

Russia, China Veto UN Bid to Refer Syria to International Court

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Russia and China vetoed on Thursday a resolution to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court for possible prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the country's three-year civil war.

This was the fourth time Russia and China have blocked United Nations Security Council action on Syria. Moscow is a close ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government. More than 150,000 people have been killed during the Syrian conflict.

"It is clear in this case that no side in this tragedy is innocent," said UN Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson, addressing the Security Council on behalf of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

There were 62 co-sponsors of the French-drafted resolution, diplomats said. The French-drafted resolution was put to a vote knowing it would be vetoed.

"If members of the council continue to be unable to agree on a measure that could provide

some accountability for the ongoing crimes, the credibility of this body and the entire organization will continue to suffer," Eliasson said.

The ICC prosecutor cannot investigate the situation in Syria without a referral from the 15-member Security Council because Damascus is not a member of the Rome Statute that established the Hague-based court a decade ago. The Security Council has previously referred Libya and Darfur, Sudan to the ICC.

UN investigators said in March that they had expanded their list of suspected war criminals from both sides in the civil war and that the evidence was solid enough to prepare any court indictment.

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay told the Security Council last month that human rights violations by Syrian government forces "far outweigh" those by armed opposition groups.

Although the U.S. is not a party to the ICC, it agreed to support the draft resolution after ensuring that Israel would be protected from any possible prosecution at the International Criminal Court related to its occupation of the Golan Heights in Syria, UN diplomats said.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in a 1967 war and annexed the strategic plateau in a move the world has not recognized. Syrian troops are not allowed in an area of separation — monitored by UN peacekeepers — under a 1973 ceasefire formalized in 1974.

Eleven countries on the Security Council are members of the International Criminal Court. Like the U.S., Russia, China and Rwanda are not.

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