

LIES AND FABRICATIONS: The Houla Massacre

Full text of Syria's Amb. to the UN Dr Bashar Al-Ja'afari's Press Conference

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In response to the UN statement regarding al-Houla massacre

Full text of Dr Bashar Al-Ja'afari's Press Conference at the UN

The full text of the Press Conference in which the Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Al-Ja'afari denounced "the tsunami of lies that were said a few minutes ago by some members of the Council". -

Silvia Cattori

Full text of the Press Conference

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In Syria is an appalling, horrific, unjustified, and unjustifiable crime. This massacre was condemned by my government in the strongest terms possible. And here my government's version of the condemnation has joined exactly the wording adopted a few minutes ago by the Security Council.

I would like here to condemn also, on behalf of my government, the tsunami of lies that were said a few minutes ago by some members of the Council who tried to mislead you by saying that their way of levelling accusations against my government is based on what they said "evidences". They are wrong and they are misleading you. Neither General Mood, nor anybody else told the Security Council and the informal session that he would blame the Syrian government's forces for what happened. It is really pitiful and regrettable that some members of the Council came out just a few minutes after General Mood had finished his briefing to mislead you to tell you lie about what happened.

I invite you all to look to what happened in al-Houla in its entirety. In the comprehensiveness of the picture, what happened in al-Houla yesterday has a background and we should understand this background in order to catch and understand who perpetrated this crime.

Yesterday, after the Friday prayer, two hundred to three hundred armed men gathered around two o'clock pm. They gathered in several points actually, and then they moved and they met in one point, in al-Houla. They had pick-up cars loaded with heavy weapons such as anti-tanks missiles, mortars and machine guns, the Libyan way you saw a couple months ago, and they started attacking the law enforcement forces in the area who were positioned in five different points and at the same time the military attacks lasted from two o'clock pm. up to eleven o'clock in the evening.

So here we are not talking about a military attack that took place and ended in a matter of half an hour. It is a full fledged military operation planned in advance with multi task purposes. After attacking the law enforcement orders positions, the military forces turned towards the civilians, and then they moved to another village which is very next to al-Houla, one kilometre away, where they burned the national hospital, they burned the crops of the farmers and they burned houses. And they killed also dozens of innocent civilians in another village also next to al-Houla, called Shomaria. So here we are not talking about only one incident that took place in one precise area, we are talking about a theatre of operations that engulfed many small villages in the area.

My government has established a national Commission of enquiry tasked with the mission of finding out who are the perpetrators of this horrific massacre so that they will be brought to justice. Whoever committed this crime will be held accountable by the Syrian authorities, by the Syrian government's law in the country.

The press statement adopted by the Security Council today, adopted somehow the version of events submitted by General Mood. If you go to the language in which the press statement was written, you will find that nothing indicates that the Council is blaming the Syrian government's forces for the killings and the perpetration of the massacres. On the contrary it identifies that other elements in the picture may be responsible for what happened. I am saying this because the press statement says that the Security Council condemns in the strongest possible terms the killings confirmed by the United Nations observers. I am here also confirming on behalf of my government that there were killings of dozen of civilians, one hundred fourteen - and then an attack that involves a series of government artillery and tank shelling on residential neighbourhood.

Then the members of the Security Council also condemned the killing of civilians by shooting at close range and by severe physical abuse. Most of the killings that took place in al-Houla are due to this kind of assassinations, killing at close range, not killed due to the artillery shelling because artillery shelling would not leave the body of the victims the way you saw them. Here we are talking about the Algerian killing style in the early nineties.

My government will spare no efforts, whatsoever, to find out the perpetrators of these massacres, and to bring them to justice.

I would like to add to that, that the Security Council should meet also to identify and call on those who are arming the terrorist groups in Syria, who are hosting them, instigating them and inciting them to violence, and protecting them, also to be brought to justice. Some members in the Council, their officials said it publicly. Some of them are permanent members. Their high level officials said it publicly that they would spare no efforts to present and to provide the Syrian opposition with weapons, and some of them said "non lethal weapons", I do not know what does it mean. But the immediate outcome of this weaponisation of the opposition was the result in the form of kidnapping the Lebanese pilgrims coming back from Iraq through Turkish territory, and in the form of suicide bombings and the infiltration by al-Quaida of the Syrian territory.

