on-the-situation-in-the-syrian-arab-republic-05092013-2013-09-05>.

Similarly, we welcome the South African government's call for an all-inclusive national dialogue in Syria. We strongly believe this is the only humane solution out of the Syrian crisis.

We condemn the use of chemical weapons, no matter from which quarters this action was carried out and appeal to the guilty parties to refrain from pursuing such heinous crimes. The international community must allow the UN weapons inspectors the space to carry out their investigations to verify the veracity of such allegations. Reports suggest that the team needs at least two weeks to complete its findings. In the interest of transparency, this should be respected by the US administration.

As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said, “the use of chemical weapons anywhere by anybody under any circumstances would violate international law.” Therefore, we would do well to recall the western complicity and silence when Saddam Hussein used sarin nerve agents and mustard gas in the Kurdish town of Halabja on 16 March 1988. The result was an estimated 5000 people dead and 7000-10000 injured.

The 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of chemical weapons was a direct response to the horrors experienced during World War I when poison gas was used to break through the front lines. Furthermore, the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention strengthens the Geneva Protocol by banning the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons. Yet, when the facts were incontrovertible in the massacre of Halabja, there was no sanction against the regime of Saddam Hussein compared to the unwavering determination to launch a military strike against the Assad government

The same can be said of Israel’s use of white phosphorus in Gaza in 2008-2009 and twice in Lebanon, in 1982 and then again in 2006.

Following an earlier chemical attack in Aleppo, unsubstantiated allegations were made, accusing the Syrian government of being responsible. However, Carla Del Ponte, a member of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria, found that in fact, it was the rebels and not the Syrian government that was responsible for the chemical attacks.

Earlier this year, we called for a negotiated political settlement, which now resonates even louder given the current state of affairs, (*see attached open letter*). Any punitive strike is bound, not only to exacerbate the conflict in Syria, but it will also lead to heightened geo-political tensions and instability, possibly drawing in Israel and Iran.

The United Nations must reclaim the initiative as a convening authority to advance a negotiations agenda on the basis of the Geneva II process and in terms of the principles and commitments that President Assad made in his speech of 6 January 2013.

AN OPEN LETTER TO H.E. MR BAN KI-MOON, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANISATION.

March 2013.

Dear Secretary General,

All of us, the undersigned, are South Africans.

You will therefore understand it if our observations are drawn on our own national experience to end what had been a very deadly conflict stretching over a much longer period than the Syrian conflict.

For some time we have been gravely concerned about the deadly conflict in Syria, very interested that it should be solved expeditiously and peacefully.

We were therefore very happy that together with the League of Arab States, successively you appointed the eminent Africans, Kofi Annan and then Lakhdar Brahimi, charged with the onerous task to facilitate this outcome.

In this regard we were very encouraged that the UN, and you personally, were associated with a determined effort to assist the Syrian people to arrive at a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict.

We have absolutely no doubt that this solution must include a fundamental reform of the Syrian constitutional and political system.

We believe that everybody committed to the genuine interests of the Syrian people and the peace and stability in the region, agree with this, including the Syrian Government. The intransigent demands of sections of the armed groups for regime change as preconditions for any discussions are unacceptable.

The attitude of the Friends of Syria is provocative and an obstacle to finding a peaceful negotiated settlement

The obvious challenge your eminent envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, faces is to elaborate the process which would enable all concerned, including the Syrian Government and Opposition, to arrive at an agreement about what should be done to end the conflict and bring about the fundamental constitutional and political reforms we have mentioned.

We would like to explain that this Open Letter was provoked by the major speech delivered by Syrian President Bashar al- Assad on 6 January 2013, after a silence of many months.

The first thing we would like to say in this regard is that it seemed obvious to us that those genuinely interested in resolving the conflict in Syria should study this speech carefully, which we have done.

The UNSG, in terms of your mandate must encourage everybody to seek a political solution.

Any untimely and ill-advised statement foreclosed all options envoy Lakhdar Brahimi might have had to build on what President Assad had said, and seriously compromised his possibility to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict.

At this point we would like to make one of the observations we believe is fundamental to the resolution of the Syrian conflict.

