Bonino: «Time to end the massacre in Syria» (La Stampa)

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Commenting on the glacial pace of the peace talks in Geneva between the Syrian regime and opposition, UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi offered a show of optimism. The Syrian crisis, now entering its third year, has caused devastating consequences for 9 million innocent victims: approximately 130,000 are dead, 2.3 million Syrians have taken refuge in neighbouring countries and 6.8 million have been displaced internally. This is the worst humanitarian crisis of our times, and the most costly, with the United Nations calling for more than 6.5 billion dollars in resources.

Italy and the European Union, the top donor, are in the forefront in this massive effort to respond to this pressing humanitarian disaster. But the resources will be of little use if the aid is unable to reach every community. There are currently hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians living under siege and in need of the most basic goods, and the images being sent in by clandestine sources are alarming. How to alleviate such a dramatic situation? Only through ceasefire and immediate humanitarian access to those areas that have been isolated for so long, starting with Homs, but including also Nabul and Zahraa, near Aleppo, and the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp, where 18,000 persons are struggling to survive to under extreme conditions. Italy intends to be ready the instant any glimmer of a political solution appears.

We will be hosting a meeting on humanitarian access in Rome tomorrow, convened by the UN and aimed at outlining a series of measures capable of putting an end to the current and unacceptable violations of international humanitarian law. I will join UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs Kristalina Georgieva and representatives of the countries of the region, in an attempt to persuade all the parties to the conflict, who have taken on an enormous moral responsibility by turning a deaf ear to any and all appeals to put an immediate end to the massacre of innocent civilians, first and foremost women, children and the elderly, and proceed to the demilitarisation of schools and hospitals.

Our effort is motivated not only by moral imperative, but also by the awareness that it is also a contribution to their and our security. The present situation constitutes an undisputable threat: those millions of persons on the move can easily conceal terrorist and traffickers among them. I have no illusions as to the extraordinary difficulty of the negotiations going on in Geneva, particularly with regard to the formation of a transitional government capable of

leading the country toward peace and democratic elections. The complexity and bitterness of the conflict in the Muslim world is clear and it will take time for a political solution to mature.

All the more reason to seek tangible results for the Syrian population in the immediate future. The pressure that can be brought to bear on the regime and the various components of the opposition by major international actors is crucial. Iran, Arabia, the U.S., Russia, Turkey and Europe must all move toward one immediate goal — the end of the hostilities — in the awareness that the status quo is a precursor to an even wider regional inferno. Lebanon and Jordan are already reeling under the unbearable tension of bombardments, and of social and economic upheaval that comes with the presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Too much time has already passed, let’s not relegate the Syrian tragedy to general oblivion.

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