

Syria regime, IS used chem weapons: UN

US vows to 'seek accountability' for attacks

AFP, United Nations

A UN investigation has established that President Bashar al-Assad's forces carried out at least two chemical attacks in Syria and that Islamic State jihadists used mustard gas as a weapon, according to a report seen by AFP on Wednesday.

The panel was able to identify the perpetrators of three chemical attacks carried out in 2014 and 2015, but was unable to draw conclusions in the other six cases that it has been investigating over the past year.

The report from the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) found that the Syrian regime dropped chemical weapons on two villages in northwestern Idlib province: Talmenes on April 21, 2014 and Sarmin on March 16, 2015.

In both instances, Syrian air force helicopters dropped "a device" on houses that was followed by the "release of a toxic substance," which in the case of Sarmin matched "the characteristics of chlorine."

The panel found that the Islamic State

"was the only entity with the ability, capability, motive and the means to use sulphur mustard" in an attack on the town of Marea in northern Aleppo province on August 21, 2015.

The Assad regime has repeatedly denied that it has used chemical weapons in Syria, but the report said that in all three cases, it had "sufficient information to reach a conclusion on the actors involved."

The findings prompted immediate calls for the perpetrators to face justice.

US Ambassador Samantha Power called for "strong and swift action" by the Security Council to follow up on the findings of the report.

The Security Council is due to discuss the report on Tuesday and could decide to impose sanctions on Syria or ask the International Criminal Court to take up the matter as a war crime.

Syria agreed to get rid of its chemical stockpile and to refrain from making any use of toxic substances in warfare when it joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, under pressure from Russia.



Turkish Army tanks driving to the Syrian-Turkish border town of Jarabulus, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

YEMEN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

UN rights chief urges int'l probe

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday called for the creation of an independent international body to investigate an array of serious violations in war-torn Yemen.

In a new report, the UN laid out a long line of allegations of grave human rights abuses by all sides in Yemen's bloody conflict, which has left nearly 4,000 civilians dead.

"Civilians in Yemen have suffered unbearably over the years from the effects of a number of simultaneous and overlapping armed conflicts," UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

"And they continue to suffer, absent any form of accountability and justice, while those responsible for the violations and abuses against them enjoy impunity," he said.

"Such a manifestly protracted unjust situation must no longer be tolerated by the international community," he insisted.

The report listed numerous attacks on residential areas, market places, hospitals and schools, pointing out that in several cases investigators were "unable to identify the presence of possible military objectives."

As of August 23, an estimated 3,799 civilians had been killed and 6,711 injured since a Saudi-led Arab coalition began air raids in March last year in support of Yemen's internationally recognised government.

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