You may recall, Mr Secretary General, that a critical matter on which the global community agreed to with regard to the resolution of the conflict in South Africa, was that a negotiated resolution of this conflict would only be possible if the belligerents, without exception, entered into direct negotiations to determine the future of our country.

Prior to this, the world community, through the UN General Assembly, had declared the system of apartheid a crime against humanity, the first and only time, since the demise of Nazism, that any system of government had been declared as such a crime.

And yet absolutely nobody, including the South Africans themselves, ever thought it correct to exclude from the negotiations representatives of the regime which formally, according to the relevant Convention, was guilty of a grave "crime against humanity".

We therefore find it very strange and monstrous indeed that in the Syrian case an absurd and counter-productive pre-condition is being advanced that one of the principal belligerents, the Syrian Government, should therefore first step down, thus to facilitate the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict!

To add to this absurdity, similarly strange and monstrous demands have been made that one of the belligerents, the Syrian Government, should unilaterally cease its military operations, with no similar demand being made about the other belligerent, the armed Opposition.

To this we must add that, as openly acknowledged by everybody, there are foreigners who constitute an important part of the 'Syrian' armed Opposition. Fundamentalist armed forces from Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan Chechnya and other countries are fighting in Syria

We never had this phenomenon in our case. Everybody was therefore certain, as happened, that once the political leaders of the principal belligerents in our country decided to engage in negotiations to arrive at a peaceful settlement, the armed forces on both sides of the conflict would respect this decision.

It is obvious that this is one of the critical and challenging matters that must be addressed

in the search for a negotiated resolution of the Syrian conflict.

The second observation we would like to make, related to the above, is that what obstructs the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict is that some in the international community who exercise very significant power in various respects, are pursuing only one objective with regard to Syria – namely, regime change!

Despite the fact that at the moment we began our negotiations to end the system of apartheid, our country was governed by a regime presumed to be guilty of the grievous crime against humanity, nobody, including the countries now calling for regime change in Syria, ever suggested that “regime change” in South Africa was a pre-condition for the peaceful resolution of our challenges!

UN/LAS Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi must try his best to encourage a global consensus to strengthen his possibility to encourage the various Syrian belligerents to engage in serious negotiations.

That he has so far failed is due to the fact some of the external players involve directly or indirectly involved in the Syrian crisis are not in the least interested in creating the space for the Syrian people to resolve their problems.

Rather, they are focused on ‘regime change’ to address what they believe are their important geo-strategic interests, which have nothing to do with the welfare of the Syrian people or peace and stability in the region and international peace and security.

We are very concerned, Mr Secretary General, that it seems that some powerful forces have taken sides in this regard, in favour of the forces seeking ‘regime change’.

We have absolutely no doubt that the position of some countries in the Friends of Syria grouping in this regard have contributed to the stubborn position of the Syrian Opposition which has so far insisted that it will not enter into negotiations with the Syrian Government,

At this point we would like to identify various elements in President Assad’s 6 January 2013 speech which we believe constitutes elements of a basis for the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict.

In particular, among others, President Assad committed his Government to:

(i) a negotiated resolution of the Syrian conflict, indicating the willingness of his Government to talk to the Opposition;

(ii) engage all genuine Syrian ‘peace partners’ in this regard, a demand akin to what the late Yassir Arafat repeatedly stated when he described his interaction with the late Yitzhak Rabin, (and the Israelis later demanded with regard to Yassir Arafat), involving all Opposition forces, those based both inside and outside Syria;

(iii) the formation of a broad-based Government, effectively a Government-of-National Unity;

(iv) the elaboration under this Government of a new *“constitutional and judicial system and the political and economic features, as it will also include agreement on new laws for the parties, elections and local administration, etc.”* through a process of an inclusive national dialogue, and National Conference, whose results would be submitted to a National

Referendum;

(v) accordingly, the protection of the sovereign right of all the Syrian people to determine their destiny, without foreign interference;

(vi) the right and duty of the Syrian Government to protect all parts of the Syrian infrastructure, the national heritage, from destruction, and ensure peace and stability in the country;

(vii) the negotiation of an arrangement(s) to ensure the mutual security of Syria and its neighbours;

