

# Speech by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to the German Bundestag in the debate on the current situation in Syria

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## Welcome

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18.04.2018 - Speech 

– verbatim report of proceedings –

Mr President,

Members of the Bundestag,

Fellow members of this House,

The conflict in Syria is now entering its eighth year. Well over 400,000 people have lost their lives. Millions of Syrians have had to leave their homes; a not inconsiderable number of them have come to Germany.

What began as peaceful demonstrations in the wake of the so called Arab Spring turned into a civil war and eventually a conflict which has now taken on international dimensions. This conflict, and the immeasurable suffering of the stricken population, are posing a test for the international community. Thus far, international conflict resolution mechanisms have failed. There is no other way of putting it. Had this not been the case, there would have been no need for the military action by France, the United States and the United Kingdom.

The Assad regime has demonstrably and repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own civilian population. Innocent women, men and children have been murdered in the most unbearable manner with chlorine and sarin.

Of course, the utmost priority now is to ensure that the situation does not escalate further and, terrible as it may sound, to use the dynamics of the situation to relaunch the political process, which has become bogged down. Neither Geneva nor Astana has so far been able to bring lasting progress in the political process. The United Nations is the only institution and organisation able to shoulder such a process in the long term. However, after all that

has happened in the past few years, we do know this: help is needed to get this process underway again. That is why we are currently making every possible effort to remove all the obstructions.

Firstly, we urged – both in ~~NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)~~ on Sunday and in the European Union on Monday – that new political talks be launched.

Secondly, we will be taking up the matter next week in the G7. I agreed with my Canadian colleague yesterday that we would put Syria on the agenda for the G7 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Canada this coming weekend.

Thirdly, we are in very close contact with Staffan de Mistura. At bilateral level we are talking with our partners about how to put fresh momentum into a very intractable situation. First of all, step by step, we need to get the international partners back on board, and then together they will have to get the United Nations process going once again.

France, the United States, the United Kingdom, the partners from the region, Turkey and Russia will be crucial in this process. What is certainly true is that looking away can no longer be an option for us. People have already been looking away for far too long in this conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The most urgent priority for the political process in the first instance must be to put in place, finally, a lasting, country-wide ceasefire and to secure humanitarian access, as has long been called for in ~~UN (United Nations)~~ Security Council Resolution 2401. In a second step, a sustainable solution which takes account of the legitimate interests of all population groups in Syria must be negotiated under the aegis of the United Nations. After all that has happened over the past few years, this will be particularly difficult.

All this should be done in accordance with the resolutions already adopted by the United Nations Security Council. These call for the formation of a transitional government, constitutional reform and, ultimately, elections. These will be the crucial points in the upcoming process.

Let me assure you that the Federal Government will use all available diplomatic means to help advance such a political process. This will include us naturally using our channels to Moscow to urge Russia to take a constructive stance. Without Russia, the political process will not succeed.

Russia, which is shielding Assad, must step up the pressure on the Assad regime if negotiations are going to bring any results at all.

We want to help the United Nations to take on an active and proactive role once more – because all conflict resolution mechanisms fall under its auspices.

In particular, we back its Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, in putting the early resumption of negotiations and the formation of a constitutional committee – on which agreement was reached even in the Geneva process – back on the agenda and making progress on these issues.

We will continue our huge engagement in humanitarian assistance for Syria. We have provided more than two billion euros so far. We will have to do even more, as we will confirm at the Syria conference in Brussels next week. I would be very pleased if this were to meet with the whole House's support in the forthcoming budget debate. However, I am equally firmly convinced that lasting peace in Syria is only possible if those who have committed or ordered the most serious human rights violations are called to account.

That is why Germany supports the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria established by the ~~UN~~ (United Nations) Human Rights Council. The Commission's task now is to document war crimes in Syria and to have this documentation ready for future trials. Ladies and gentlemen, we do not want war criminals to escape punishment.

Finally, as we have already told our partners, we are prepared to provide very practical support, financial and logistical, for the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, as we have done in previous instances.

Ladies and gentlemen,

the events of recent days have been a very tough reminder of how highly dangerous the situation in Syria is – and not only for the region itself. That is why we are doing our utmost to bring about a diplomatic solution. That is the only way to end the people's suffering and bring lasting peace to Syria.

Thank you very much.

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