

President Ahmad Al Jarba's speech at the end of first round of negotiations in Geneva, January 31, 2014

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January 31, 2014

Office of the President of the Syrian Coalition
Geneva, Switzerland
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Dear Syrian sisters and brothers,

The regime's mouthpieces will come out with more misleading and fabricated information about the negotiations. The regime will want to put its own smokescreen on what actually happened at Geneva II. You will hear the regime, as usual, claim victory in one of its virtual bales where victory is only achieved over the bodies of Syrians.

Don't expect to hear any truth from the regime. The only truth is that the regime's acceptance to sit at the negotiating table is the beginning of its end. It was a seven -day bale fought at in Geneva. It felt much longer than that but we stood face to face with the representatives of the regime, a regime that only knows how to waste me and feed on blood.

It was not an easy task. I speak on behalf of all my colleagues when I say we felt like we were drinking from a poisoned chalice while the criminal was killing our women, children, young men and women, and elderly.

The only consolation that we had was that the regime which had been oppressing us for more than 50 years had arrived in Geneva to dig its own grave with its own hands. The regime looked like it was on death row. The regime was not aware that every cold blooded bullet or shrapnel that pierces the body of one of our children will turn into another nail in its coffin, a coffin being made in Geneva.

I would have liked to have spoken to you today with a more optimistic vision for Syria, one in which we would have been able to reach agreement with our countrymen to bury our differences and to achieve peace and security. We were sincere in our determination to rebuild, rebuild a new and a free and a democratic Syria for all citizens, a Syria of forgiveness and reconciliation, a Syria of compassion where there is no hatred or vengeance.

I would have liked to see this bale coming to an end so that we would be back to you to kiss our mothers' heads, the mothers of those who laid down their lives, the mothers who lost their children at the hands of a madman who brought destruction to the country and the people.

It was no easy task, and I can say I am speaking on behalf of each and everyone of us. We were drinking from that poisoned chalice. However, we had to walk through this bleak tunnel with determination achieve a goal that we had set our minds on. Praise be to God, we are able to say we have achieved that goal, Assad and his regime were exposed and we have won the international support to which we aspired.

The day we took the historic decision to participate in Geneva II, we were able to overcome several obstacles in the process, including the preservation of the opposition's unity and addressing the concerns of the revolutionaries on the ground. Then, Assad hoped that we would arrive in Geneva empty-handed, for him to deal the first blow by leaving the first round of negotiations without any progress.

We, on the other hand, were neither naïve or reckless. We never thought that the regime that has used chemical weapons would put on the negotiating table of negotiations a free gift to be presented to the Syrians.

Our objective in this round was to expose him and his regime before the sponsors of Geneva II and all those who called for it. This is exactly what happened. What we wanted took place and this is what the captive of his own palace did not expect.

We have made it clear from day one: we are for Geneva I, which was agreed to by all sponsors, including Russia. We called on the other party to sign immediately. We were breathing down their necks throughout the week while they were trying to escape. We faced the regime in the eye, turning their claims of terrorism into exposing their 50-year reign of terror. The regime was also judged on its attempt to import terrorism to the country, and to inviting foreign intervention using sectarian and mercenary militias from Lebanon and Iraq. Except for the regime's initial agreement to Geneva I as a reference point, one can barely talk of any serious commitment by Assad's representatives.

The scenes were, in reality, absurd. We sat before representatives of a regime which had no hesitation using chemical weapons against its own people, a regime protected by mercenaries of sectarianism and hatred, a regime which dances on the remains of 11,000 detainees, a regime that tries to take the moral high ground while having the temerity to lecture us about terrorism and the sanctity of life.

The regime of hatred believed it was more politically astute, believed that its political ploys would enable it to achieve what military and security tactics failed to do. The regime thought, having failed to crush the people and our revolution, it would be able to

make up for its defeat in the negotiating room. Wishful thinking. We were able to prove that when righteousness stands up to injustice, victory would come in both politics and on the battlefield.

The regime had hoped that Geneva would undermine our unity, only to find that this direct confrontation on become a source of unity – as our revolution had been – for our great nation. The dictator was a broken man when his representatives were compelled to discuss his future for the first time in five decades.

In Geneva, a new Syrian republic is born.

However, we have yet to sign a political pact. Our historic decision to participate in Geneva II put corruption and despotism in Syria on notice. The regime of father and son has become a party among others, unable to claim to be a representative of the nation. The regime is not even aware that it has fallen into the trap it tried to lay for us, and that it is losing more legitimacy every day while under the umbrella of the United Nations.

