

Federal Foreign Minister Westerwelle addresses the German Bundestag on the motion to continue the UNIFIL operation

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14.06.2013 - Speech 

– *verbatim report of proceedings* –

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, fellow parliamentarians! We cannot debate the continuation of Germany's participation in the UNIFIL mission without at the same time considering the situation in neighbouring Syria. We are taking the indications that chemical substances have been used in Syria very seriously. We will continue the intensive exchange of information on this to find out the facts of the matter. We urge that the newly presented reports be discussed in the ~~UN~~ (United Nations) Security Council with a view to reaching a common position.

Germany will continue to work towards the planned international conference on Syria. Even if the chances of such a conference on Syria are not all that great just now, we should and we will continue our efforts to reach a political solution.

Lasting peace in Syria will only be achieved by a political solution. If I gauge your reactions correctly, this seems to be the view of the vast majority of members of this House.

Ladies and gentlemen, what we need as soon as possible is an end to the violence and the start of a political process. Germany itself will not supply any weapons to Syria. But we will respect any different conclusion reached by any of our partners. However, anyone considering supplying weapons must make sure that those weapons do not fall into the wrong hands. We have already seen elsewhere what grave repercussions there can be when extremists and terrorists get their hands on modern weapons technology.

The Federal Government, ladies and gentlemen, has up to now made available over 160 million euros, most of it for humanitarian assistance for the refugees and internally displaced persons. This makes Germany one of the largest donors. But I can assure you that we will look into further ways to provide support.

There is a very real danger that the conflict will spread to other countries in the region. The conflict in Syria is having a broader and broader impact. Hezbollah fighters have taken part in the fighting on the side of the regime. In Lebanon there is renewed tension around religious disputes. The possibility of renewed violence cannot be ruled out.

The already difficult domestic situation in Lebanon is being exacerbated by the influx of refugees from Syria. One million Syrian refugees in Lebanon alone – that's equal to about a quarter of the country's total population. So the country is undoubtedly getting closer and closer to its limits.

We have now put in place the conditions to take 5000 refugees here in Germany, most of whom will be coming to us from Lebanon. In addition, no-one who has come to Germany from Syria since April 2011 will be repatriated. This applies to no less than 11,000 asylum-seekers. No-one will be deported to Syria.

The support provided by UNIFIL in equipping and training Lebanese armed forces remains vital. The mission makes a crucial contribution towards preventing the crisis from spreading like wildfire through the region. It is in the international interest, but also in our own best interest, to continue German participation in UNIFIL.

Extending the mandate for the mission would also be in line with the wishes of Israel, Lebanon itself and the United Nations, all of which have expressly asked that German participation be continued. The Bundestag mandate for German participation in the UNIFIL naval element is to be extended unchanged for twelve months until 30 June 2014. The personnel ceiling remains unchanged at 300.

On behalf of the Federal Government, I request your approval of this mandate.

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