Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Christos Stylianides on the situation in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria

Brussels, 6 March 2018

Eleven days ago, on 24 February 2018, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2401, which requires all parties to the Syrian conflict to immediately cease hostilities for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance and evacuation of the critically sick and wounded. But since then, almost no progress has been made on the ground to implement this resolution.

On the contrary, the Syrian Regime and its allies continued their military offensive in blatant disregard of the provision of the Resolution, of human suffering and of International Humanitarian Law. The mere presence of Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) in Eastern Ghouta cannot justify the continued indiscriminate shelling and bombing of the civilian population and of medical facilities, precisely what is happening in Eastern Ghouta.

A year-long siege used for the purpose of starving the population and the indiscriminate shelling of the civilian population may amount to war crimes. Those responsible will be held accountable for their deeds. We therefore fully support the UN's launch of investigations into that matter.

The fact that on 5 March a UN aid convoy was finally allowed to enter Douma, bringing health and food supplies for 27,500 people in need, is a small positive step. But at the same time, it is disappointing that once again the Syrian regime removed critical medical items from the convoy in clear violation of International Humanitarian Law. And one convoy once in a while is far from sufficient.

The list of those in need of medical evacuation from the besieged enclave has grown to more than a thousand people, including many women and children. What we urgently need to see now is a full compliance with the ceasefire agreed in the UNSC Resolution 2401. The Russian proposal for a daily five-hour pause is simply not sufficient to allow humanitarian workers to deliver aid to the people who need it most and to evacuate those who cannot be treated on the spot. Parties to the conflict on the ground need to ensure unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to those trying to save lives.

The European Union will continue to work for the full implementation of UNSC Resolutions and for the respect of international law. We will use the UN and international fora to keep pressing for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2401. We call on the guarantors of the ceasefire in de-escalation areas to live up to the expectations of the international community and exercise fully their responsibilities to help to stop these attacks.

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