France sees 14 uses of chemical weapons in Syria in recent weeks

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said France has indications that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s government has carried out 14 attacks with chemical weapons since signing an international pact banning their use.

“What this show us is that Bashar Al-Assad’s regime, in spite of its commitments, continues to be able to produce chemical weapons and to use them,” Fabius told reporters in Washington, adding that France was examining samples from the attacks.

Fabius, according to the New York Times, said the attacks had been carried out in recent weeks and mostly involved chlorine bombs. Human Rights Watch reported earlier in the day that it had evidence that the Syrian regime had dropped chlorine bombs from helicopters on three towns in northern Syria in April.

The Chemical Weapons Convention signed by Syria last year does not define chlorine as a banned element, but it does prohibit its use in weapons.

In an interview with CNN from Damascus, Syria’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Faisal al Mekdad, denied the use of chlorine gas. “I assure you 100% that chlorine gas has never been used by
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U.S. President Barack Obama, after meeting with Syrian opposition leaders at the White House Tuesday, condemned the Syrian regime for deliberately targeting civilian populations in aerial bombardments, including those using barrel bombs.

Barrel bombs are containers filled with explosives that are dropped from aircraft or helicopters, causing widespread destruction on impact. The U.N. Security Council in February passed a resolution calling for an end the use of barrel bombs in populated areas as well the indiscriminate use of any arms in those areas.

Human Rights Watch said the Syrian regime, which has absolute control of the airspace over its territory, has used barrel bombs in 85 distinct locations since that time. The Syrian Network for Human Rights said there have been more than 920 deaths due to barrel bombings since the resolution was passed.

Obama met with Syrian Opposition Coalition President Ahmad Jarba as U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said at the United Nations that he had accepted the resignation of his special envoy to stalled negotiations to end the conflict. No replacement was immediately announced.

A White House statement reaffirmed that Al-Assad had “lost all legitimacy to rule Syria” and that the United States would continue work to find a political solution to the conflict that includes a transition to a new governing authority.