**Russia, China Veto UN Move to Refer Syria to ICC**

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Russia and China on Thursday vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution referring the Syrian crisis to the International Criminal Court for investigation of possible war crimes, prompting angry responses from the proposal's supporters who said the two countries are blocking justice and should be ashamed.

This is the fourth time the two countries have used their veto power as permanent council members to deflect action against the government of President Bashar Assad.

More than 60 countries signed on to support the French-drafted resolution in a dramatic move to demand a path to justice in the conflict, which has entered its fourth year.

The resolution would have referred Syria's crisis to the world's permanent war crimes tribunal without specifically targeting either the government or the opposition.

Before the vote, U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson pleaded with council members to find unity and "put an end to this long nightmare." French Ambassador Gerard Araud warned, "A veto would cover up all crimes. It would be vetoing justice."

But Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin walked into the council meeting with a smile, telling reporters, "I'm going to be boringly predictable." He earlier had called the resolution a "publicity stunt" that would hurt efforts to find a political solution to a crisis that activists say has killed more than 160,000 and sent millions fleeing.

U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power had her speech ready for the promised veto. "Sadly, because of the decision of the Russian Federation to back the Syrian regime no matter what it does, the Syrian people will not see justice," she said. She added, "There should be accountability for those members of the council who prevented accountability."

The draft resolution condemned the "widespread violation" of human rights and international humanitarian law by Syrian authorities and pro-government militias as well as abuses and violations by "non-state armed groups" during the last three years. It would have referred the conflict to the world's permanent war crimes tribunal without targeting either side.

"It is to Russia and China's shame that they have chosen to block efforts to achieve justice for the Syrian people," said British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant. "And it is disgraceful that they have yet again vetoed the Security Council's efforts to take action in response to the appalling human rights violations being committed every day in Syria."

Rwandan Ambassador Eugene Richard Gasana said, "This council cannot be inured to mass tragedies."

The Security Council has been deeply divided over Syria, with Syrian allies Russia and China at odds with the U.S., its Western allies and other members who support the opposition.

Frustration has soared as the international community struggles to find a solution to the war, deliver humanitarian aid to almost 3.5 million Syrians in need and end impunity for horrific crimes.

Attempts at peace talks are at a standstill, leading the joint U.N.-Arab league envoy who tried to broker them to resign.

"Russia and China's vote for continued impunity is a disgrace of historic proportion," said Richard Dicker, director of international justice at Human Rights Watch. The opposition Syrian Coalition called the vetoes a "disgrace."