

France calls for strong UN resolution to enforce Syria's surrender of chemical weapons

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UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

President Francois Hollande of France.

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French President François Hollande today called for a United Nations Security resolution that would authorize the potential use of force if Syria fails to comply with its agreement to hand over its chemical weapons following the last month's sarin gas attack on a Damascus suburb.

“France wanted a strong reaction to respond to this appalling crime and to dissuade [President] Bashar al-Assad’s regime from committing new massacres,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate, noting that this pressure led to Syria’s agreement to give up its chemical weapons.

The divided Council has been unable to adopt a resolution on Syria and Mr. Hollande called on the five permanent members – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States – to collectively renounce their right to a veto in the case of crimes against humanity.

“France has three demands,” he said, referring to Council negotiations over verification and the destruction of Syria’s chemical stockpiles. “The first is that the text enables the Security Council to take up the issue at any time.

“The second is that the resolution includes measures under Chapter VII in case of Syrian non-compliance with its commitments,” he added, referring to the chapter in the UN Charter that provides for the possible use of military force amid other measures to ensure compliance. “The third demand is that those who committed these crimes must be brought to justice.”

Stressing the need for urgent action to end the fighting, in which he said 120,000 people have been killed and a quarter of the population driven from their homes, Mr. Hollande said the forthcoming Geneva meeting must not be just a talking shop but must take decisions to install a transition government with full executive powers to re-establish peace, protect every community and organize future elections.

Turning to other hot spots in the Middle East, he noted the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, stressing that these were the only path to peace and a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side within secure borders. He also referred to hopeful statements by Iran’s new President Hassan Rouhani on engagement over his country’s nuclear programme.

“His words must now be translated into acts,” he said. “What France is waiting for from Iran are concrete deeds that prove that this country has no military nuclear programme even if it obviously has the right to pursue its civil programme.” Iran says its nuclear programme is solely for the peaceful production of energy, but many countries fear it is seeking nuclear weapons.

Turning to Africa, Mr. Hollande cited the threat of terrorism, voicing horror at the “barbarous attack” by militants on a mall in Nairobi, Kenya. But he also pointed to hopeful signs such as the Security Council-backed French and African intervention in Mali to drive out militants and terrorists from the north and restore stability in the West African country.

He called for a similar Council resolution to provide the logistical and financial means for an African force to restore order in the conflict-riven Central African Republic.

“In every field – security, proliferation, development, climate – there is no worse danger than inaction,” he concluded. “The worst decision is not to take one. The worst danger is not to see it. It is the responsibility of the UN to act. And each time it reveals its impotence, peace loses.

“That is why I propose a code of good conduct to for the Council’s permanent members: in the case of mass crimes they must renounce their right to a veto.”

On the margins of the General Assembly, Mr. Hollande met with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with whom he discussed ways to avoid a further spill over of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon. The two men also exchanged views on the situation in the Central African Republic and Mali and the role of France in supporting both nations.

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