

Remarks by Federica Mogherini with the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr Staffan de Mistura

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We just met with brave women and men who are engaged in civil society work inside Syria and outside Syria - all Syrians different background, different ages, different political ideas.

This morning and today all saddened together with us by the news of a horrible attack in Idlib – chemical weapons as the worst of the war crimes - and whoever is responsible for that must be held accountable. We have talked about that with the representatives of civil society and not one single of them fails to mention the need to work on accountability and responsibility.

If I can pass the message that we share with them is that impunity is not an option, especially in front of these terrible scenes we are seeing today. And maybe it is not by chance that it is exactly when the international community, 70 different countries and organisations come together to try and build peace, supporting the UN [United Nations] mediation in Geneva, gathering funds for the humanitarian support and looking at the future and how the international community can support the Syrians as they build the future of Syria. Maybe it is not a chance that it is right in a moment like this that such attacks come.

But we have the responsibility together with our Syrian friends to stay strong and continue working for peace. This is what they do. I am always impressed by the strength, the hope, the capacity to look at the future and to unite, that Syrian people show. Beyond the people that represent them even in the talks, I leave that to Staffan [de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria], whenever I meet Syrians - women and men - they acknowledge their differences but they manage to look together at what they can do for the future of their country. And here today we heard the strong determination of all of them.

First of all, to build together the future of Syria, take it in their hands; refuse violence of any kind; and guarantee that the future of Syria respects diversity and unity. And I think this is the basis of common sense but also the heart that the Syrian people express today, and tomorrow at the conference [Brussels Conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"] together with the United Nations and - as I said - 70 different delegations from around the world and international organisations, we'll try to give an answer to this. Try to do their part of our responsibility, supporting the Syrians to try and find their way to their own future; with the humanitarian help, with the support to the political negotiations in Geneva that are for us the only way forward and also starting to look at what the international community can do in the future to reconstruct the country that will need to be reconstructed – not only from a material point of view but also - that is self-evident - from a point of view of living together and rebuilding trust and the capacity to look at each other without hate in each other's eyes. From what I have seen the people of

Syria are ready, the international community is ready; I hope that this political solution can be found or at least started so that we can all offer a dignified present and future for all Syrians inside and outside of Syria.

And I did not mention how great it is to work as always not only with the United Nations. The European Union and the United Nations are more and more natural partners in this difficult war, but also with Staffan de Mistura [UN Special Envoy for Syria] who is doing a remarkable job as the UN Secretary General Special Envoy with patience, determination, diplomatic capacity that very few have in the world of today and finding or trying to find some common ground even where it seems impossible. I think we all owe him a lot in these difficult times and tomorrow I will be honoured to open the conference together with the Secretary General [of the United Nations], António Guterres.

Q. [Inaudible] Do you have evidence of today's chemical attack in Syria? And in terms of reconstruction, why should not Russia and Iran pick up the bill since they have been doing much of the destroy?

I would like also to pick up on this by saying that we also do not have any evidence at the moment and obviously the European Union and the United Nations and the entire international community especially as we gather here in these days on Syria, we share whatever we can share in terms of information. But I mentioned earlier this morning a principle that I would like to reiterate that there is an objective responsibility for any regime towards the protection of their own civilians and this is a principle that is valid under international law in any case and so I think this is something we have to remind us all and that also we discussed with our Syrian friends today.

When it comes to the reconstruction, I want to make it very clear. The work that the European Union has started today at the technical level together with the United Nations and the international financial institutions is to start preparations for a major collective effort that will be needed in the moment when the conflict will be over and a political agreement will be reached. No reconstruction will be financed before that. Obviously all the humanitarian aid and all the humanitarian support will continue to come in. That is a must for us and as you know the European Union is the first humanitarian donor for Syria with almost €10 billion we have mobilised together with our Member States so far. That will continue, that is a priority for us. But the reconstruction effort, the reconstruction financing, will only be starting when the political process will start and an agreement will be reached in Geneva.

Why do we need or do we believe there will be the need for a major international coordinated effort? Because the amounts of money we are talking about are amounts of money that no single power alone, not to mention powers as the ones you mentioned like Iran and Russia that do not have the strongest possible economy in the world, would ever have the resources to face. We as Europeans, as well as we believe the international community as such, have learned from our lessons in the past that you can win the war, but you can lose the peace and that is best recipe for a protracted state of confusion, tension, sometimes insecurity and conflict again. The cycle of falling back again into conflict if you do not stabilise the place after the conflict is over is very high.

