Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Chairman's Conclusions of Friends of Syria meeting

2012-02-27

The first meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People (“the Friends’ Group”), was held in Tunis on 24 February 2012, with the participation of more than 60 countries and representatives from the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab Maghreb Union and the Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf States to discuss the worsening situation in Syria.

The Friends’ Group reaffirmed its firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of Syria. It expressed strong condemnation of the Syrian regime’s ongoing, widespread, and systematic human rights violations, including: the indiscriminate use of force against civilians; the killing and persecution of peaceful protestors; and sexual violence and ill-treatment of thousands of detainees, including children. The Syrian regime’s brutal actions over the past eleven months have led to the death of thousands of innocent civilians, caused widespread destruction, forced tens of thousands of Syrians to flee their homes, and created widespread suffering among the Syrian people. Journalists portraying the truth about what is happening in Syria have paid with their lives. The Group viewed the regime’s use of heavy artillery and tanks to attack residential areas of cities and towns as particularly reprehensible. The atrocities committed, as the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry has said, amount in some cases to crimes against humanity.

The Friends’ Group affirmed its goal of a political solution to this crisis that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity, freedom, peace, reform, democracy, prosperity and stability. The Friends’ Group recognized that this solution should address the concern of all citizens of Syria, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. It expressed its strongest possible concern about the situation in Syria and called for the following steps to be taken as a matter of urgency:

Support for the League of Arab States

The Friends’ Group commended the League of Arab States for their leadership on this issue and welcomed the League’s actions and proposals to achieve a peaceful resolution of the crisis. It underlined the need for an immediate end to all violence and for the full implementation of the decisions and resolutions of the League of Arab States on the situation in Syria, notably resolutions 7444 of 22 January 2012 and 7446 of 12 February 2012, that, inter alia, call for the Syrian government to:

Cease all violence and protect its population;

Release all persons arbitrarily detained due to the recent incidents;

Withdraw all Syrian military and armed forces from cities and towns, and return them to their original home barracks;

Guarantee the freedom of peaceful demonstrations; and

Allow full and unhindered access and movement for all relevant League of Arab States' institutions and Arab and international media in all parts of Syria to determine the truth about the situation on the ground and monitor the incidents taking place.

The Friends' Group noted the Arab League's request to the United Nations Security Council to issue a resolution to form a joint Arab-UN peacekeeping force following a cessation of violence by the regime as outlined above and agreed to continue discussions on the appropriate conditions for the deployment of such a force.

Political Transition

The Friends' Group called for an inclusive Syrian-led political process conducted in an environment free from violence, fear, intimidation and extremism and aimed at addressing the legitimate aspirations and concerns of Syria's people. The Friends' Group noted that the Syrian government's effort to impose unilaterally a set of political steps labeled as reforms would not resolve the crisis.

In this regard, the Friends' Group set out its full support for the League of Arab States' initiative to facilitate a political transition leading to a democratic, plural political system in which citizens enjoy equal rights regardless of their affiliations or ethnicities, beliefs or gender, including through commencing a serious political dialogue between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition aimed at:

Formation of a national unity government;

Delegation by the President of Syria of his full authority to his First Deputy to cooperate fully with the national unity government in order to empower it to perform its duties in the transitional period; and

Transparent and free elections under Arab and international supervision.

In this regard, the Friends' Group welcomed the appointment of Kofi Annan as the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syria Crisis.

Accountability for Regime Actions

The Friends' Group expressed disappointment that the United Nations Security Council had thus far been blocked from responding to the League of Arab States' repeated appeals for support and for its plan to end the violence in Syria. The Friends' Group calls on the Security Council to work with the League of Arab States and other interested parties to take effective action against the Syrian regime' gross human rights violations, and to bring about an end to the violence against civilians. The Group underlined the need to end impunity and to hold those responsible for perpetrating crimes against the Syrian people to account.