(viii) the holding of new elections to enable the Syrian people to choose a new Government, held on the basis of the agreement that would result from the processes indicated in (iv) above;

(ix) the implementation of a 'general amnesty' for all those who had been involved in the armed conflict, through the processes indicated in (iv) above, while respecting the right of individuals to resort to the courts to seek justice for any harm they might have suffered from the actions of any of the armed belligerents, including a provision for the necessary reparation;

(x) the convening of a Conference and process for "national reconciliation" through the processes indicated in (iv) above; and,

(xi) a programme decided during the process indicated in (iv) above to respond to the challenge of rebuilding and restoring the infrastructure destroyed or damaged during the armed conflict.

Quite frankly, Mr Secretary General, we find it extremely difficult to understand why and how you made the determination that these proposals, in themselves, do not "contribute to a solution that could end the terrible suffering of the Syrian people".

To the contrary, we believe that you should have publicly stated that all the objectives above are a necessary and acceptable but incomplete part of what is required peacefully to resolve the Syrian conflict.

We fully accept that it will be impossible for the Syrian Opposition to accept the proposal made by President Assad that his Government should have exclusive powers to guide the entire process indicated in the suggestions detailed above.

Mr Secretary General, we cannot but note that you have been very silent about the demand in the Geneva Communiqué that "All parties must re-commit to a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms and implementation of the six-point plan immediately and without waiting for the actions of others."

Those seeking a genuine political solution in Syria reject the demands of the faction favouring a 'regime change' and that only the Syrian Government should act to 'cease armed violence', without demanding the same of the armed Opposition.

Indeed, the UNSC has been very silent when some of the very same signatories of the Geneva Communiqué have spoken publicly about their determination to strengthen and

encourage the Syrian armed Opposition!

We will now return to the matter of the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria.

It is perfectly obvious that this cannot be imposed from outside.

We strongly suggest that this should be a result of negotiations among the Syrians, and not a pre-condition for such negotiations.

Again you will recall that in our South African case, we did not establish any 'transitional governing body' in our country. We allowed the regime ostensibly guilty of the crime against humanity, to remain as the governing body throughout the process of negotiations, until it was replaced through the 1994 democratic elections.

An all Party Transitional National Council ensured that the then all white apartheid Parliament did not take any decisions that could impact negatively on the negotiations process and a future democratic government in South Africa.

The esteemed UN/LAS Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, should have taken advantage of the positive commitments made by President Assad on 6 January 2013, to engage the Syrian Government about what might be done to address this one matter of devising an arrangement such that the Opposition would be assured that it would play its due and legitimate role during the transitional and negotiations period, without giving the Syrian Government any veto powers in this regard.

We are certain that with the necessary will and creativity, this outcome can be achieved, with no requirement for a condition precedent of 'regime change'.

This was done in South Africa. We can see no reason why this cannot be achieved in Syria.

Fundamental to everything we have said, Mr Secretary General, is the requirement on the part of absolutely everybody concerned, including yourself and the UN as a whole, to understand the imperative practically to respect, without equivocation, the sovereign right of the people of Syria to determine their destiny.

This is a fundamental and inalienable precept in all the principal documents of the UN, a precept that you, as the UN Secretary General, independent of all Member States of the UN, have an obligation to defend at all costs.

In other words you have the obligation to defend the rule of law as represented in the international law represented in many UN documents, starting with the UN Charter, which international rule of law is being blatantly violated in the case of Syria, most unfortunately with the encouragement of the Friends of Syria.

One of the undeniable realities about Syria is that those who pursue the objective of 'regime change' made a fundamental mistake when they thought or assumed that it would be possible 'easily' to overthrow the Syrian Government through armed rebellion.

Despite repeated assertions by the international 'regime change' faction that 'the Assad

regime' is about to fall, life has proved this wishful forecast wrong, and will continue to do so.

One reason for this is that important sections of the Syrian population support the Syrian Government, which means that it is radically wrong to pretend that this Government represents nobody but itself.

Yet another of the undeniable realities about Syria is that what has sustained the armed rebellion is not so much its internal support as external all-round support and encouragement.

