

Syria: Declaration by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU

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Seven years ago, what began as a peaceful demonstration in the midst of the promise of the so-called Arab Spring quickly became a full-scale civil war in Syria that has left more than 400 000 people dead, more than 11 million displaced and close to 19 million Syrians in need of assistance. Neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey struggle to cope with the largest exodus in recent history.

Pro-democracy protests started in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa and soon expanded to the entire country, only to be met with brutal repression by the Syrian security forces. The regime's merciless violence and brutal war against its own people has not only led to civil war, chaos and destruction, it also paved the way to the rise of extremism and terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al-Nusra.

Today the conflict takes civilian lives every day despite the promises of de-escalation and countless calls by the international community to silence the guns.

Saving lives in Ghouta and everywhere in Syria as well as protecting civilians must be paramount. Humanitarian needs exist across Syria but are especially critical in Eastern Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin right now. UNSC resolution 2401 is the international community's unanimous response to address the violence and deteriorating humanitarian situation throughout Syria, but it remains largely unobserved due to the continued ground offensive and aerial bombardment, as well as the deliberate targeting of civilians and medical infrastructures in Eastern Ghouta by the regime, supported by Russia and Iran. We deplore also the impeded access to humanitarian assistance due to the regime, and the consistent removal of medical items from humanitarian convoys. The EU also expresses deep concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afrin following the Turkish military operation. The implementation of the UNSCR 2401 by all parties is

necessary to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuation which are urgently needed across Syria, but particularly in Eastern Ghouta and Afrin.

Today, we reiterate our call to all parties for the immediate and full implementation of UNSC Resolution 2401 demanding a ceasefire without delay and call again on Russia, Iran and Turkey, as the EU did in the HR's letter to their respective ministers after the 26 February Foreign Affairs Council, to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as Astana guarantors.

From the very beginning the European Union was clear that there can be no military solution to this conflict. We reiterate that this horrific humanitarian crisis can only be brought to an end by a sustainable political solution. This can only be achieved through a genuine and inclusive political process that meets the democratic aspirations and needs of the Syrian people in line with relevant UNSC Resolutions, including the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and the UNSC Resolution 2254. The EU reiterates its support for the work of the UN Special Envoy and the UN-led Geneva process in this regard. The EU played its part in the fight against Da'esh and now that this terrorist organisation is almost defeated in Syria we believe that a political agreement remains the only way towards a sustainable solution to the conflict, including the lasting eradication of violent extremism.

Reaching a meaningful and inclusive political agreement, which meets the aspirations of all Syrians and includes with adequate representation of women in intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, is vital.

Democracy, human rights and rule of law are fundamental principles and the European Union is working to translate them into concrete initiatives. There can be no meaningful transition in Syria without justice and fair representation of all communities. We commend the constructive role played by the Syrian Negotiation Commission and its engagement in the process. We call on the regime to engage meaningfully in talks and on its backers to use their influence to ensure this.

We will pursue accountability for war crimes relentlessly; this is the indispensable basis for national reconciliation. We also condemn the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and Da'esh confirmed in the reports of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism and stress our grave concern at continued reports of chemical weapons use. These recent reports need to be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators of these horrendous crimes need to be brought to justice. The international community cannot tolerate impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The EU will continue to support the resilience of the Syrian population. In opposition held areas the local administrative structures will continue to profit from the EU support. Syria has to be brought back together as a sovereign and undivided country. In this regard, the EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria, only once a comprehensive, inclusive and genuine political transition is firmly in place in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and will keep supporting the neighboring countries.

The European Union is the leading donor in the international response to the Syrian crisis with an overall total of over €10.6 billion since 2011. The Brussels II conference on 24-25 April 2018 will be another step taken by the EU and the UN to ensure that the international community remains focused on the Syria conflict and to address the urgent humanitarian needs of those affected by it as well as supporting the resilience of refugee-hosting countries.

Syria's destiny lies in peace, democracy, equal citizenship and the rule of law. The European Union will continue to work for this with determination and with consistency, for the Syrian people.

The EU will continue to stand with the Syrians.

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