Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary's remarks with French Foreign Minister Fabius in New York on the situation in Syria

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Speaking in New York today, the Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

“It is a pleasure to be here in New York, and I am grateful to my colleague Laurent Fabius and to the French Government for convening this important meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

Today, the United Kingdom stands with France in calling for urgent and generous contributions from all nations to the United Nations relief effort. 1.5 million people have been displaced inside Syria. 2.5 million people are in need of urgent assistance. And the number of refugees in neighbouring countries, which is growing day by day, today stands at over 200,000. Despite this desperate need, the UN relief fund is only 50% funded.

And so I am announcing today that the United Kingdom, already the second biggest national donor to Syria’s humanitarian crisis, will contribute an additional £3 million pounds in aid to Syrian refugees, on top of the £27.5 million we have already committed.

This will include £2 million to humanitarian relief agencies inside Syria and an additional £1 million to help NGOs working with refugees in Jordan, and in particular supporting women who have been victims of sexual violence in conflict. These new funds bring our total humanitarian support to Syria to £30.5 million.

We call on other nations to increase their funding - and on Security Council members to set a strong lead.

And to that end, the UK and France will propose a meeting of Development Ministers, with UN agencies, in the coming weeks, to encourage increased donations.

We will also continue our work with the opposition from Syria, supporting follow-up to the opposition’s Cairo Conference and its work to develop a transition plan, and delivering the non-lethal support that the UK has committed ourselves to provide, which is now beginning to reach those who need it.

Our two nations are also determined to help hold to account those responsible for human rights abuses in Syria. We will work to support initiatives to bring the situation in Syria to the

attention of the International Criminal Court, despite the many obstacles to this. If these don't succeed we look forward to a day when a different kind of government in place in Syria will take responsibility for voluntarily referring the situation to the ICC, as part of a long-term process of accountability and reconciliation in Syria.

So those who continue to support Assad and his regime should think carefully about their position. Now is the time to step away from this regime and deny it moral and financial support. And we call on Assad supporters to distance themselves from the regime, or face the increasing possibility in the future of being held to account for the regime's actions.

We are also determined with our allies to make clear that any use of chemical weapons would be utterly unacceptable. The UK and France will today call on the UN Secretary-General to ensure that the UN Investigation Mechanism into allegations of the use of chemical and biological weapons can readily be deployed.

We, key allies and members of the opposition have been working on planning for a post-Assad Syria, 'The day after' as Laurent has said, in which people can express their views freely and without fear of repression. We believe that the international community should establish an international mechanism to help coordinate this work involving the countries in the region that are carrying such a heavy burden from this crisis.

The international community must stand by the countries neighbouring Syria in their time of need. We are doing so in Lebanon for example by: giving strong political support to attempts to end Syrian interference; increasing our support to the Lebanese army, as the best guarantor of stability, doubling military training; and increasing our support to the Lebanese government's effort to manage Syrian refugees.

And finally, although our focus today is the humanitarian situation in Syria, it remains the case that the Security Council must also shoulder its responsibilities. The Security Council must give purposeful support to the new UN and Arab League Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and be prepared to return in the coming weeks to giving its full support to a plan for a peaceful political transition.

Today we have seen further regional condemnation of the Syrian regime at the NAM summit, where President Mursi made clear that it was "oppressive" and "had lost legitimacy". The UK strongly supports his call for a peaceful transition to a democratic system of rule that reflects the demands of the Syrian people for freedom. We hope the Security Council and the wider UN system can put their full weight behind that ambition."

Q + A to the UK Foreign Secretary William Hague at the joint press conference on the situation in Syria - 30 August 2012

Q:

Allow me to thank you, Mr Fabius and Mr Hague, for being here to talk to the international press and now my question of course is the same, that the great humanitarian catastrophe that is going on in Syria. You all realise it, but too late, but better late than never, how is that you will be able to speak with your colleagues in the Security Council, meaning Russia and China, to all come ready, to unite on one platform, to save the Syrian people, civilians, from this ongoing tragedy. And can you do that, will you do that?

A:

On that we have tried as you know. You have followed these things closely . We have tried many times to have a united approach in the Security Council in an effort not only to help those caught up in this crisis, which we are doing today, but to bring an end to it. And we have made progress at times. We did with resolution 2042 and 2043, but our efforts to pass resolutions that in our view would make a decisive change in the situation have been vetoed three times. We continue our diplomacy with Russian and China. We never stop talking to Russia and to China about these things, but today in the absence of agreement of requiring the implementation of what was the Annan peace plan, which is what we argued for on the 19th July, in the absence of that, we are focussing on doing everything else that we can to help hundreds of thousands, millions of people caught up in a crisis that the United Nations Security Council has failed in its responsibilities to bring to an end. And so, this does not indicate we are in any way weakening in that work and that objective, but in the absence of a solution, we have to do everything we can to help.

Q:

A follow up on the buffer zones and then a question on Brahimi. The Turkish government has made very clear - the question to both of you please - that they want these zones - or inside or outside - anyway, the buffer zones, they made it very clear, they need it. The UN said we will not provide it, because we cannot police it and we need a Security Council resolution. NATO can do something if they choose to. NATO countries, and you both are NATO countries, are you considering how to help implement what the Turks are asking for or is this really out of the question? Basically, I'm trying to say that Russians are afraid of a Kosovo type intervention through these humanitarian corridors. Are you considering that? Is this totally off the table? And does Brahimi, from your point of view, his task, isd to do the political transition in Syria, or just choose whatever his task may be? Thank you both.

A:

I am pleased Mr Brahimi has taken on this role. It is a formidably difficult role of course and now he will want to, he is consulting widely about how to pursue it. One of the things that he can build on, is that there was at least agreement among the Permanent Members of the Security Council and many others that there should be a transition and that there should be a

transitional government in Syria. Indeed at our meeting in Geneva at the end of June, we agreed what that should look like. That it should include the members of the current regime and of the opposition, formed on the basis of mutual consent and I think that that is an important statement for Mr Brahimi to build on in his work so in my view he is there to work on transition, formidably difficult as that is, because, of course, there is no agreement between government and opposition in Syria and there is not a strong enough Security Council resolution with a mandate to bring that about and that is part of his role. On the question on safe zones, I really gave the same answer as Laurent has already given. We are excluding no options for the future. We do not know how this crisis will develop, how it will develop over the coming months. It is steadily getting worse. We are ruling nothing out and we have contingency planning for a wide range of scenarios. We don't generally go into what all that contingency planning is, but we also have to be clear that anything like a safe zone requires military intervention and that, of course, is something that has to be weighed very carefully and, of course, it is not something to which the United Nations Security Council has assented, or would be likely to assent to, in current circumstances. So there are considerable difficulties with such an idea, but we are not ruling out any options for the future.

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