This is despite the solemn commitment made by the signatories of the Geneva Communiqué that "Action Group members are opposed to any further militarisation of the conflict", some of whom have done everything they can precisely to 'militarise' the Syrian conflict.

Because of all manner of deceit, dishonesty, double standards and pursuit of national geo-strategic interests at all costs, even after the signing of the Geneva Communiqué, many Syrians have died, many have been displaced internally and turned into refugees, and much infrastructure has been destroyed, when the possibility existed, with the active involvement of the UN and the LAS, peacefully to resolve the Syrian conflict.

Those in the rest of the world, outside Syria, who are responsible for this reality, have determined that the lives of the Syrian people are worth nothing, provided that they achieve their geo-strategic goals.

Today sections of the Syrian National Council and the unarmed opposition are calling for negotiations without preconditions.

The failure of the UNSC to act decisively and collectively to find a peaceful negotiated solution to end the tragic violence further eroded the prestige of the UN, and the Office of the UN Secretary General, as defenders of the interests of the smaller countries, such as our own, against the diktat by the major powers.

We strongly suggest, Mr Secretary General, that you position yourself on the side of the Syrian people, both those who support and those who oppose the Syrian government.

Millions of people in Africa and the rest of the world are concerned that the UN is increasingly being transformed into an instrument of the West.

As Secretary General, you must do something to help restore the prestige of the UN and the UN Secretary General.

We have no doubt that if you acted decisively to assist the Syrian people peacefully and speedily to resolve their conflict, this would help you to achieve these objectives.

We suggest, humbly, that you might find it very useful to draw on the South African experience, among others, to facilitate the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict.

We hope you will understand, Mr Secretary General, that the pursuit of the objective of 'regime change' in Syria, under whatever guise, and the attendant external support and encouragement of the armed Opposition, only means the death and displacement of yet more Syrians, the destruction of infrastructure, and further enormous destabilisation of the

Middle East, with unforeseen consequences.

We have addressed this Open Letter to you, Mr Secretary General, simply because we wish for the people of Syria the same benefits of peace, democracy, national reconciliation and development which our own process of negotiations among all belligerents, without none excluded, brought to all our people.

Please accept, Mr Secretary General, the assurance of our respect.

- 1 Dr Wally Serote - Author and Indigenous Knowledge Systems expert
- 2 Prof Pedro Tabensky - Director of the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics, in the Department of Philosophy: Rhodes University
- 3 Ms Thoko Didiza - Former Cabinet Minister
- 4 Dr Sydney Mufamadi - Director of the School of Leadership, UJ and Former Cabinet Minister
- 5 David Maimela - Former President of SASCO and researcher and MISTRA
- 6 Reverend Frank Chikane - Author and Former Director-General in the Office of the President
- 7 Prof Chris Landsberg - National Chair of African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, University of Johannesburg
- 8 Dr Essop Pahad - Editor, The Thinker and Former Minister in the Presidency
- 9 Sam Ramsamy - International Olympics Committee Member
- 10 Aziz Pahad - Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
- 11 Mrs Zanele Mbeki - Gender Specialist
- 12 Prof. Alec Erwin - Associate Professor at UCT and Former Cabinet Minister
- 13 Dr Zoleka Ndayi - Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Fort Hare
- 14 Dr Malapo Qhobela - Vice Principal- Institutional Development - Unisa
- 15 Sekgobola Thobakgale - Africann Renaissance Youth Network
- 16 Prof Vusi Gumede - Head of the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute (TMALI)
- 17 Dr Snuki Zikalala - Former GCEO SABC News
- 18 Mr S. Donga
- 19 Meiya G. Nthoesane - Manager: Corporate Services, Centre for Business

Management, Unisa

20 Hazel Setzin –Director Rochefauld International

21 Marthe Muller – COO, South African Women in Dialogue

22 Miranda Strydom – Former Journalist

23 Amanda Dlamini – President of The African Pioneers and member of the African Youth Coalition

24 Mbongeni Magubane – Vice Chair, Pan African Youth Dialogue

25 Theresa Strydom – Social Worker

26 Sithembiso Khanyile – Executive Director of South African for Peace in Africa Initiative (SAPAI)

27 Nkululo D. Lawu – Director, Inkululo African Solutions

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