Dichiarazioni alla stampa del Ministro Giulio Terzi, del Segretario di Stato USA, John Kerry

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(fa fede solo il testo effettivamente pronunciato)

FOREIGN MINISTER TERZI: Good morning and welcome to Villa Madama. In particular, I welcome my friend the Secretary of State John Kerry and the head of the Syrian Opposition Forces Coalition, Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib.

In the past few days, the Secretary of State Mr. Kerry stated that this meeting was needed in order to take concrete decisions and this is an appeal to be concrete and to realize how urgent new measures are. And in fact, this is in complete agreement with President Moaz al-Khatib. There is a sense of urgency, and we need to take concrete steps. And these are the grounds for the decisions and discussions in which Italy is involved with regard to the Syrian crisis.

Now, today's meeting here in Rome is based on these considerations, and therefore I accept the request of the Secretary of State to summon the countries that are most involved in the crisis in order to have an operational meeting, open it up to the Syrian National Coalition, because we see the coalition as being the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

I thank all the foreign affairs ministers, my colleagues, who have come today. And in the past three hours this morning, we've been saying that we have to shoulder responsibilities that can no longer be postponed. The suffering of the Syrian people is forcing us to go above and beyond the efforts that have been made to now. We must be able to reach a turning point. 70,000 victims are a huge weight on the conscience of the international community. We can no longer allow this massacre to continue. We cannot allow the bombings to continue, and clearly not with SCUD missiles, the massacre, illegal detention. The regime is perpetrating crimes against humanity, crimes against its own people.

And I would like to say what Italy has done up to now. In the past few months, together with our main partners in Europe and together with the United Nations as well, we've taken action on the humanitarian plane in order to alleviate the suffering of 2 million internally displaced persons and thousands of refugees. We've allocated 30 million Euros to help neighboring countries to alleviate this suffering as well. And we've supported the different components of

the coalition in seeking a leadership and a unitary program of action. And we want to have a strong convincing alternative to the dictatorship.

Today – as I was saying, today's meeting here in Rome has given us a new momentum. I think that we're taking a step forward, first of all, because we are taking the responsibility to provide not only humanitarian support but material assistance to the coalition as well. This stepped up support must be perceived directly in the Syrian territory through our support to local councils in the liberated areas. And we've also talked about the possibility to open humanitarian corridors and to be closely coordinated with all the countries who've met here today.

Our friend, Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib, has just pronounced the encouraging – some encouraging words on the work that he is doing together with his colleagues, and the opposition has to be able to fully play the role that it has in order to build up a new democratic Syria. He's also told us that they are about to establish a provisional executive body, which should be operating within Syrian soil.

And I wish to close with a warning that was expressed during today's meeting to the regime in Damascus. They have to stop violence, they have to release political prisoners, and they have to clearly enable a democratic and pluralist Syria with the exiting of Assad. Of course, all countries working side by side with the coalition are involved, and we can say that the Syrian people will never be left alone.

And it is a great pleasure for me to give the floor now over to the Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry. And after his remarks, we'll hear President al-Khatib's remarks. Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you very much, my friend, Giulio Terzi. Thank you for welcoming us. Thank you for hosting this very, very important meeting here in Rome. We are honored to be here. And Sheikh Moaz Khatib, thank you for joining us today and being part of this important discussion. It's a pleasure to be here working with friends on a very important and consequential issue. And we are grateful for the opportunity to come together with allies – partners – working together in pursuit of peace as a first resort.

Particularly important to be joined here today by our partners in this endeavor, the Syrian Opposition Coalition. They are the legitimate voice of the Syrian people. And that stands in very stark contrast to the rule of Bashar al-Assad, who long ago lost his legitimacy and who is out of time and who must be out of power. So with our united voice today, and the voices of those other ministers who joined us from other countries from the Gulf, across Europe – with our united voice today, we express our commitment to helping the Syrian people in order to achieve their goal to live in a free and a safe and a just society. Their goal is our goal.

And so we are determined to find a way forward to a better day that we know awaits Syria, a day that will not come as long as Assad is in power. For more than a year, the United States

and our partners who gathered here today in Rome have called on Assad to heed the voice of the Syrian people and to halt his war machine. Instead, what we have seen is his brutality increase.

