

President Khoja's Speech at "Arria Formula" Meeting of UN Security Council

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April 29, 2015

Speech
(Arabic)

(Original in

Khaled Khoja

President of the Syrian Coalition

April 29, 2015

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ambassadors,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm particularly grateful to France, the United States, and the United Kingdom for convening this meeting. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the friends of the Syrian people who have generously provided humanitarian aid, given shelter and assistance to our displaced people, and trained and equipped our brave civil defence teams.

Your Excellencies,

I speak to you today, on the Day of Remembrance for all victims of chemical warfare.

Syrians are among those victims. Syrians have suffered the torment of chemical weapons, barrel bombs, ballistic missiles, torture, siege and starvation at the hands of a dictator who has used all means to suppress the rights of the Syrian people to freedom and dignity. I don't want to repeat the statistics on the regime's crimes. You all know them. The crimes committed by the Assad regime amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. They are a permanent stain on the international community, and particularly this Council. And the situation is getting worse. Assad's brutality, and the international community's failure to end these crimes, have bred a vicious extremist threat that is a clear and present danger to the world.

This Council has expressed its concern and condemnation of the deteriorating situation in Syria. But words are not enough. Condemnations have not stopped Assad's aerial bombardment. Strong statements will not end ISIL's terror. Even the Council's resolutions on humanitarian access and the prevention of chemical weapons have not had the desired impact. For example, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has listed 87 violations of UN Security Council resolution 2118 on chemical weapons. Despite the efforts of some, none of the steps taken by the international community has made the difference we need. We need action to immediately stop the killing. We need protection to put the country on track for a political solution based on the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

Your Excellencies,

We believe your Council has the opportunity today to take decisive steps to end the conflict in our country. Three important developments together present –in our opinion

– an opportunity to push for a peaceful solution.

First, the regime cannot win militarily. Opposition forces have defeated the regime in the north and south, despite the support that it has received from some regional and international forces and from mercenary militias from all over the world. In parallel, there are growing divisions within the regime. Major General Rustom Ghazaleh – a member of the regime, killed by another member of the regime – is not the first example, and nor will it be the last, of a regime turning on itself. The military and economic decline of the regime coincides with the withdrawal of its troops from cities – which it then aerially bombards.

Second, the political opposition, and particularly the Syrian Coalition, is making progress. We have worked hard to move from the mindset of opposition to that of a state. We are leading the effort, through open dialogue with the rest of the political opposition groups, including Building the Syrian State Movement, and National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, to unite our political efforts and positions within the framework of the Geneva Communiqué. We have initiated joint meetings with moderate armed groups on fighting extremism and maintaining a large part of the military, security and civil state institutions during the transitional phase. The first consultative meeting, held on April 25 and attended by the majority of the military factions fighting the Assad regime and ISIL, was a step towards forming a comprehensive national consensus on the parameter of a political solution, and towards an agreement on establishing a civil democratic state.

Your Excellencies,

You already know that we are engaging constructively with Staffan de Mistura and his team in order to find a political solution acceptable to all Syrians, just as we engaged Lakhdar Brahimi and Kofi Annan. Our position on regional initiatives depends on their compatibility with the Geneva Communiqué. We are not a traditional opposition, but revolutionary movements with a common goal: to end dictatorship, end the bloodshed, and build a free democratic state in Syria. In this context, over the past four years, we have developed documents and principles accepted by all opposition forces. These include the 2011 founding document of the National Council, the two Cairo papers of 2012, the founding document of the Syrian National Coalition, the road map that we submitted during the Geneva negotiations, and the thirteen points we submitted as a basis for dialogue with other factions. We also have a detailed vision for the transitional period, including the Day After project, which we continue to develop.

The third positive development that could be a catalyst for a diplomatic intervention is the unified Gulf, Arab and Muslim position regarding Iranian expansion, and its affiliated militias. This position peaked in the decisive Saudi stance during operations Decisive Storm and Restore Hope, in addition to the diplomatic efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the crisis in Yemen. The Gulf intervention in Yemen has raised the morale of the Syrian people, who have suffered from blatant Iranian intervention in our country, and from the terrorism of its militias. We are optimistic that your Council can take effective steps to end the conflict in our country as you did

with resolution 2216 on Yemen, issued under Chapter VII.

These developments offer us an opportunity to immediately end the killing and human suffering, and begin comprehensive negotiations based on the Geneva Communiqué.

Although some of these steps may take time, your Council can take practical steps to save lives and alleviate human suffering: goals on which every member of this Council can agree.

We appeal to you to take the following steps.

First, implement your resolutions on the delivery of humanitarian aid and the prohibition of chlorine gas.

Second, emphasize accountability as a component in the political solution.

Third, we urge you to take effective steps to stop the barrel bombs by establishing safe zones. Such zones will contribute to a political solution and will serve the immediate goal of saving lives and alleviating human suffering.

Your Excellencies,

Safe zones will save lives and provide protection to civilians. They will prevent the killing of large numbers of civilians by barrel bombs. And they will prevent Assad's aircraft from aerially deploying chemical weapons and barrel bombs. Despite two Security Council resolutions threatening Chapter VII measures in the event of further use of chemical weapons, the Assad regime continues to drop bombs filled with chlorine with no consequences. Safe zones will enforce the Security Council's resolutions. And, by protecting civilians, safe zones will deny extremists a recruitment tool.

Safe zones will help alleviate human suffering. They will create space for humanitarian aid to be delivered more safely into some areas. And they could slow the exodus of refugees or create the safety needed for return. The space they create could be the first step to long-overdue accountability.

Your Excellencies,

The past four years have demonstrated that despite the intolerable scale of the horror, and despite the clear threat to international peace and security, the Council has not fulfilled its responsibilities to protect the Syrian people, ending the humanitarian disaster and find a peaceful solution to the conflict in our country. We will continue to confront this Council with its responsibilities. But we will not stand idly by in the face of the worst humanitarian disaster known to mankind since World War II. In the absence of Council action, we will continue to appeal to those countries that have stood with the Syrian people and ask them to establish safe zones. Any action in response to an overwhelming humanitarian need that succeeds in saving lives, alleviating human suffering, and contributing to peace is both moral and legal, particularly if the Security Council has failed to act.

Your Excellencies,

We believe that the crimes of the Syrian regime, and the failure of the international community to address them, have led to the world's worst humanitarian disaster. They

have also led to the emergence of the world's worst terrorist organization, which calls itself the Islamic State despite having nothing to do with Islam, and which poses a direct threat to international peace and security. We are here to tell you that we will do everything we can to work with you and the rest of the world to put an end to this tragedy, and to confront the challenges of generating peace, development and the building of a free and democratic state.

Thank you