

Foreign Minister Steinmeier calls start of the talks on Syria in Geneva an encouraging sign

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In an interview with the “Welt am Sonntag” newspaper on 30 January, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said:

The fact that the talks in Geneva aimed at resolving the brutal civil war in Syria have now actually started in January is an encouraging sign. Millions of Syrians have waited a long time for this. Saudi Arabia also played an important role in convincing the opposition to take part in the talks in Geneva. I have great understanding for the concerns of the Syrian opposition, which fears being caught up in protracted negotiations without any real progress being made, while the people continue to suffer in Syria. At the same time, only talks can show whether both sides are willing to accept painful compromises so that the killing stops and Syrians have a chance of a better future in their own country. The start of the talks in Geneva would not have been possible without the international process that began in Vienna last October, led to ~~UN.(United Nations)~~ Security Council Resolution 2254 in December and will continue in Munich on 11 February.

Difficult weeks of talks lie ahead of us, and there will be setbacks. The crucial thing is that we never lose sight of the goal, namely a genuine political transition in Syria. Only this can form the basis for all Syrians to tackle IS.

But for the talks to be successful, real progress must urgently be made in the humanitarian field. Surrounded areas must be able to receive food and medical supplies; prisoners must be released; and the bombing of the civilian population must finally end. I have great faith in Staffan de Mistura, ~~UN.(United Nations)~~ Special Envoy for Syria, who is chairing the negotiations. During our talks with all sides in recent days and weeks, we lobbied for the start of these negotiations. I myself spoke on the telephone with Riyad Hijab, head of the Syrian High Negotiations Committee, and encouraged the opposition to attend the talks. We are now providing concrete support to the negotiating process in the form of political back-up, expert guidance and funding.

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