Statement by Foreign Minister Steinmeier following his talks with the General Coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee

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Foreign Minister Steinmeier issued the following statement in Berlin today (3 November) following his talks with the General Coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition, Riyad Hijab, at the Federal Foreign Office:

The fact that there have been no further air strikes on eastern Aleppo, which has been under siege for months, provides at least some relief to the people living there in the greatest deprivation and danger. At the same time, we see that a few kilometres away, the suburbs, outskirts and surroundings of Aleppo are still being bombed. The same applies for other parts of Syria, from which we are still hearing the most harrowing reports on the barbaric actions of the regime and its supporters – reports of schools being shot at, pupils dying, attacks on hospitals and the use of chemical weapons.

Moscow has now announced another ten-hour ceasefire tomorrow, Friday. As in the past, we say that this is nowhere nearly enough. It does not provide enough time to evacuate sick and seriously wounded people or to deliver the necessary humanitarian supplies for the residents of Aleppo.

We need to ensure that the imminent handover of power in the US administration does not lead to a power vacuum. And this is why we now urgently need new impetus for talks between Moscow and Washington, but also with the regional players. All parties to the conflict must now take on their responsibility for alleviating the suffering of the people in Aleppo and ending this catastrophe. A ceasefire is, and remains, the first step on this path. It is equally vital that there be a clear distancing on the part of the opposition fighters from the terrorist al-Nusra Front.

As is the case for aid for the people suffering in Syria, this is a humanitarian imperative. It is also a duty of the international community, which has pledged to work towards a political settlement on behalf of and under the auspices of the United Nations. As a main supporter of the Syrian regime, Russia bears the greatest responsibility. But all those involved, especially those whose voices carry particular weight in the region, are called on to help put a stop to the suffering of the people.

It remains crucial that the moderate Syrian opposition stay united. In my talks with Riyad Hijab, I expressed my recognition for his great commitment to ensuring that the opposition remains united.

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