

Foreign Secretary statement to Geneva Conference on Syria

 gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-statement-to-geneva-conference-on-syria

Location:

Montreux

Delivered on:

22 January 2014 (Transcript of the speech, exactly as it was delivered)



The Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

Thank you very much Secretary General.

We meet today with the urgent task of implementing the Geneva communiqué agreed 18 months ago, as a roadmap to end the conflict in Syria.

At that time, 15,000 people had been killed and there were 87,000 registered Syrian refugees in the region. These numbers seemed appallingly high at the time.

But the failure to implement the Geneva communiqué has meant that at least 110,000 other innocent people have now died, and 2.3 million more people have had to flee as refugees – including a staggering one million children.

These facts should be seared into our consciences. They are a devastating reminder of the human cost of this war, and they give overriding urgency to the task before us.

For we can be absolutely certain that if this peace process fails, then thousands more innocent Syrians will pay the price. I urge both Syrian delegations to approach these negotiations in that spirit - recognising that the entire future of Syria is at stake.

And the Syrian government bears a particular responsibility for this crisis and can do the most to end it. I call on them to commit themselves to the aim of a mutually agreed settlement; and to stop actions on the ground which undermine the negotiations.

At a time of relentless attacks on their homes and their families, the National Coalition have agreed to participate in this Conference, which was not an easy decision for President al-Jarba and the National Coalition leadership and I commend them for taking this step and for endorsing today the Geneva communique as their basis of our work. They have our full support in doing that.

And we should be absolutely clear that the Syrian conflict did not begin with terrorism. This began with ordinary people calling for greater political and economic freedom, who were met with brute force and oppression rather than the offer of peaceful change. And there must be accountability for the appalling crimes committed in this conflict, including those reported by distinguished jurists this week.

And it was because of that repression that those protests escalated into a mass uprising and civil war, and it is this instability that has created a foothold for extremists. But they are in a tiny minority compared to the millions of Syrians who have taken no part in this conflict and who want and deserve lives of dignity, and safety, and freedom.

The only way to end the bloodshed and to deal with extremist threats, is to reach an inclusive political settlement that takes into account the needs and aspirations of all Syria's communities with a Syrian-led political process, leading to a transition enabling the Syrian people independently and democratically to determine their future.

All of us who have endorsed the Geneva Communiqué know what the goal is: a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers, formed by mutual consent, which means no one included without the agreement of the others, including a President who has destroyed his own legitimacy.

And we know what the steps are that are needed to reach that goal, including a firm timetable for a Syria-led transition for a future for Syria that is genuinely democratic and pluralistic; and ceasefire agreements enabling immediate and full humanitarian access. We have provided £500 million pounds in aid as the United Kingdom and pledged £100m more but aid must be able to reach the people who need it most. The deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid is utterly unacceptable and a flagrant disregard of the UN Security Council presidential statement of last October. The UN estimates that 2.5 million people inside Syria are currently receiving no or extremely limited assistance, including 250,000 people trapped in besieged or hard-to-access areas. Urgent efforts are required to improvement this situation.

The transition in Syria should also include full participation for women, as set out in the Geneva communiqué. As the United Kingdom we would have liked to see a formal role for Syrian women's groups and civil society at this meeting. But I welcome the Secretary General's and Mr Brahimi's strong support for the inclusion of women in both delegations. There can be no lasting settlement in Syria that does not involve Syria's women at every stage of the process and as the UK we will work to achieve their full participation in this process.

These talks are only the start of a process, so will require commitment and courage, but I urge both sides to remain at the negotiating table. And to them I say, this is your opportunity to put an end to the devastation of your country. Now is the time to choose to save a generation of Syrian children from violence and trauma; to end the sieges being laid to ancient towns and cities; to begin to repair the rich fabric of Syrian society; and to spare millions of refugees the prospect of years of exile, homelessness and deprivation.

We have no illusions about how difficult and challenging this process is likely to be but we should all do everything possible to help the people of Syria achieve peace.

Further information

Follow the Foreign Secretary on twitter [@WilliamJHague](#)

[Why Geneva II matters on thinglink](#)

Follow the Foreign Office on twitter [@foreignoffice](#)

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email newsdesk@fco.gov.uk