So we do not need double language in the Security Council. We need to bring everybody accountable to the justice, even though if we touch upon some permanent members. Those who have great interest in stopping violence and bringing to success the national inclusive dialogue in Syria should stop interfering in our domestic affairs, stop arming, hosting,

financing and protecting the armed terrorist groups in my country. You cannot be an arsonist and a fireman at the same time. And this is exactly, unfortunately, the case of some members in this Security Council. The Arabic, the regional and the international dimensions of the Syrian crisis are not murky situation any more, and everybody knows what we are talking about.

I am in your hands.

Question: *In the statement it said "Attacks involved the Syrian government artillery and tank shelling in residential neighbourhoods". You disagree with that?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: I disagree with the interpretation provided to you of this sentence by the German ambassador, the British ambassador, and others. The interpretation was wrong. It is up to General Mood to present the facts. It is not up to the German ambassador or the British ambassador, or other ambassadors.

Question: *But the fact that there was government shelling on a residential neighbourhood, was that a fact?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: General Mood did not say that.

Question: *Given the circumstances were unclear, is General Mood more factual than the Secretary general?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: This is exactly what I was trying to say to your colleague. General Mood said that, that the circumstances were unclear with regard who to blame for these attacks. Yes, he did say that, but in this context, not in the context provided to you by some ambassadors.

Question: *Do you feel that this letter of the Secretary General is it more akin to the statement of the German and the UK ambassadors or to the statement made by General Mood in consultations?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: More inclined to sympathise with the German and the British ambassadors, of course.

Question: *What about the investigation?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: There is a close cooperation between the Syrian Government and UNSMIS [United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria] in Syria. Of course after establishing the Syrian national inquiry commission of investigation, the Syrian authorities will share with General Mood the outcome of these investigations, and then, of course, General Mood will share this information with the Security Council and Mr. Kofi Annan. One important point, gentlemen : you may remember that every time the Security Council has scheduled a session to discuss the Syrian crisis, something should happen in Syria. Either suicide bombing, or a terrorist attack, or a kind of massacre, the one unfortunately we are discussing today. So, it is not an innocent coincidence that the massacre took place only one day before the arrival of Mr. Kofi Annan to Syria. This dimension is very important because it casts shed of doubts about the real motivations of those who perpetrated this horrific crime. They are seeking escalation, they are seeking mobilisation of the Security Council against the Syrian government. No government whatsoever would massacre its own citizens for achieving political victory over its opponents. Using artillery and shelling and tanks and missiles would

not kill these innocent civilians the way they were killed by. And this has been notified by the Security Council press statement when they said that they were killed at close range. That means that is a pure assassination, it is not about using artillery and tanks shelling.

Question: *You say it is not the Syrian government, but who did it?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: The armed terrorist groups have initiated this kind of terrorist attacks from the beginning of the crisis in Syria. Here we are not talking about the first incident that takes place in Syria. Of course what happened yesterday is horrific, appalling, unjustified and unjustifiable crime. But this type of killings is not done by any government on earth. It is about armed groups, it is a terrorist crime. We cannot describe it with different terms. Whoever committed this crime will be held accountable to the Syrian justice, and the national investigation Committee established by the government yesterday should submit its report in three days from now. So we will know for sure who is behind this horrific crime in a matter of three days.

Question: *Would it not give a pretext for members of Council Security members to blame the government that they are giving this by proxy?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: As I said in the beginning, we should look at the picture in its entirety. The issue is not to go into details. Sometimes details are important but sometimes they are not. The issue is to have the right judgement on what happened. And in order to have the right judgment you have to look at the picture in its entirety with its historical background, with its geopolitical dimensions. As I said, there is an Arab dimension, there is a regional dimension and an international dimension of the Syrian crisis. And some countries are publicly saying that they would support - and they have already supported - the Syrian military wing of the opposition with weapons. People should very cautious and very careful while reading the map of what is going on in Syria.

Question: *Would it be for pushing to the increase in size of UNSMIS mission, maybe to arming their personnel, for some kind of internationalisation?*

Bashar Al-Ja'afari: That might be one of the targets seek by those who perpetrated the crime. That might be one reason. One very important reason for perpetrating this kind of horrific crime: to increase the internationalisation of the Syrian crisis, and to increase the number of the staff of UNSMIS.

Thank you.

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