Remarks by Federal Foreign Minister Steinmeier on the occasion of the first meeting of the working group for Stabilization of the Counter-ISIL-Coalition on 18 March 2015

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you today to the first meeting of the working group for Stabilization of the Counter-ISIL-Coalition.

I would like to particularly welcome the representative of the Government of Iraq, Dr. Abdulbasit Turki Said, the US Presidential Envoy to the Coalition, General Allen, the Deputy

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-Special Representative for Iraq, Mrs. Lise Grande, as well as our co-chair Assistant Minister Faris al-Mazrouie of the United Arab Emirates.

We have come together regularly since September of last year, united against one of the most abhorrent terrorist organizations that mankind has seen, ISIL, or Daesh. An organization that terrorizes people in vast strays of land in Syria and Iraq – and that is extending its brand even beyond the region, to Africa and elsewhere.

Today, in the framework of the global alliance against this particular incarnation of terrorism, we are glad to note some positive developments in Iraq. These developments require our action in support of the government of Iraq. We need to secure stability in those areas that are already being freed from terrorists. Today is about “post-ISIL”.

When I visited Iraq in mid-August of last year, I was encouraged by the resolve of the then Prime Minister designate, Haidar al-Abadi, to restore the unity of the country and reach out to the Sunni segments of the population. There are first important achievements in this regard. But it is an up-hill battle and a lot of effort still remains to be invested in this endeavor.

We are here today because we want to support the Government of Iraq in restoring national unity as well as lasting peace and stability. Many of our countries are doing so with military means – Germany is acting in this field through our training mission based in Erbil as well as by material support. But we all know that military action – especially when successful – must be followed-up with a fast and efficient civilian effort to ensure lasting stability.

Stabilization is a very broad field of action. In this group we want to follow a narrow definition of “stabilization”: we will focus on recovery efforts that are non-military like demining or policing and also on measures that go beyond immediate humanitarian relief. In other words: necessary steps to gain the security, well-being and trust of the local people after the liberation of an area from ISIL.

This group shall ensure that we – the international community regrouped in the Counter-ISIL-Coalition – gain a better understanding of the needs to provide relief and basic services – water, electricity, security – to the people in the immediate aftermath of the counter-offensive. And it is, secondly, meant to ensure that our Iraqi partners on the ground receive a strong and well-coordinated response to their requests!

Today’s meeting will focus mainly on the urgent action needed in support of the Iraqi people. But also concerning Syria we continue preparing and planning for stabilization. ISIL has grown strong in Syria, and there is a risk that success in Iraq may push ISIL back into Syria – where Assad has so far shown little enthusiasm to fight them. We met yesterday with the President of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, Khaled Khoja, and discussed the situation there. We have some instruments already in place that will help a stabilization effort in Syria – once the conditions will be given. But let me be clear on this: The prime responsibility to improve the situation in Syria clearly lies with the regime that must stop the massive violence against the people of Syria.

A few months ago, in this same room we hosted an international Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation. I would like to see our commitment to stabilization in Iraq and Syria also as one way to follow up on our promises to help Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey as well as Egypt and Iraq cope with the huge number of refugees from Syria and to give hope to the millions of refugees who want to return to their homes.

For now, I wish you all the best in your deliberations and all of us success in this important task.

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