

PRESS RELEASE

185/21

14/03/2021

Syria: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the 10 years of the conflict

15 March 2021 marks ten years since peaceful protests began throughout Syria. Their violent repression by the regime sparked a decade of conflict. The regime's brutal repression of the Syrian people and its failure to address the root causes of the uprising has resulted in an escalated and internationalised armed conflict. Over the last ten years, countless abuses and violations of human rights, and grave violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly by the Syrian regime, have caused enormous human suffering. Accountability for all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law is of utmost importance both as a legal requirement and a central element in achieving sustainable peace and genuine reconciliation in Syria.

The Syrian refugee crisis is the largest displacement crisis in the world, with 5.6 million registered refugees and another 6.2 million people displaced within Syria, and with conditions not in place for their safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return in line with international law. Furthermore, the conflict has entailed severe repercussions across the region and beyond and fuelled terrorist organisations. The EU recalls that all actors in Syria must focus on the fight against Da'esh. Preventing the resurgence of the terrorist organization remains a priority.

The conflict in Syria is far from over. The European Union remains resolute, continuing to demand an end to repression, the release of detainees, and that the Syrian regime and its allies engage meaningfully in the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Without credible progress and as long as the repression continues, targeted EU sanctions on leading members and entities of the regime will be renewed at the end of May. The European Union has not changed its policy as outlined in previous Council Conclusions and remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state.

The European Union would be prepared to support free and fair elections in Syria in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and under supervision of the UN, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate. Elections organised by the Syrian regime such as last year's parliamentary elections or the presidential elections later this year cannot fulfil these criteria and therefore cannot contribute to the settlement of the conflict nor lead to any measure of international normalisation with the Syrian regime.

The European Union cannot and will not look away as the future of Syria and its people are held hostage to conflict. On 29 and 30 March, the European Union will co-chair with the UN a fifth Brussels conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and of the region", involving the participation of governments and international organisations as well as of Syrian civil society.

The European Union is ready to enhance dialogue among all international actors with influence in the Syrian crisis, and calls on them to join forces at the conference to reaffirm and consolidate strong support for a political solution in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254, as well as for the tireless efforts of UN Special Envoy Pedersen to advance all aspects of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 in a comprehensive approach. There can be no military solution to this conflict: sustainable peace and stability can only be achieved by a genuine, inclusive and comprehensive Syrian-led political solution, with the full and effective participation of women and the concerns of all segments of Syrian society taken into consideration.

As in previous years, the conference will also generate international financial support to help meet the dramatically increasing humanitarian needs inside Syria, for Syrian refugees, and for refugee-hosting communities and countries in the region. There will be a strong call at the conference for the renewal of UN Security Council Resolution 2533 enabling safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access and the cross-border delivery of assistance, essential under current circumstances to meeting the vital needs of millions inside Syria.

Having provided some €24 billion over the past decade, the European Union and its Member States remain the largest contributors to meeting the needs generated by the conflict. The Syrian people continue to have the full political and humanitarian support of the European Union, in the pursuit of a peaceful and sustainable future.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania¹⁾, and the EFTA countries

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

¹⁾The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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