Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary comments on Syria and Ukraine

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The Foreign Secretary today hosted a meeting of Foreign Ministers from France, Germany, Italy and the USA on Ukraine. William Hague then chaired a meeting of Foreign Ministers from the ‘London 11’, the Core Group of the Friends of Syria, to discuss the situation in Syria and how the group could provide increased support to the National Coalition.

Speaking on behalf of the group after the meeting, Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I want to begin by expressing my deep condolences to the people of Turkey over the terrible mining disaster. Foreign Minister Davutoglu of course has been here with us today, and I’ve said to him the UK stands ready to assist our friends in Turkey in any way that we can, and the ministers gathered for the Friends of Syria Core Group meeting observed a minute’s silence in memory of the lives lost in Turkey.

I’ve hosted a series of meetings this morning, starting with a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of France, Italy, Germany, the United States and the UK to discuss the crisis in Ukraine. We unanimously welcomed the Ukrainian government’s efforts to promote constitutional reform, including the first meeting of the national dialogue that was held yesterday. This was clearly a successful first meeting. We strongly welcome that, and we welcomed the fact that preparations for the presidential elections on 25th May are proceeding well in the great majority of Ukraine.

We strongly support the work of the OSCE, including the work of President Burkhalter of Switzerland, but also the work of the OSCE on the ground. The United Kingdom has already committed nearly £2 million to the OSCE for their work in Ukraine, and I can announce an additional contribution of another £500,000 to the Special Monitoring Mission. It is vital that there are enough monitors and enough resources to monitor and to report truthfully on what is happening on the ground in Ukraine. And we call on other OSCE partners to do likewise and to increase their support for this vital effort.

We all agreed at the meeting that Russia’s behaviour towards the elections will determine whether or not wider economic and trade sanctions will be applied by the United States and by the European Union. We all agreed to continue preparations for these sanctions, while of course urging Russia to stop any actions that prevent the elections going ahead peacefully.

We were then joined on the subject of Syria by the Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan and Egypt. These are the countries that make up the Core Group of the Friends of Syria or the 'London 11.' We held some detailed talks, including with President Al-Jarba and Prime Minister Tomah of the Syrian National Coalition.

We are of course united in our disgust and anger at what is happening in Syria, and the regime's utter disregard for human life. We've already seen the deaths of over 150,000 Syrians. And we have agreed a short communiqué, first of all condemning the Assad regime's unilateral plan to hold illegitimate presidential elections on 3rd June. We say in our communiqué that this mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict, utterly contradicts the Geneva Communiqué – it is a parody of democracy, many millions of Syrians will be unable to participate in such a so-called "election" and we call on the entire international community to reject these illegitimate elections as the Arab League, the United Nations, the United States, Turkey and the European Union have already done.

We have also agreed unanimously to take further steps together, through a co-ordinated strategy, to increase our support for the moderate opposition, the National Coalition and for its Supreme Military Council and associated moderate armed groups; to do everything we can to hold the Assad regime accountable for the terror it is perpetrating, including through Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court; to work together to counter the rising forces of extremism and to complete the removal of Syria's chemical weapons; and to step-up our efforts to deliver humanitarian aid across borders and across lines irrespective of the consent of the regime. And we say at the end of our Communiqué we have directed our officials to implement a core group action plan.

The United Kingdom, for its part, adding to that, will provide an additional £30 million ($50 million) in practical support to help the opposition. We have also decided to upgrade the status of the National Coalition's Representative Office here in London to a "Mission" in recognition of the strength of our partnership. With other countries, we will increase our humanitarian assistance to areas not being reached by the UN, including by funding cross-border aid. The UK has now allocated £76 million for such cross-border operations and we will step up those efforts. And we will strongly support a new UN Security Council resolution to compel the regime to allow humanitarian aid into Syria and to halt its starvation and surrender tactics. As I mentioned in reference to the Communiqué, we will strongly support the principle of a Resolution referring the Syrian regime to the International Criminal Court.

In that regard, I am also delighted to have the National Coalition's full support for our Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, which has been so widely used by regime forces inside Syria. And I have invited their representative to attend the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, taking place here in London from 10th to 13th June.

So we have had a strong, united and purposeful meeting which involves the stepping-up of support to the moderate opposition in Syria and concerted action at the United Nations. We will work over the coming weeks to implement these commitments, including to increase humanitarian assistance, and we will intensify how closely we work together given the deepening crisis in Syria, because we are all determined to respond to it.

Further information

The ‘London 11’ consists of: Egypt; France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UAE, UK and USA.

President Al-Jarba of the Syrian National Coalition and Prime Minister Tomah of the Coalition’s Interim Government attended on behalf of the Syrian opposition.

Communiqué

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