

Russia's Role in Syria Raises Questions About Bid for Human Rights Council

The United Nations General Assembly will select new members for the Human Rights Council in elections to be held in New York on October 28. Russia is running against Hungary and Croatia for a chance to represent the Eastern European group at the world's foremost human rights body.

The undersigned organizations urge all member states, when deciding which Eastern European candidate to support, to question seriously whether Russia's role in Syria – which includes supporting and undertaking military actions which have routinely targeted civilians and civilian objects – renders it fit to serve on the UN's premier inter-governmental human rights institution.

UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 asks that those voting for members of the Human Rights Council “take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights.” This guidance applies to candidates' efforts to protect and promote human rights in their own countries and abroad.

Russia's actions in Syria stand in clear contrast to its rhetorical commitment to human rights. Member States should particularly consider Russia's indiscriminate attacks, its substantial weapons deliveries to the Syrian government and its efforts to prevent impartial accountability for serious crimes in Syria.

Moreover, Member States should consider Russia's decision, on October 8, 2016, to veto a credible draft UN Security Council resolution aimed at ending atrocities in Aleppo. This was its fifth use of a veto on a resolution concerning Syria at the Security Council. Since September 19, 2016, Russian and Syrian forces have bombarded opposition-controlled parts of Aleppo. The attacks included the use of barrel bombs, cluster munitions, and incendiary weapons, and damaged or partially destroyed at least five hospitals in six separate attacks, [Human Rights Watch research shows](#).

In addition to persistently blocking Security Council action to curb violations by the Syrian government, Russia continues to provide the Syrian government with arms.

Syrian-Russian joint military operations, which began on September 30, 2015, have extensively used internationally banned [cluster munitions](#). They have also increasingly resorted to the use of [incendiary weapons](#), with at least 18 documented attacks on opposition-held areas in Aleppo and Idlib between June 5 and August 10. In June, RT broadcast footage of [incendiary weapons](#)—specifically RBK-500 ZAB-2.5SM bombs—being mounted on a Russian Su-34 fighter-ground attack aircraft at a Syrian airbase.

Amnesty International [has concluded](#) that Russian and Syrian government forces appear to have deliberately and systematically targeted hospitals and other medical facilities to pave the way for ground forces to advance on northern Aleppo.

In one notable incident, a humanitarian convoy seeking to deliver life-saving aid to Aleppo governorate was attacked on September 19, 2016 by either Russian or Syrian forces. In the past month,

indiscriminate airstrikes on opposition controlled eastern Aleppo have also had a devastating impact on civilians.

As part of its 2016 campaign for reelection to the Human Rights Council, Russia published an aide memoire with a pledge to “promote states’ compliance with their international human rights obligations.” Its ongoing cooperation with the Syrian government in the indiscriminate bombardment of opposition held areas in Syria, including in eastern Aleppo, does not fulfill the terms of that pledge. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [told the Security Council](#) on September 28 that those using indiscriminate weapons in Aleppo “know they are committing war crimes.”

The credibility and legitimacy of the Human Rights Council rest upon its members demonstrating a genuine commitment to human rights. When deciding which Eastern European candidate to support, member states should carefully consider whether Russia’s Syria abuses are compatible with the principles and aims of the world’s principal inter-governmental human rights body.

Signed

1. Abrar Halap Association for Relief and Development*
2. Ahl Horan*
3. Al Seeraj for Development and Healthcare*
4. Alkawakibi Organization for Human Rights
5. Amrha*
6. Antiwar Committee in Solidarity with the Struggle for Self Determination
7. Attaa Association*
8. Attaa for Relief and Development (ARD)*
9. Balad Syria Organization*
10. Basmet Amal Charity*
11. Baytna Syria
12. Bihar Relief Organization*
13. Bonyan*
14. CARE International
15. Council for Arab-British Understanding
16. Damascene House Foundation for Society Development*
17. Darfur Bar Association
18. Deir Elzoz United Association (FURAT)*
19. Education Without Borders (MIDAD)*
20. Emaar Al Sham Humanitarian Association*
21. Emissa for Development
22. Enjaz Development Foundation*
23. EuroMed Rights Paris

24. Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights
25. Ghiath Matar Foundation*
26. Ghiras Al Nahda*
27. Ghiras Foundation for Childcare and Development
28. Ghiras Syria*
29. Hand in Hand for Syria
30. Help 4 Syria*
31. Hivos People United
32. Human Rights Watch
33. Human Rights First Society
34. Humanitarian Relief Association (IYD)*
35. Insan for Psychosocial Support*
36. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
37. International Humanitarian Relief*
38. International Supporting Woman Association (ISWA)*
39. Irtiqaa Foundation*
40. Just Foreign Policy US
41. Karam Foundation
42. Kesh Malek
43. Local Development and Small Projects Support - LDSPS
44. Maram Foundation for Relief & Development*
45. Mayday Rescue Foundation
46. Middle East Desk Broederlijk Delen - Pax Christi
47. Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights
48. Mountain Foundation*
49. Najda Now International*
50. Nasaem Khair*
51. Orient for Human Relief*
52. PAX
53. Qitaf Al Khair Relief Association*
54. Refugees International
55. Rethink Rebuild Society
56. Saed Charity Association*
57. Save a Soul*
58. Sedra Association for Charity*
59. Shafak Organization
60. Shama Association*
61. Snabel Al Khyr*
62. STAND: The Student-Led Movement to End Mass Atrocities

63. Syria Charity*
64. Syria Civil Defence - The White Helmets
65. Syria Relief*
66. Syria Relief Organization*
67. Syrian Education Commission (SEC)*
68. Syrian Engineers For Construction and Development Organization (SECD)*
69. Syrian Expatriate Medical Association (SEMA)*
70. Syrian Institute for Justice
71. Syrian Medical Mission*
72. Syrian Network for Human Rights
73. Syrian Orphans Organization*
74. Syrians for Truth and Justice - STJ
75. Takaful Al Sham Charity Organization*
76. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information*
77. The Syria Campaign
78. The Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)
79. The Syrian Establishment for Human Care & Enhancement (MASRRAT)*
80. Trocaire
81. Tuba Dernegi*
82. Unified Revolutionary Medical Bureau in East Gouta*
83. Union of Syrians Abroad*
84. Vision GRAM International
85. White Hands - Beyazeller*
86. Women Now for Development

**These organizations are members of the Syria Relief Network (SRN), an umbrella organization of Syrian humanitarian NGOs working inside Syria and neighboring countries to provide relief to Syrians in need of assistance.*