Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

# International meeting on support to the Syrian Opposition

2012-11-16

Speaking after meeting the Leaders of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces and opening an international meeting on support to the Coalition, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said:

“Today I met the President and Vice President of the new National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in their first visit to Europe since the Coalition’s establishment in Doha a few days ago. They are very welcome here in London and we had a detailed discussion on how the Coalition will make progress now. The situation in Syria, of course, is very grave and deteriorating. More than 30,000 people have now died, hundreds of thousands are refugees in neighbouring countries, many hundreds of thousands are displaced within Syria and millions need humanitarian assistance. So we want to continue to step up our assistance to the people of Syria”.

“The formation of the Coalition is a very encouraging development and I’m further encouraged by the discussions that I have had with them this morning. It is important, of course, and I have stressed to them: that they respect minority rights; that they are inclusive of all communities in Syria; that they are committed to a democratic future for the people of Syria; that in the face of a regime that has committed such abuse, violence and rape against the people of their own country this Coalition stands firmly against all of those things; and that they uphold high standards of human rights, of international humanitarian law, preventing sexual violence and the preventing abuse of prisoners”.

“These things are very important to their future and to international support for them. I am encouraged by their response and by meeting Sheikh al Khatib the President of the Coalition and I welcome the commitment that he has made to reach out to all opposition groups and communities in Syria, to respect human rights, to finalise a clear plan for political transition in Syria and, of course, to demonstrate that the coalition can be a credible political alternative to the Assad regime”.

“There is still a lot of work to be done. In depth discussions will now take place here in London today with a wide range of countries about how we can channel assistance more effectively to the people of Syria and build up our links with the new coalition. The meeting today will focus on the practicalities of those things”.

“We will have further discussions in the European Union on Monday in Brussels, which I will attend, about Syria and about the assistance we can give to the Coalition and to the people of Syria, and I will make a further statement to the House of Commons next week about our approach. But I hope that today and this meeting will mark a turning point for the Syrian people and that it will begin major steps towards a political transition in Syria”.

“So I am encouraged by what I have heard and seen from the leaders of the Coalition and I hope the discussions in London today will bring greater assistance to tens of thousands of people suffering today in Syria. Thank you very much”.

On recognition of the opposition the Foreign Secretary added:

“I discussed with the Coalition this morning the question of recognition. We would like to be able at an early stage to recognise them as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people. One or two countries have already done so. I wanted to meet them myself before the United Kingdom takes that step. We need their assurances about being inclusive of all communities, we need to see that they have genuine support within Syria. And if we are going to take that important step of recognition we should do so in full possession of the facts and on the basis of discussions with them”.

“So the meeting we have had today is an important component of that and we’ll continue to work on this over the next few days and I will make a further statement to our Parliament about this next week”.

On the National Security Council the Foreign Secretary said:

“In our National Security Council yesterday we reviewed all the options on Syria. We don’t rule out any option on Syria, but we are conscious that this ultimately needs, whatever happens, a diplomatic and political solution. A military victory of one side over the other would be a long, expensive process in terms of human life. And so our top priority remains to achieve a diplomatic and political solution and that remains our position”.

“We will discuss the way forward with European Union colleagues on Monday and also with Arab nations and with the United States, now the American elections are over”.

“We cannot stand still, we cannot just say that we will leave things as they are in Syria because it is a gravely deteriorating situation. But how we respond has to be well judged, well thought through and so at the moment our priorities are to increase our humanitarian assistance as we have done in recent weeks, to better coordinate our practical support to people in opposition held areas on the ground, and to keep up the pressure for a diplomatic solution”.

---

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-meeting-on-support-to-the-syrian-opposition