

Remarks by High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference of the Brussels Conference

Check against delivery!

I would like to thank all my friends and co-chairs for having prepared this Conference and started this Conference this morning together with a collective effort, together with the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations [Stephen O'Brien] and the Foreign Ministers of Germany [Sigmar Gabriel], Kuwait [Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al Hamad Al Sabah], Norway [Børge Brende], Qatar [Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman] and the United Kingdom [Boris Johnson].

I chaired today in Brussels this Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region". We brought together representatives of over 70 countries and international organisations, international and Syrian civil society and built on previous years' Conferences in Kuwait and London. The unity of the international community is today more not less relevant than ever and our common work is more not less urgent today, to bring humanitarian aid to Syrians and to put an end to the war.

The conflict in Syria has brought about destruction and human suffering on an enormous scale. In particular, the Conference condemned the use of chemical weapons by the government and Da'esh, as identified by the UN-OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] Joint Investigative Mechanism and the attacks on Khan Sheikhun yesterday. The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, must stop immediately.

The international community is committed – today re-commits – to working together to support a peaceful future for Syria and all Syrians in a sovereign, independent, unitary and territorially integral country where all Syrians will be able to live in peace and security.

We committed to work for a sustainable inclusive peace while addressing the urgent humanitarian needs inside Syria and supporting the work for neighbouring countries in hosting over five million refugees.

The Conference recognised that humanitarian needs of vulnerable people, especially women and children, inside Syria and in the region were never so great. We decided to respond to this humanitarian crisis, in particularly in response to the UN appeals – and Stephen O'Brien will for sure be happy to give you more details on this particular issue following your questions-. But we all agreed that it is important to ensure not only humanitarian support is

available, but that it can be delivered. Access for this aid throughout the country has to be improved and sieges and starvation tactics have to stop.

Humanitarian assistance alone, however, cannot stop the war, cannot stop the suffering of Syria's people. What Syrians need and want is a political solution negotiated between the Syrian parties, on the basis of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, including 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. The Conference highlighted clearly that any lasting solution to the conflict has to be centred on meeting the democratic aspirations and needs of the Syrian people and providing safety and security for all Syrians. Only through a genuine and inclusive political transition will there be an end to the conflict.

We, therefore, gave our full support to the Geneva peace talks and commended and encouraged the excellent work of the UN Special Envoy [for Syria] Staffan de Mistura. We also stressed the role of civil society, including women's organisations that was recognised as a key part of a lasting solution.

More attention was given also to the importance of achieving full compliance with the ceasefire agreed at the Astana meetings and we recognised a special and important role and responsibility that the three guarantors hold when it comes to its full implementation – meaning Russia, Turkey and now Iran.

More needs also to be done to protect civilians and relief workers in this terrible conflict. There must be no doubt that those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law or human rights, whoever they are – whoever they are – will be held accountable. In particular, we condemn, as I said, the use of chemical weapons, as reported in yesterday's attack, and demand that they cease and that accountability is guaranteed through the appropriate mechanisms.

The third theme of our Conference was a recognition of the important role played by the neighbouring countries – as you know the Conference focussed also on the future of the region –, especially Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. We have agreed documents setting out mutual commitments between Lebanon and Jordan and the international community. These countries need our continued support and they will continue to get it. Today we agreed on this all together.

In particular we need to support the economic development of neighbouring countries to address the impact of the protracted crisis as well as opportunities for Syrians to secure their livelihoods. We need to increase our work to reach the goal of getting all refugee children, vulnerable children in host communities and children in Syria into quality education. No lost generation can be accepted. Practical steps were agreed today to make this happen.

Finally – the fourth theme – we highlighted that reconstruction and international support for its implementation would be a peace dividend -a very powerful one – but only once a credible and inclusive political transition is firmly underway. We heard from representatives of civil society inside Syria, who contributed with their personal testimony –

sometimes very moving ones – and also with very practical and political ideas that indicated us the way on how we can act to help the people of Syria.

Today's Conference has agreed on a holistic approach to the Syrian crisis. The urgent needs we need to face continue to respond to the dire humanitarian situation by ensuring assistance and protection for those in need and support to the countries in the region. The scale of suffering is such that a political solution is more urgent than ever before. Investment of political work in supporting a resolution to the crisis is key in securing a future, any future, but especially a free and democratic future for Syria and its people. Only Syrians can make the agreement that will secure peace. But the commitment of the international community and the region – that today we have taken- is supporting them in achieving that a peaceful future is essential and today we stated this. Sustainable and inclusive peace in Syria for the Syrians remains the objective of all our common work.

That has not always been an easy meeting today but it has been, I think, a constructive one.

I thank you very much and I will invite my colleagues to answer to your questions unless you have any specific questions particularly directed to me.

Q. If Raqqa falls, it will not necessary fall into the hands of [the President of Syria, Bashar al-]Assad and how will it play into the international cooperation to try to solve and make any political progress and find a root to any peace in Syria?

Just one word on this because, as Børge [Brende, Foreign Minister of Norway] rightly mentioned, there is a military strategy of the [U.S.-led] Anti-Da'esh Coalition – we discussed this a few weeks ago in Washington -. There is together with it the humanitarian component and I would like to stress one unequivocal principle: as we underline that reconstruction and support to the reconstruction from the international community is linked to the beginning of a political transition, humanitarian assistance and help is always unconditional and goes to every human being in need. But, then, there is a political component and there is not going to be any military strategy that can substitute a true political solution. And this is going to be true all over Syria because what we heard today from the Syrian friends who addressed our ministerial meeting with powerful words, what is needed is a political situation in the country, governance in the country, that will allow each and every Syrian to feel home in Syria. Unless this happens, there will not be any sustainable peace and no sustainable social and human reconstruction of the country far before the economic one.

So I think this is clear. We have three components of the work to be done: the military one against Da'esh, the military efforts to bring the 'hudna', the ceasefire, into place, for real and the humanitarian and political work. These are all components of the same work. And today even in very difficult conditions, I believe, we witnessed a moment of a serious, frank, but constructive and unified purpose, more than I expected. I hope and I believe

– I expect, as we say in diplomatic terms – that the consistency of all the actors at the table will be proven in the coming hours on all these different elements; the military dynamics on the ground, the humanitarian delivery and the political efforts.

Just one second, just to remind you all on the numbers, but also on the co-chairs declaration. We will release it exactly at the end of the conference day, so there you will have the final common pledge, but also the resume – somehow – of the co-chairs declaration getting the inputs of the interventions today.

Thank you.