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Assad Continues Attacks on Civilians as ICC Lacks Jurisdiction

By John Glaser

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[The Syrian city of Homs was the latest to be attacked](#) as the Assad regime continues making war on its own people, [despite promises to end the assaults](#). Army tanks rolled into Homs early Saturday, snipers took positions, and shots have been firing indiscriminately. Residents reported that bombs were dropped, homes burned, and phones lines were down in various neighborhoods, as Syrian forces randomly detained residents.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an activist group, said Saturday that 21 people have been killed in Homs province over the last 24 hours.

After the Obama administration [called for President Bashar al Assad to step down](#) on Thursday, calls for an investigation into Assad's possible crimes against humanity became prominent. However, [Luis Moreno-Ocampo, the chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, issued a statement Friday](#) saying that he currently has no legal authority to open such a probe.

Ocampo's reluctance regarding Assad's massive crimes against thousands of innocent people lies in stark contrast to his eagerness to investigate and issue an arrest warrant to Moammar Gadhafi of Libya, where U.S.-NATO forces opened a bombing campaign. At least in part, his reluctance to target Assad for crimes against humanity is due to the reluctance of the U.N. Security Council to grant the prosecutor the authority to do so, which is required by the Rome Statute.

Navi Pillay, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, asked the U.N. Security Council Thursday to authorize an ICC investigation into the Syrian crackdown, citing mounting evidence that the government has committed crimes against humanity.

[Assad will give an interview on Syrian state television on Sunday](#), in his first television appearance since June 20, and the fourth since pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in March. According to the state news agency SANA, the interview will address “the situation in Syria, the continuing process of reforms, the repercussions of American and Western political and economic pressures and a vision of the future for Syria in the current regional and international context.”

According to the head of International Committee for the Red Cross’s delegation in Syria, Marianne Gasser, [Syrian authorities are on the verge of granting access for the first time to its prisons](#) — where more than 10,000 activists and other civilians have been detained, often in mass arrests. However, in exchange for its access to detainees as per the agency’s usual protocol, the ICRC’s confidential findings on the treatment of prisoners and their conditions of detention are shared only with detaining authorities.