Just this week, we witnessed a desperate leader engage in ruthless attacks on Aleppo with rockets and with the appalling use of SCUD missiles, claiming dozens of innocent lives. I heard this morning the story of maybe 50 to 70 young men and women who were taking an exam, dreaming of their future, whose lives were snuffed out by one of Bashar Assad's SCUD missiles. That's what he thinks of the future and of the people of Syria. Even hospitals have come under attack in his cold-blooded effort to cling to power.

The simple fact is Assad cannot shoot his way out of this. And as he deludes himself in pursuit of the military solution, the United States, our partners, and now the Syrian Opposition Coalition, make a different choice. Our choice is a political solution, outlined in the Geneva communique, which Russia has also signed onto. It is in line with the opposition's own transition plan, and this must include a transitioning governing body with full executive powers formed on the basis of mutual consent.

This is the right path to peace, and it is one that can unite the Syrian people, rebuild a society that respects and protects them regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or gender. These are the same standards that we set for our own countries, so there's nothing different here. All Syrians, including those who have not yet taken sides in this conflict, must know that they all can have a future in a post-Assad Syria. The opposition is prepared to take the steps necessary to get there.

The question we ask today is this: Will the regime allow its people this chance at peace, or is it going to continue its brutal campaign? Because as we make clear today, the United States decision take further steps now is the result of the continued brutality of a superior armed force, propped up by foreign fighters from Iran and Hezbollah, all of which threatens to destroy Syria. The United States and all the countries represented here believe the Syrian Opposition Coalition can successfully lead the way to a peaceful transition, but they cannot do it alone. They need more support from all of us, and they need Bashar al-Assad to make a different set of decisions.

So today, on behalf of President Obama, who has been very clear about the stakes in Syria, I'm proud to announce that the United States of America will be providing an additional $60 million immediately in nonlethal assistance to support the coalition in its operational needs day to day as it continues to organize and work for the political transition that we all want to see. And I look forward to working with the United States Congress on this.

This funding will allow the opposition to reach out and help the local councils to be able to rebuild in their liberated areas of Syria so that they can provide basic services to people, who

often lack access today to medical care, to food, to sanitation. This includes helping Syrians preserve institutions of state, which are critical to enabling a future transition in Syria itself, and also to helping those who work within them, those without blood on their hands, to be able to continue to do their important humanitarian work.

We will also channel this assistance to those projects and local groups that the coalition decides needs it the most. And as the regime continues to lose ground, these funds will also help the opposition forces and political leaders are able to extend stability, as well as build representative government and rule of law and extend that rule of law to those newly liberated areas.

I want to make clear this new support that President Obama has ordered is on top of more than 50 million that we provided to help the Syrian activists organize opposition efforts across the country to be able to communicate with each other and to broadcast a message of hope across their country.

Today, in our meeting, which I found to be remarkably united, every country expressing its revulsion against these SCUDs, against the tactics of this regime, every country articulating an urgency to our need to unite in our efforts to help the people of Syria against an enemy that respects no battlefield rules.

In 2011, the armed Syrian opposition was a small group, dedicated to protecting peaceful protestors. Now it is holding and extending the frontlines against elite regime forces. The United States has decided, that given the stakes, the President will now extend food and medical supplies to the opposition, including to the Syrian Opposition's Supreme Military Council. So there will be direct assistance to them, though nonlethal.

Of course, we will continue to work with our partners to provide critical humanitarian support for all Syrians in desperate need of relief, some 3,000 refugees a night crossing into Jordan, tens of thousands of refugees in Turkey. That's why the United States is providing $385 million for everything from emergency food, shelter, blankets, surgical equipment, and mobile clinics. And in the Ahmad refugee camp on the Turkish border, we are bringing in medical supplies.

In all cases, we are working and we will continue to work closely with the Syrian Opposition Coalition and our international partners in order to make sure that the assistance we give reaches the people who need it and that we want to have receive it, even those who are trapped in some of the hard-to-reach areas. All of this work will be guided by our partners in the Syrian Opposition Coalition and in the Supreme Military Council.

We had a very thorough discussion today, in which all of the leaders present articulated their further needs for the opposition, and I will be taking some of these ideas back to Washington for further consideration. We agreed that we will consult on a regular basis, in constant touch

with each other, and meet when necessary and we consult together whenever we deem appropriate.