Dear sisters and brothers, you saw how the regime dilly-dallied in agreeing to the opening of humanitarian corridors into old Homs for a full week. You saw that the regime treated our women and children as bargaining chips while our negotiators, bearing in mind our fallen heroes, our detainees and our besieged people, sought a new free Syria with dignity.

However, the regime's making concessions was not for free this me. We have linked our presence in Geneva II with the provision of the means to defend our people on the ground.

I can assure you that the pledges made by the states have come into force. The pace of supporting our revolutionaries is quickening as you may have heard in the past few days. The more the regime tries to prevaricate and renege on its commitments, commitments according to which we decided to participate in Geneva II, so will the defensive arming of our revolutionaries who are defending our honor and integrity until the regime has accepted Geneva I to the letter. This can only lead to stripping Bashar Al Assad from all powers, paving the way for his removal and for him to be held accountable.

And when the Assad regime puts an end to its aggression on our people with tanks, aircraft and barrel bombs, only then can it ask for halting assistance to the opposition to defend itself.

Sisters and brothers,

Now that the picture is clearer, you should be aware that we were neither naïve nor reckless to believe that the regime of chemical weapons would present a free gift to the Syrians at the negotiating table. Talking to the regime was not just about sing at the

negotiating table, but also about discussions along political, military, legal, humanitarian, and other lines, as the regime itself did.

We have made it clear from the first day of the conference: we are for Geneva I which was accepted by all sponsors including Russia. We called on the other party to sign immediately and we pursued them for the duration of the talks. The regime showed no more than an initial agreement on the Geneva Communiqué as a reference point.

Today, we would like to make it clear to our friends that we cannot speak about a serious commitment by Assad's representatives, in spite of the fact that we were fully committed to making Geneva II a success. We renew our commitment to go back to Geneva in a few days' time to continue the political process and the transition of power to the Syrian people. The only guarantee for our people is the creation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers to run state institutions, civilian and military, to restructure the army and security and intelligence services, and to guide Syria to peace.

Sisters and brothers, we all know how this regime turned the life of a country and a people into a living hell, ranging from mass graves to massacres. A regime that tortured our people and children and drove them to starvation. The images of no fewer than 11,000 detainees that we saw in the past few days are clear evidence of the regime's criminality, both past and present. All these acts were committed so that the puppets of the mullahs of Teheran remain on a throne made of the very skeletons of the Syrian people.

The regime spared no part of Syria from the horror of death and destruction. It shelled parts of the country and used the citizens of other areas as cannon-fodder to fight their own compatriots. Yes, the regime sacrifices the descendants of Saleh Al Ali and the sons of Badawi Al Jabal in a war that suits its own ends and the ends of its regional masters. The regime draws strength from a short collective memory. How can we accept that a regime that murdered Salah Jadid and Mohammed Omran, a regime that introduced the three-bullet suicide of Ghazi Kanan to the world can defend our usurped coast and protect the mountain that was sculpted so deeply in our memory by the bedouins?

Who would believe a regime that made our Christian brethren destitute, tortured their intellectuals and confiscated the wealth of their businessmen would want to protect them from their brothers who share with blood and tears their daily tragedy? Who would be fooled by those who laid siege to the heritage of Sultan Al Atrash and denied Syrian Kurds their rights and their identity could protect Syria or defend her cause?

Sisters and brothers,

Today, the world is more convinced of the justice of our revolution and our having taken the political path. The regime has placed itself in an embarrassing position by attending Geneva II in the belief that we did not want a solution that would prevent bloodshed and by doing so exclude the people of Syria from the solution. Now the regime is

walking in its own funeral procession. Its acceptance of the Geneva I principles is the beginning of the end. It is the beginning of handing power over from the dictator to the people. This is an attempt to renege on commitments of a regime in its death throes. The use of barrel bombs is glaring evidence of the regime's untenable position.

We have entered through the gate of change and have managed to put the regime's delegation before difficult choices. The regime's delegation has yet to sign or to commit and the United Nations bear witness to this fact. The regime's representatives were loathe to discuss humanitarian corridors while the world is closely watching how the regime prevaricates to prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching areas where one quarter of the population is either dead or likely to die of starvation. And what do the regime's representatives talk about? Terrorism.

Sisters and brothers, revolutionaries, salt of the earth, those of you who chanted: "the people want the downfall of Assad, the Syrian people are one," I call on every mother who lost a loved one, on every revolutionary willing to lay down life for country, on every Syrian child denied sleep due to hunger and the barrels of fire and disgrace, I look up to all of you, I hold your hands which give us strength and dignity to assure you that your tragedy, your dreams and your demands are our responsibility. We may lose our lives but the mission will go on.

31st January 2014, Geneva