We do not have any interest in seeing that happening, obviously we do not imagine in any possible way that there can be a situation where the European Union takes the bill regardless of any kind of political dynamic. This is simply not going to happen and I think we made it very clear yesterday with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union. But the Syrians have to know, and also the negotiating parties have to know in Geneva, and also the international players have to know that the European Union is ready to come and do its part, as always, provided that the political conditions are there, because we care about the Syrian people. That is our message.

We Europeans are not the ones who are bombing, we are not the ones who are fighting, we are not the ones who are fighting, we are not the ones who are pushing for one side or the other – we are the ones delivering humanitarian aid, helping the UN to reach an agreement and a political solution, and we are the ones getting ready to help the Syrians build by themselves, as they would like to do, the future of their country. This is our approach; this is the way we believe foreign policy should be done and we are consistent on that. But this does not mean that somebody breaks everything and then we pay the bill – this is simply not going to happen.

Q. Una domanda in italiano per l'Alto Commissario Mogherini - dopo il bombardamento di questa mattina aumenterà la pressione dell'Unione Europea sul regime di Bashar Al-Assad per la soluzione soprattutto diplomatica?

L'Unione Europea ha sempre detto insieme alle Nazioni Unite che non c'è altra soluzione a questo conflitto se non un accordo politico, che sta alle parti siriane trovare a Ginevra sotto l'egida delle Nazioni Unite con il grande lavoro che sta facendo Staffan de Mistura. L'Unione Europea fa e continua a fare pressione per questo e al tempo stesso continuiamo a sostenere i siriani dentro la Siria e al di fuori della Siria per evitare che persone muoiano e continuino a morire in condizione drammatiche. E quindi per questo l'Unione Europea continua ad essere il primo donatore di aiuto umanitario per i siriani.

[Translation from Italian] The European Union along with the United Nations have always said that there is no other solution to this conflict but a political agreement, which has to be found by Syrian parties in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations with the great work Staffan de Mistura is doing. The European Union is doing and will continue to advocate for this and at the same time we continue to support the Syrians inside Syria and outside Syria, so that people do not die, and do not continue to die in tragic conditions. So this is why the European Union remains the biggest donor of humanitarian aid for Syrians.

Q. Mr de Mistura, during Geneva IV last February, we get by the end of the session a kind of hope that they agreed at least on four baskets and they are coming back. But in Geneva V things were again blocked. Why was the process blocked in this session of last week? And Mme Mogherini, don't you think that the blockade of the negotiation in Geneva - one can say the failure

of the political process until now - can impact negatively the Conference? We thought in the beginning it will be a highly political one and it could be only a humanitarian Conference.

I totally share what Staffan [de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria] has just said. So the first part of your question is something I would put into question. I believe that it would be completely naïve to imagine that a round of talks in Geneva, being in the fourth or the fifth - or even the sixth probably - could bring the result of an end of the conflict. And I think it was not the expectation of the negotiator himself, of all of us, or of the parties that were coming together – if I am not wrong for the first times coming together even around the same table, or at least in the same room.

After the seven years of war, you cannot expect one round of talks or two rounds of talks to bring the solution to everything, as you cannot expect a Conference [Brussels Conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"] – even such an important Conference as the one we are having today and tomorrow here – to bring the end to the conflict but I would like to remember us all that we have finally entered the phase where content is discussed. Again, if it is not your role, it is for sure not mine that of giving details, but for once we have started - and the parties have started - to discuss seriously about the content and this is something that was never achieved before.

And the meaning of the Conference [Brussels Conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"] here, as you mentioned, is not only that of keeping the humanitarian support high, because we also run the risk that the international community gets used to the Syrian crisis and this becomes a forgotten crisis. This is something we absolutely do not want to happen. But also, we are gathering 70 countries and organisations tomorrow exactly to pass this message of hope to the Syrian people and of encouragement - let's say so - to the Syrian negotiating parties that the international community is strongly behind this process and has expectations on an outcome of this. It might not be tomorrow, it might not be the day after tomorrow, but once they entered the serious discussion on content we are on the right track.

Thank you.

Languages:

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