Now, we all understand this is a complicated challenge, but the principle that guides this challenge is very simple: No nation, no people, should live in fear of their so-called leaders. And all people deserve freedom and the opportunity to live in peace and dignity and with justice. We cannot meet this moment, so long as this leader decides to wage war on this own people in the manner that he has chosen. And we must meet this moment so that the people of Syria can live their full promise. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN AL- KHATIB: I wish to thank the Italian Government and the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs for allowing for this very important meeting with Mr. Kerry and all the foreign ministers who participated in this meeting in order to speak about the suffering of Syria in the hands of the mafia that is ruling the country now.

We are now speaking after two years of massacres of our people and the destruction of our infrastructures. The Syrian revolution is a peaceful revolution. I insist on this. And it's only the regime that has forced people to resort to arms. And of course, proof to this is the massacre and the bombarding with the SCUD missiles of this regime. The hole that was dug by the rocket that fell in (inaudible) was 150 meters deep. How can people who live under such conditions, while they witness the massacre of their children and people – how can they feel?

We speak of terrorism. I said to the ministers of foreign affairs that there are three questions we, as Syrians, are tired of and I, as a president, am tired of. Speaking of terrorism, no terrorists in the world have such a savage nature as that of the Syrian regime. That's one. Two, chemical weapons – the destruction by the regime in Syria, while using all sorts of weapons, is much more harmful than any chemical weapon. Number three is minorities. The regime has always presented itself as a regime that protects minorities. What I say to you is go to Lebanon and see what the Syrian regime did to the minorities in Lebanon when it occupied Lebanon. This is all I want to say regarding this.

Concerning the fighters, the mass media pay more attention to the length of the beard of a fighter than to the massacres. Days ago, the blood of children was actually kneaded into the dough with which the bread was made after the massacre. And this is more important than the length of the beard of the fighters. There are people who carry ideas that are strange to our society. We are against all sorts of opinions that want to impose themselves or to destroy the social fabric of Syria.

The colonel who is a martyr, Abu Farat, one of the combatants in Aleppo, is proof to this. He said, "I am sad because of every human being that is killed on the other side, because this human being at the end is a human being, and he has a family, and we are humans and not

beasts. I'm sad when I see any tank that is destroyed, but I'm forced to fight." Abu Farat was killed a few minutes later after he said this.

We – our Muslim fighters – the Islam as we see it is an Islam that wants the best for everybody, the good for everybody. We all descended from Adam and we were created in order to cooperate, not to kill each other.

There are several issues that were raised with the ministers, and we called for several points. One, to commit the regime to create humanitarian corridors that are safe and that – especially leading to Homs, which has been under siege for 250 days, and al Dara'a which is the cradle of the peaceful movement in Syria, and that witnessed also the martyr (inaudible), who tried to help the fighters and he was tortured by the regime and his tongue was actually sent in a plastic bag to his family because he was calling for freedom. We ask for the protection of the civilians.

Two, to consider the unity of Syria as a must. And independently of all claims that it might be divided, we will fight this.

Three, negotiation was called upon byzthe coalition while putting a main pre-condition, the elimination of the regime. I am saying, here and now, Bashar Assad, you have to behave for once as a human being. Stop killing and massacring this people, arresting and torturing its children. Bashar Assad, you have to adopt at least one wise decision in your life for the future of this country.

Four, giving the Syrian people and its revolutionaries the right to defend themselves. There is an international tendency not to arm the opposition, for different reasons. And I say, if this is what you want, then stop supplying the regime with weapons that they still receive in the context of old arms agreements.

Five, there is a point on the ban of – on weapons. Six, calling upon all countries to facilitate the residents' permits to Syrians. Some countries are harassing and even arresting, in certain countries, the Syrians who are in favor of the opposition. We ask for you to facilitate things for them and to give them medical aid and scholarships and all types of support that may be necessary.

Finally, we asked for support to neighboring countries, because they are under pressure due to the Syrian crisis. Finally, the international community can no longer stand aside and watch what is happening in Syria.

I wish to conclude by saying that our great cities, historical cities, are being destroyed, and whoever launches a stone against Syria is like launching a stone against one's own mother, because we are the cradle of civilization. Thank you very much.

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