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As Annan Resigns, UN Condemns Violence in Syria

This is IN THE NEWS in VOA Special English.

The United Nations General Assembly has approved a resolution on Syria. But it does not require any actions and cannot be enforced. The resolution condemns the government's use of heavy weapons against rebels. It also criticizes the U.N. Security Council for failing to stop the violence in Syria.

Friday's vote came as Syrian activists reported more violence in the seventeen-month-old uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

On Thursday, Kofi Annan announced he will leave at the end of the month as the United Nations and Arab League negotiator for Syria. He blamed his resignation what he called a lack of unity in the Security Council.

KOFI ANNAN: "Syria can still be saved from the worst calamity if the international community can show the courage and leadership necessary to compromise on their partial interest for the sake of the Syrian people."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says the Security Council has become "paralyzed" over Syria. On Friday he urged the major powers to cooperate. He said "the immediate interests of the Syrian people must be paramount over any larger rivalries of influence."

Unlike Security Council measures, General Assembly resolutions cannot be vetoed.

Since last year, Syrian allies Russia and China have vetoed three Security Council resolutions on Syria. The proposals would have held President Assad responsible for his failure to honor Mr. Annan's peace plan. They would have also threatened the president with sanctions. The Annan plan included a cease-fire and talks on a temporary government. Rebel forces did not commit themselves to the plan either.

The Obama Administration said Mr. Annan's resignation shows the failure of Russia and China to support meaningful resolutions against Mr. Assad.

But China says it has been actively "supporting and cooperating with" Mr. Annan's efforts. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said China regrets his resignation and understands the difficulties of his work.

The Security Council established a U.N. observer mission in Syria in April. But the violence increased, and half of the three hundred military observers left in July.

French ambassador Gerard Araud is this month's president of the Security Council. He denied suggestions that he opposes an extension of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, or UNSMIS, past August nineteenth. He noted a recent Security Council resolution permitting a renewal, if the government stops shelling civilian areas and if the level of violence decreases.

GERARD ARAUD: "And on this basis, I think we'll decide whether we keep the UNSMIS. If we can't keep the UNSMIS in Syria, I think we are ready, of course, to consider any proposal by the secretary-general."

British Prime Minister David Cameron is calling for more aggressive action.

DAVID CAMERON: "We need to pass resolutions at the United Nations to put further pressure on Syria. I want to see them under so-called Chapter 7 so they have full legal backing of the UN: sanctions, travel bans, asset freezes -- all the steps we can take."

Government forces have been attacking Aleppo, Syria's largest city, with tanks and helicopters over the last three weeks. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have fled and an unknown number have died.

And that's IN THE NEWS in VOA Special English. I'm Steve Ember.

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