

PRESS RELEASE

762/16

09/12/2016

Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the situation in Aleppo

Since the beginning of the offensive by the Syrian regime and its allies notably Russia, the intensity and scale of the aerial bombardment of eastern Aleppo have caused widespread civilian casualties and devastated large areas of the city, causing an appalling deterioration in the situation there. The EU reiterates its strong condemnation of such deliberate excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians, aid and healthcare personnel, and civilian infrastructures such as schools and hospitals. The Syrian regime has the primary responsibility for the protection of the Syrian population. The EU condemns the continued systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law. These violations, including indiscriminate bombardments, by the regime and its allies, and the offensive at large must stop. The EU recalls the obligation under international humanitarian law to take all feasible measures to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects enjoying special protection under international humanitarian law.

These attacks and the use of starvation of civilians through the besiegement of populated areas, as a tactic of war, as well as forced population transfers, also constitute clear breaches of international humanitarian law and must immediately cease. Those responsible for any such breaches, crimes against humanity and other serious international crimes, which may amount to war crimes, must be held accountable. Impunity for such crimes cannot be tolerated. In this context, the EU will act swiftly, according to established procedures, with the aim of imposing further restrictive measures against Syria targeting Syrian individuals and entities supporting the regime as long as the repression continues.

Given the suffering of Aleppo's civilian population, the EU demands that all parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian regime, immediately grant unhindered and unconditional access so that medical evacuations of the sick and wounded from eastern Aleppo can proceed in line with the UN's plan, and the civilian population can find refuge in a place of safety. The EU calls on the Syrian regime to do this urgently to alleviate the dire situation in Aleppo. It calls on Russia to demonstrate through policies and actions all efforts to use its influence to make this happen. Particularly as aid is just kilometres away. To this end, it is crucial that there is an immediate ceasefire to allow the United Nations to get humanitarian assistance to those still cut off in eastern Aleppo and to provide humanitarian relief to those who have fled eastern Aleppo. The EU takes note of all international efforts in this regard. Arbitrary denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians of support indispensable to their survival, such as food aid, and life-saving medical supplies, constitute a serious breach of international humanitarian law. At the same time, civilians willing and able to leave Aleppo on a voluntary basis, must be granted unhindered passage through safe humanitarian corridors in full compliance with international humanitarian law and monitored by the UN. The EU notes the opposition's agreement to facilitate proper protection of civilians and evacuation of the wounded. The EU strongly supports the continued determined efforts of the UN to address the humanitarian situation in Aleppo and across Syria.

The EU condemns atrocities committed by Da'esh and other UN designated terrorist groups and reaffirms its strong commitment to combat them. Da'esh and other UN designated terrorist organisations constitute a threat for the future of Syria as well as to the interest and values of the EU.

The EU reiterates its support for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and its profound conviction that there can be no military solution to the conflict. There cannot be a lasting peace in Syria under the current regime and until the legitimate grievances and aspirations of all components of the Syrian society are addressed. The EU calls for an immediate and full ceasefire throughout Syria. It is the major contributor of humanitarian assistance aimed at saving the lives of civilians suffering from the conflict, in strict respect of humanitarian principles. It also continues with increasing urgency to advocate a political solution that will provide a genuine political transition to accountable and inclusive government for all Syrians, as provided for in the 2012 Geneva communique and UNSC resolution 2254, and fully supports the efforts of the UN Special Envoy de Mistura to create conditions for resumption of intra-Syrian talks, with the meaningful participation of women and civil society. The EU will therefore intensify its outreach to regional actors on the future of Syria, in constant coordination with and close support of the UN Special Envoy, with a view to laying the ground for the resumption of an inclusive and Syrian led political process under UN auspices. The EU will continue to support efforts of the Syrian opposition and in particular the High Negotiations Committee (HNC)

as the opposition delegation in the UN-brokered talks.

The EU underlines that only once such an inclusive political transition is firmly in place will the EU be able to assist with the reconstruction of the country directly and through cooperation with international organisations.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, and Albania*, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this Declaration.

*The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press