



Recommendation 2026 (2013)¹

Final version

The situation in Syria

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its [Resolution 1878 \(2012\)](#) on the situation in Syria, in which it firmly condemned “the widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity committed by Syrian military and security forces” and “the human rights violations committed by some of the armed groups combating the regime”.

2. It is appalled by the fact that, since then, the violence has escalated, resulting in a full-fledged civil war and a humanitarian tragedy: more than 100 000 people have died since the beginning of the conflict, 2 million have taken refuge abroad, 4.25 million are internally displaced and a total of 6.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Also, gender-based violence, including rape, the kidnapping and trafficking of women, sexual exploitation and violence, forced prostitution and forced marriages, has become part of a strategy aimed at destabilising the Syrian population. The Assembly condemns in particular the large-scale use of chemical weapons on 21 August 2013 in the Ghouta area of Damascus, which reportedly resulted in many hundreds of deaths, particularly among civilians, including several hundred children.

3. Once again the Assembly insists that there can be no impunity for those who commit crimes against humanity, whoever and wherever they are. All allegations of violations and crimes committed throughout the Syrian conflict, by virtue of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare must be properly investigated and their perpetrators, whoever and wherever they may be, brought to justice, including, as appropriate, before the International Criminal Court.

4. The Assembly notes in this respect the fact that the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, which presented its report on the Ghouta attack on 16 September confirming the use of chemical weapons, has now returned to Syria to complete investigations on allegations of six additional chemical attacks which occurred before or after that of 21 August.

5. The Assembly welcomes the fact that, against the background of Western threats of military strikes, political developments have taken the upper hand. Intensive diplomatic efforts had led, by mid-September 2013, to a United States-Russia framework agreement on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons and the adoption of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council laying out the modalities of its implementation. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, adopted on 27 September 2013 immediately after the decision of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on special procedures for an expeditious and verifiable destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons by mid-2014, renews hopes for peace and a political settlement to the conflict.

6. The Assembly also welcomes the acceptance by the Syrian authorities of the agreement, highlighted by Syria’s accession to the United Nations Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction and by the handing over by the Syrian authorities of information about its chemical weapons and related infrastructure, according to the agreement.

1. *Assembly debate* on 3 October 2013 (34th Sitting) (see [Doc. 13320](#), report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr von Sydow). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 3 October 2013 (34th Sitting).



The United Nations Security Council resolution obliges the Syrian authorities to accept personnel designated by the OPCW or the United Nations and provide them with immediate and unfettered access to – and the right to inspect – any and all chemical weapons sites.

7. The Assembly is well aware of the huge technical difficulties and legal obstacles to the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons, and that the ongoing civil war in the country increases them immensely. Strong political will is needed to work out the details of implementation of the agreement, and strict compliance by both the Syrian authorities and the opposition are indispensable for its success. Pending cessation of the hostilities, ceasefires should be implemented to allow for inspection of chemical weapons sites, as well as for the transportation and destruction of chemical weapons.

8. In this respect, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge the governments of Council of Europe member States to:

8.1. put pressure on all sides so as to ensure respect for the ceasefires necessary for the implementation of the agreement;

8.2. provide additional resources to the OPCW to carry out its challenging task.

9. The Assembly notes that whereas the international community's agreement on a process aimed at the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons has the merit of renewing hopes for peace, it does not stop the war, which may continue with the use of conventional weapons. Therefore, reiterating that the possibility of eliminating violence and embracing the change for which so many lives have been sacrificed can only be opened up to Syria through a political solution to the conflict, the Assembly supports wholeheartedly the organisation in Geneva of an international peace conference on Syria (Geneva 2) and hopes that it may be convened before the end of 2013.

10. The road map for a political transition in Syria, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, should gradually lead to the creation of conditions for a Syrian-led political process and, eventually, to free and fair elections, on the basis of the Kofi Annan peace plan and the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The Syrian people should be free to build their own future.

11. In this respect, the Assembly is concerned over the growing rifts within the Syrian opposition as well as between its political and military branches. The increasing presence of jihadists and other extremist groups, including terrorist groups, among those who are fighting the regime, fuels legitimate fears among the various religious and ethnic minorities about their future in a post-conflict Syria. Sadly, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 seems to have deepened divisions among the opposition groups. The Assembly also warns against external players, who, because of specific geopolitical interests or for sectarian reasons, are providing political, military and financial support to extremist groups.

12. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge the governments of Council of Europe member States to:

12.1. make use of their bilateral relations with Arab States and other States in the region to secure their support for a ceasefire in preparation for the international peace conference on Syria (Geneva 2);

12.2. engage in all international efforts aimed at uniting those Syrian opposition groups which favour democracy and tolerance and bring them to the negotiating table;

12.3. support the emergence of a democratic, inclusive and stable State in Syria respectful of human rights and the rights of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, rather than the fall of the current regime;

12.4. make preliminary plans to address the devastation to the physical infrastructure resulting from the war.

13. The Assembly reiterates that the mosaic of ethnic, cultural and religious groups which forms the Syrian population, religious tolerance, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, must be preserved in a future post-conflict Syria.

14. The Assembly further believes that the emerging unity of the international community, as witnessed by the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, should now focus on tackling the dramatic humanitarian consequences of the conflict. In this respect, recalling its Resolutions [1902 \(2012\)](#) on

the European response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and 1940 (2013) on the situation in the Middle East, as well as its current affairs debate, held in April 2013, on “Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq: how to organise and support international assistance?”, the Assembly:

14.1. calls on the Council of Europe member States to demonstrate solidarity and shared responsibility by taking the necessary measures to cater for Syrian refugees as effectively as possible. In this respect, it welcomes the Swedish authorities’ decision to grant permanent residence permits and the right to family reunion to all Syrian refugees currently in the country, as well as to those who will arrive and obtain a resident permit. It encourages other member States to consider taking similar measures;

14.2. reiterates its gratitude to the receiving countries, in particular the Jordanian, Turkish, Lebanese and Iraqi authorities, for hosting and assisting Syrian refugees;

14.3. calls on the Council of Europe member States, as well as the international community as a whole, to respond urgently to the calls for funds, including additional funds to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to assist the Syrian refugees and also the neighbouring countries receiving them, as well as the displaced persons within Syria. Noting the recent sharp increase in the arrival of Syrian refugees in European non-neighbouring countries, international solidarity and assistance should also be extended to these countries;

14.4. underlines that the problems posed by the dramatic situation of refugees and displaced persons in Syria and in receiving countries can only be solved if there are prospects for peace and a political solution to the conflict;

14.5. encourages Council of Europe member States to ensure that the effects of the very widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence against women, and the humanitarian consequences of the Syrian conflict, as well as the need for urgent international assistance, are put on the agenda of the forthcoming international peace conference on Syria (Geneva 2).