

Statement by Foreign Minister Steinmeier following the meeting of the Syria contact group in Vienna

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17.05.2016 - Press release 

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier issued the following statement after the meeting of the Syria contact group in Vienna on 17 May:

This was the fifth time we met in this format with the aim of finding ways to end the violence and civil war in Syria after five years. The figures show that this is necessary. Three hundred thousand people have been killed; 12 million people have lost their homes; and five million people have fled and are living outside the country, including in Europe, with a particularly high number in Germany.

Once again today, the talks were difficult and at times heated – but one cannot expect anything else when 20 countries with very different experiences and a very different perception of Syria meet around a table. We also need these disagreements in order to gradually find ways to reach a political settlement. I think it was a very constructive debate. Despite different starting positions, everyone realised in the end that the Geneva peace talks, which are currently suspended, must be restarted as soon as possible. All sides are willing to support this path. The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria has been encouraged to invite all parties to Geneva as soon as possible so that the talks can restart. Obviously, we expect the parties to refrain from making the restarting of these talks subject to preconditions that no one is currently able to meet.

Independently of this, we in the International Syria Support Group also expect improvements to be made in many areas. At the start of the talks this morning, I said that not only has a ceasefire been agreed since our meeting in early February – the situation is also now calmer in many parts of Syria. At the same time, the ceasefire is being breached, particularly in the Aleppo region. That was why we also talked today about how we can improve the implementation of the ceasefire and ensure that it is respected all over Syria. The United States and Russia have expressed their willingness to undertake further steps on the technical level in order to find out who is responsible for breaching the ceasefire. It should be possible to do so in the 21st century.

Since our last meeting in February, we have also made some progress as regards the humanitarian situation. In the meantime, it has been possible to reach some 800,000 people who were cut off from humanitarian aid. But in recent weeks in particular, we have seen humanitarian aid supplies being blocked in cities such as Daraya, although the trucks were already loaded and en route. We have also seen medical supplies being unloaded from the trucks so they would not reach those in need. This is not acceptable. It is not only a humanitarian task, but also an obligation under international law, that available humanitarian aid supplies reach people in all parts of a country. This is why today we also explored ways of reaching people in need where this has not proved possible by truck. There was a mandate for the United Nations today to find ways to provide aid by air drops so that the people cut off from aid in Syria can receive humanitarian assistance.

Those were the results of today's talks. We will have to continue this debate, particularly within the framework of the International Syria Support Group, alongside and as a complement to the peace talks that will hopefully be restarted in Geneva.

Keywords

Syrian Arab Republic →