The Friends' Group welcomed the adoption by the UN General Assembly on 16 February of resolution 66/253 which strongly condemned the repression in Syria and demanded that the Syrian regime implement the Plan of Action of the Arab League of 2 November, and its decisions of 22 January and 12 February without delay. In view of the significant support for this resolution, the Group called for the United Nations Security Council to fulfil its responsibilities on Syria by returning to this issue as soon as possible. The Group also welcomed the continued involvement of the Human Rights Council and called on the Syrian regime to cooperate fully with the independent Commission of Inquiry. It welcomed the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of 22 February 2012.

The Friends' Group set out its determination to continue to take relevant political, diplomatic and economic measures to press the Syrian regime to stop all acts of violence and to prevent the regime from generating further instability in the region. In this regard, participants committed to take steps to apply and enforce restrictions and sanctions on the regime and its supporters as a clear message to the Syrian regime that it cannot attack civilians with impunity. These should include:

Travel bans on members of the regime;

Freezing their assets;

Ceasing the purchase of Syrian hydrocarbon products;

Ceasing infrastructure investment in, and financial services relating to, Syria;

To reduce diplomatic ties with the Syrian regime; and

Preventing the shipment of arms and related materials to the Syrian regime; and studying means of restricting the Syrian regime's access to fuel and other supplies used for military purposes.

Support for the Opposition

The Friends' Group commended the courage and determination of Syrians on the ground, who are the vanguard of the Syrian people seeking freedom and dignity. In this context, it

also praised the work of the Syrian National Council (SNC) to form a broad and inclusive body and encouraged them to continue these efforts.

To this end, the Friends' Group recognised the Syrian National Council as a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change. The Group agreed to increase its engagement with and practical support for the Syrian opposition. The Friends' Group encouraged the Syrian National Council to pursue its actions in a spirit of unity and to support the vision of an inclusive, prosperous and free Syria that protects its citizens and generates stability in the region, and where all citizens enjoy equal rights.

The Friends' Group called on the Arab League to convene a meeting around the Syrian National Council with a range of opposition groups and individuals, including those inside Syria, committed to a peaceful political transition, in order for them to agree on:

A representative coordination mechanism for working together before, during and after a transition period;

A clear statement of shared principles for a transition in Syria, according to relevant covenants and resolutions of the United Nations regarding human, social and political rights, as well as a commitment to a civil, representative future government that safeguards the rights of minorities.

Humanitarian Assistance

The Friends' Group expressed its strong concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria, including the lack of access to basic food, medicine and fuel, as well as threats and acts of violence to medical staff, patients and facilities, in some areas. It reiterated the need urgently to address humanitarian needs, and to facilitate effective delivery of assistance and to ensure safe access to medical treatment. The Friends' Group called on the Syrian government immediately to cease all violence and to allow free and unimpeded access by the UN and humanitarian agencies to carry out a full assessment of needs in Homs and other areas. It demanded that the Syrian regime immediately permit humanitarian agencies to deliver vital relief goods and services to civilians affected by the violence, especially in Homs, Deraa, Zabadani and other areas under siege by the Syrian security forces. The Friends' Group agreed that, if the Syrian regime stopped its assault on civilian areas and permitted access, it would deliver humanitarian supplies immediately. The Friends' Group also noted the serious and growing burden carried by Syria's neighbours in hosting refugees from Syria and committed to provide appropriate support and assistance in this regard.

To this end, the Friends' Group welcomed the United Nations' efforts to coordinate the humanitarian response, including funding, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. The Group welcomed the Emergency Relief Coordinator's intention to visit Syria to engage with all parties to allow impartial access for humanitarian assistance. The Group

also supported the establishment by international humanitarian agencies of Humanitarian Operational Hubs in neighbouring countries. It welcomed the creation of the Syria Humanitarian Forum and pledged support to the body in its role as a working group to coordinate international assistance. It reinforced the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between the humanitarian response and the ongoing political negotiations.

The Friends' Group also declared its firm commitment to contribute substantially to rebuilding Syria in the process of transition and to support the future economic recovery of the country. To this end, the Group decided to create a working group on economic recovery and development.

The Friends' Group expressed their thanks and appreciation to Tunisia for hosting this international conference. The Group agreed to meet again in Turkey in the near future. The Group also agreed that the following meeting would be hosted by France.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chairmans-conclusions-of-friends-of-syria-meeting