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Syria: UN condemns regime’s shelling of Houla – Terzi: the line’s been crossed: pressure to protect civilians

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The international community condemned the Syrian regime for its shelling of Ohula, which took the lives of women and children, and Minister Giulio Terzi explained that Italy was ready to support tougher resolutions to address the humanitarian crisis.

In a meeting during the night the UN Security Council adopted a declaration, complete with Moscow’s signature, condemning the Assad regime for its shelling of the civilian population which violated the UN resolution calling for the cessation of all forms of violence, including the use of heavy artillery on the civilian population.

Speaking by video link, head of the UN mission in Syria Robert Mood admitted how “many of the circumstances surrounding what happened are still unclear”, and for this reason the 15 members have asked UNSG Ban Ki-moon to open an investigation into what actually happened. An appeal was included at the end of the declaration for the cessation “of all forms of violence and by all parties”.

Houla, a turning point

According to Terzi, the Houla massacre marks a turning point, that declarations and condemnations are no longer sufficient and that “strong international pressure” is needed. “Support for the Annan plan”, the minister added, “must be convinced and without reservation, but the Syrian regime has perhaps not understood that it is not open-ended, and that responsibility for the violation of its conditions falls entirely on the Damascus government and its refusal to cooperate”.

“The only option I feel can definitely be ruled out is the continuation of the massacres. If necessary we will boost the observers mission to 2,000-3,000 persons and, if all else fails to stem the violence and launch a political process to end the crisis, the Security Council will have to assess how to make the mission and its capacity for self-defence more effective”. For a stronger resolution “China’s, and even more importantly Russia’s, role is crucial, but we are discussing an idea that is not yet on the table If similar scenarios were to be repeated in the future we would support them”, he added.

A plan to exit the crisis

A possible exit from the crisis could be a plan proposed by American President Barack Obama for a “soft transition” following the model of Yemen, which would call for Assad’s exile but leave part of his government in place. The US and Russia will discuss the idea at the Los Cabos G20 meeting on 18 and 19 June. Terzi reported that “for some weeks now discussions have regarded a solution that could be acceptable also to those in the Security Council that have thus far had the most problems, and a change at the top of the Syrian regime is surely something to explore”, with “the participation of all the opposition forces, which need to be encouraged toward unity”.

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