

EDITORIAL

JULIANA VENGOECHEA-BARRIOS

The outbreak of civil and political unrest that began in Tunisia and that has spread throughout Arab nations in North Africa and the Middle East had its first manifestation in Syria in March 2011. Ever since the civil unrest and the uprising of protests against the Government of President Bashar Al-Assad has escalated. The international community watches in awe as violent governmental repression and crackdowns are in the rise, and the numbers of civilian casualties peaked in late February 2012, with a United Nations estimate of about 7500. Despite global outcry against the violent methods of President Al-Assad and in the verge of an imminent civil war the international community has yet to take a definite action. Having as backdrop the aftermath of the uprising in Libya, the situation in Syria presents a mayor challenge to international law.

The United Nations, through its Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, its High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, the Human Rights Council and the majority of the General Assembly have all clearly stated that President Al-Assad must step down. The UN and the Arab League designated former Secretary General Kofi Annan as special envoy to Syria in an effort to curb the violence occurring in the country. Despite two days of meetings between Mr. Annan and President

Assad in early March, little progress was achieved. The efforts of the United Nations and the Arab League have fallen short, and without a more definite action in the hands of the Security Council it is virtually impossible to find a definite solution. The Security Council's draft resolution on Syria was vetoed by Russia and China, and with no prospects of a change of mind of these two permanent members any effective action of the Security Council is barred.

Founding principles of the United Nations such as the protection and promotion of human rights and the right and exercise of self determination are clearly being ignored by the Syrian government and as the situation rests it seems highly unlikely that the UN will have a mechanism to hold President al-Assad and the government of Syria accountable for its obligations towards the Syrian people.

The potential risks of a foreign military intervention seem to outweigh the concern for the protection of the rights and lives of the Syrian people. There are differences in the context of the situation in Syria from that in Libya that seem to be justifying a different international reaction. However, the loss of lives and protracted violence is a common element to both situations, and it seems to be that this should be the driving force for the United Nations, through its Security Council, to take action. For as long as politics and national interests dominate international communal action, the effectiveness of the United Nations will continue to be questioned. This is a pivotal opportunity for the UN not to repeat errors of the past. Hopefully Homs will not go down in history as Rwanda or Srebrenica.

