14 European Foreign Ministers: Syria, ending the humanitarian disaster in Idlib

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Idlib is experiencing a new humanitarian disaster, one of the worst of the Syrian crisis which, in nearly a decade, has counted countless similar disasters. The Syrian regime continues its strategy of military reconquest of the country at any cost, regardless of the consequences for Syrian civilians. Since December, its operations in the north-west have increased in intensity, with the support of Russian aircraft. The relentless air strikes and the dropping of “barrel bombs” have forced nearly one million Syrians to flee in just a few weeks. The reception facilities are now saturated. Hundreds of thousands of people – mostly women and children – are seeking shelter in makeshift camps, where they suffer from cold, hunger and epidemics. According to data provided by UNHCR, a total of 298 civilians have been killed in Idlib since 1st January.

It is perfectly clear to us that there are radical groups in Idlib. We would never take terrorism lightly. We are fighting against terrorism with determination and we are on the front lines of the fight against Daesh. But fighting against terrorism cannot and must not justify massive violations of international humanitarian law. The United Nations has warned of the risk of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis if the current offensive should continue. We call on the Syrian regime and its supporters to stop this offensive and to resume the ceasefire established in autumn 2018. We call on them to pun an immediate end to hostilities and to honour their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the protection of humanitarian workers and medical personnel, who have often lost their lives because of their commitment to civilian populations in Idlib. We also call on Russia to continue negotiations with Turkey in order to de-escalate the dire situation in Idlib and to contribute to a political solution. Beyond the urgency of a ceasefire in Idlib, we call on Russia not to block in the coming months the renewal by the Security Council of the mechanism that allows cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid, which is desperately needed in north-western Syria. A mechanism that has already been shut down in the north-east, where we now must find an alternative to the Al Yaroubiyah crossing.

In the face of the unfolding tragedy, Europeans are also shouldering their responsibilities. From a humanitarian standpoint, the European Union and its Member States are the main donors in support of the Syrian population. We intend to support and further expand these

collective efforts in response to the crisis that is taking place in Idlib. Europe continues to put pressure on the regime for a real commitment in the political process.

On 17 February, European countries adopted new sanctions affecting, on an individual basis, Syrian entrepreneurs who are fuelling the regime's war efforts and benefiting from its impact. We intend to continue supporting the mechanisms to combat impunity established by the United Nations, committed to gathering evidence that will be fundamental in the preparation of future proceedings against those responsible for the most serious crimes: the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. We will also continue our work on referring cases to the International Criminal Court. We will continue our efforts, including within our national jurisdictions, to ensure that crimes committed in Syria will not go unpunished. Such crimes have included the use of chemical weapons, in violation of the fundamental principles of international law. We must determine who is responsible and ensure that those responsible for such violations will be held accountable. We also need clarity on what happened to the many detainees and missing persons.

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/02/di-maio-siria-fermare-il-disastro-umanitario-a-idlib-la-stampa/