U.N. Security Council Sees Video Evidence of a Chemical Attack in Syria

April 16, 2015

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The New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/17/world/middleeast/un-security-council-sees-video-evidence-of-a-chemical-attack-in-syria.html>

UNITED NATIONS — A Monday night in March, at 8:30. The sound of helicopters, then a thud, then the smell of bleach, overpowering, followed by a surge of wounded to the local hospital. They were all short of breath. Some vomited. All reeked of bleach.

This is what Dr. Mohamed Tennari, 35, from the Syrian town of Sarmeen, told diplomats on the [United Nations Security Council](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/s/security_council/index.html?inline=nyt-org) on Thursday in a closed-door meeting called by the United States to draw attention to suspicions of the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in the war in [Syria](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html?inline=nyt-geo).

Dr. Tennari showed a video taken at the hospital that he ran. In it, two children are piled on their grandmother’s body. A third, a baby, is on the next bed. Their mouths are open. Gloved hands give them oxygen, then an injection. Dr. Tennari says later that all three children, ages 1 to 3, died. Their parents, too. And their grandmother.

Samantha Power, the American ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters after the session that there were few “dry eyes in the room,” and that the Council would seek to determine who was responsible and hold them accountable.

“We need an attribution mechanism so we know precisely who carried out these attacks,” she said.

The United States, along with its allies Britain and France, has accused the Syrian government of dropping chlorine-filled bombs — “only the Assad regime has helicopters,” Ms. Power said Thursday — though Russia says there is insufficient evidence. It has been impossible to establish independently who is responsible, and the Council is likely to continue to face that problem. No one so far has been assigned the task of figuring out who was behind the attacks.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [said in late March](https://www.opcw.org/news/article/allegations-of-toxic-chemical-attacks-in-syria/) that it was monitoring reports of chlorine use in aerial bombardments in Syria. The agency confirmed in September that [chlorine had been used](https://www.opcw.org/news/article/opcw-fact-finding-mission-compelling-confirmation-that-chlorine-gas-used-as-weapon-in-syria/) “repeatedly and systematically” in bombing three villages in northern Syria, but its report stopped short of saying who used it.

The Security Council passed a binding resolution in early March prohibiting the use of toxic chemicals like chlorine as weapons of war in Syria. It did not assign blame either.

Dr. Tennari was not formally trained in how to treat chlorine attack victims. He studied to be a radiologist and trained in government hospitals, before protests broke out against President [Bashar al-Assad](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/bashar_al_assad/index.html?inline=nyt-per)’s administration in 2011, then turned into full-fledged war. He ended up running the hospital in Sarmeen.

Dr. Tennari was watching television at home that Monday night when the helicopters started whirring overhead. He raced in to the hospital, which was soon overrun. As many as 120 injured people poured in that night after what he described as two attacks.

“It was chaos,” he said.

There were not nearly enough beds, so patients were sprawled on the floor, he said. Some were piled on top of one another. Dr. Tennari said he tried to save the three children shown with their grandmother’s body in the video that he said was taken that night; there is no way to verify independently when and where it was shot.

Their father was a friend of his, he said, and ran an electronics repair shop in town.

The family lived in a basement apartment which became “a gas chamber” when toxic gas seeped in through a vent, Dr. Tennari said. Even the rescue teams were nervous about entering.

Even treating the patients was harmful. Dr. Tennari said his eyes itched, and he felt nauseated. One of the nurses fainted from the chlorine fumes off the injured.

Dr. Tennari maintains that civilians were targeted; most of the injured were women and children. He said he had feared that the hospital itself would be bombed, and the staff herded patients out as soon as they were well enough.

Dr. Zaher Sahloul, president of the Syrian American Medical Society, who also testified to the Council, said he would meet Friday with Russian diplomats to urge them to press the Assad government to let in medical supplies. A shipment of dialysis fluid has been blocked from getting to the besieged city of Douma, Dr. Sahloul said.

This week [Human Rights Watch](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/h/human_rights_watch/index.html?inline=nyt-org) said it had uncovered evidence suggesting that the Syrian government used chlorine or other toxic chemicals in barrel bomb attacks on opposition-held areas in the Idlib governorate between March 16 and 31. Sarmeen, where Dr. Tennari runs the hospital, is in that governorate.

“Unless the Council delivers on its call for accountability and sanctions, including an arms embargo, it risks losing credibility,” Philippe Bolopion, United Nations director at [Human Rights Watch,](https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/13/syria-chemicals-used-idlib-attacks) said Thursday in a statement.