EUROPEAN UNION

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Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following the meeting of the Friends of the Syrian People

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission issued the following statement today:

"I participated today in the meeting of the Friends of the Syrian people in Paris. The overwhelming response of so many States and organizations shows the strong commitment of the international community to support the Syrian people as the tragic situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. Violence is increasing and numbers of casualties have reached unimaginable levels. The risk of full civil war has become even more real.

The regime is clearly responsible for the brutality of the repression. Instead of freeing detainees and withdrawing its troops and heavy weapons from urban areas, Assad's regime continues with the shelling of innocent civilians.

Any further militarisation of the conflict will have a serious impact not only on the Syrian people but on the region as a whole. We can already see serious effects in neighbouring countries who shoulder the largest and most difficult burden. We will continue to support them.

I also participated in the Action Group meeting last Saturday in Geneva. We now have a concrete roadmap for a Syrian-led transition and a clear mandate for Kofi Annan to take this forward. He has an extraordinarily difficult task. Now, collectively, we will have to ensure its implementation and increase the pressure on the regime. The unity and coherence of the international community is essential. That is why the UNSC must act now and ask for the implementation of Kofi Annan's plan and the roadmap agreed in Geneva, including international sanctions.

The humanitarian plight of the Syrian people has worsened and we will remain at the forefront of the efforts to bring assistance to those in need. Lack of access remains the biggest obstacle."

P R E S S

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