

Opening statement by HR/VP Mogherini at the Second Brussels Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region"

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Excellencies, colleagues, dear friends,

The little girl in the video, Farah, is younger than the war in Syria. She cannot even remember what peace looks like; because she has never seen a country in peace. And yet her smile, her poetry I believe is contagious. Farah reminds us why we are here in Brussels today and we wanted to start our day with her words and with her smile.

We are here for her, we are here for Syrians, all of them. And we are here for the people, all the people of Syria. We want Farah to know that she can be anything she wants in life; we are here to tell her that the war will be over, to take this commitment, to tell her that she will not be a refugee forever, that her identity is not defined purely by the status of being a refugee - that she is a girl, she will be a woman, that she can be a teacher and a poet and follow her dream. Farah's dream is alive first and foremost thanks to the incredible men and women working in the Zaatari refugee camp where she lives; I recognise some of the places where the video was taken.

A dream is alive thanks to the hospitality of Jordan and of all the countries like Lebanon and Turkey that are hosting millions of Syrians. A dream is alive thanks to the people living in the communities that are hosting them. A dream is alive thanks to the United Nations and their tireless work. And thanks to the financial support we, the international community, have managed to mobilise through seven years of war.

From the European Union alone, almost eleven billion euros have been mobilised in these years. Last year at the First Brussels Conference we committed to increasing our support for Syrians, inside and outside the country. And today I can announce that, not only collectively we have delivered on last year's pledges but also that collectively, as international community, we have even exceeded last year's commitment by 25%. And inside Syria we have managed to deliver more than twice the amount we had originally pledged.

Let me also announce today that the European Union will confirm for the next year the same contribution as last year and we aim at maintaining the same level of contribution until 2020 - that is 560 million euros for our European Union's support to Syrians in Jordan, Lebanon and inside Syria and for the host communities. And for Syrians in Turkey the European Union and Member States will uphold their commitments and mobilise additional three billion euros in the coming two years.

But the work goes on today at the Second Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, to confirm to all our Syrian friends that we are still with them, that we do not forget that the war is still ongoing and that they need our help. That we are with them, with all the Farahs who hope and believe in a better future and in a normal life. But to give her and all her friends, and her parents, a normal life, financial commitments, yes, are necessary and we are here for that - but they are not enough. We need to put an end to the war in Syria - that will make her life normal.

I am sure most of you remember last year's Conference, those dramatic days. We met right after a chemical attack, in a very tense and delicate moment. I do not know how you feel about it, but my personal feeling is that it seems that we are stuck in a cycle of violence that keeps repeating itself, over and over again. Our common goal is and should be to break this cycle of violence and escalations - and we all know there is only one way of doing so. And let me say I believe the countries of the region, the countries neighbouring Syria know this better than everyone else.

The solution to this war can only come from meaningful political talks between the Syrian parties, under the UN auspices. It can only be a political negotiated solution. We need to unlock the Geneva talks. The proposal to set up a Constitutional Committee - led by Syrians and under the UN leadership in Geneva - should now be turned into reality, as a matter of urgency. And we will hear today from Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy [for Syria], but I hope we can also contribute to give him some food, not for thought - he thinks enough and very wisely - but for action.

We believe that transitional justice and the return of Syrians to their country must also be part of the picture. And we need to see progress on detainees and missing persons. The UN has proposed to set up a Standing Secretariat on this issue, in support of the working group formed by the Astana guarantors. This is also something we should work for, so that independent monitors can access all detention facilities, and light can be shed on cases of forced disappearances.

The political process, the path towards peace and reconciliation is and will not be easy - we are not naïve, we know that well. But believing in what is right does not mean being naïve - it means contributing to the solution. And we believe it is the only realistic way to achieving a sustainable peace, a united, free, democratic and inclusive Syria that belongs to all Syrians and to which all Syrians can belong.

The war can lead to a military victory, maybe. But would it lead to winning the peace? Our meeting today brings together more than eighty delegations from all around the world, from the region and international institutions. I would like to thank each of you for being here. We do not share the same views on everything, and we know that very well. But I believe there is the possibility to work together on two things: mobilising the aid, the financial support that can allow Farah to study, and stay alive; but also to work together to bring the Syrian parties to the negotiating table for real. We need both government and opposition to engage seriously in the UN-led talks. And collectively, I believe we do have the leverage to do so - if we decide to exercise it.

Let us invest all our resources to move from a context of never-ending escalations, to one of successful political negotiations. Let us try to win together the peace, or rather to let the Syrians win the peace. Because Syria is not a chessboard for geopolitical games; it belongs to its citizens, to all of them, no one excluded.

Later today, we will listen to some representatives of the Syrian civil society who are here with us and who I met together with Staffan [de Mistura] yesterday. They have come to Brussels from Syria but also from the rest of the region. They have different social backgrounds, different ideas, different personal histories. But they all have something in common, from what I have seen.

First of all, a capacity of understanding, listening to each other and to compromise, that I wish those who need to sit at the negotiating table had. And they all want a united and independent Syria; a peaceful and secure Syria, an inclusive and truly democratic Syria. Just like all Syrians, they want to take not only the future but also the present of their country into their hands. Let me conclude by saying that today we can let and help them doing so and I hope we take this opportunity.

I thank you very much, and I have the honour as the EU co-chairs this Second Brussels Conference together with the United Nations to introduce to you the message that António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations, has addressed to all of us.

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