Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Geneva II negotiations on Syria: women’s participation

2013-12-19

On

11th November I informed the House

that the Government was determined to ensure that the Geneva peace talks include a direct role for women’s groups in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 2016 and 2122 on women, peace and security. I said we believe it is vital that women participate fully in decisions about the future of Syria, as they have an indispensable role to play in rebuilding and reconciling Syrian society. I announced that we would work with UN/Arab League Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, his team, international Non-Governmental Organisations and other countries to make this a reality. And I said that we would work with the UN and its Agencies to ensure that we give the women’s groups the support they need to participate effectively.

I would like to update the House on the steps we have taken to support this commitment.

I have written to Mr Brahimi who has responsibility for deciding the format of the talks. I have also written to Foreign Ministers of members of the UN Security Council and the Core Group of the Friends of Syria, to like-minded EU Foreign Ministers and to EU High Representative Cathy Ashton. I have asked them all to work with the United Kingdom in three areas:

First, both sides should be encouraged to appoint women to their delegations. The United Kingdom is focussing its efforts on working with President Al-Jarba and the Syrian National Coalition. We are working with them to ensure strong female representation in the Opposition delegation and to develop their capacity on gender issues.

Second, the UN should ensure that gender advisers and expertise are made available to all parties at Geneva, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2122. We have also called for the appointment of an empowered, senior-level, full time gender expert to Mr Brahimi’s team.

Third, we have called upon the UN to facilitate a clear role for women’s groups and civil society in the Geneva II process itself. We have provided Mr Brahimi with a proposed format for a Civil Society Consultative Body at Geneva, comprised of women’s groups and civil society organisations and appointed through a mechanism determined by the UN. We would expect women to make up 50 percent of the membership and leadership. The Consultative

Body would have regular access to the UN mediation team and the official delegations, could take part in specific negotiations if requested, and would support Geneva II by providing advice, position papers and recommendations. Its representatives would speak at the opening ceremony of the talks, along with UN Women. It should be seen as an independent, non-aligned voice, which plays particular attention to the interests and views of women and under-represented groups. Under our proposals, the Consultative Body would be based in Geneva, operating in the same venue as the official talks, and would be part of the institutional structure for Geneva II.

The UK stands ready to provide technical and financial assistance to support this direct role for women at the Geneva conference and during the transitional process.

Further information

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