European External Action Service (EEAS)

EU Statement – United Nations General Assembly: High Level Panel on human rights in Syria

2021-03-02 · New York

2 March 2021, New York - Statement on behalf of the European Union by H.E. Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, at the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly High level panel of the General Assembly on the situation of human rights in Syria

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement. The countries of Monaco, San Marino and Andorra also align with this statement.

The European Union welcomes this timely High-level panel of the General Assembly on the situation of human rights in Syria.

Later this month, on 15 March 2021, we will commemorate a sombre anniversary: The Syrian conflict will have lasted ten years. Yet, even after a decade of conflict, the violence and instability in Syria continue to cause enormous suffering, with long-term consequences for the Syrian people. The human devastation of the country endures.

The dire human rights and humanitarian situation in Syria calls for the continuous full attention of the UN human rights bodies. The EU condemns the persistent, widespread, systematic and serious violations and abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, in particular by the Syrian regime and its allies.

Therefore, the EU continues to call upon all parties, in particular the Syrian regime and its allies to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, and to permanently cease indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling on civilians, and civilian objects, critical infrastructures such as health facilities and schools, and protect those most vulnerable, as well as health and humanitarian workers. The EU also reiterates its call for a complete, immediate and nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria, in line with the call by the

Secretary General, his Special Envoy and UNSC resolutions, to guarantee the protection of civilians on the ground and from airstrikes.

As the largest humanitarian donor across the whole of Syria, the EU reiterates the need for safe, full, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access, including to places of confinement or detention, in line with humanitarian principles. We echo the call by the Secretary General for improved humanitarian access, both cross line and cross border. The same access must be ensured for protection and human rights organisations. The regime continues to impose administrative and security restrictions on humanitarian access, especially in areas previously held by the Syrian opposition, while the continued harassment and enforced disappearance of current and former humanitarian workers, activists and other civilians is deeply concerning. All such practices must cease forthwith.

All those responsible for breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. The EU reiterates its call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court. In the absence of avenues for international justice, the prosecution of war crimes under national jurisdiction where possible, to invoke Syria's and all parties' to the conflicts responsibility for human rights violations represent an important contribution towards securing justice. In this regard, the recent ruling (last week) of a German regional court, where a defendant has been found guilty and sentenced for his role in the Syrian state torture regime, is an encouraging step forward. The EU has supported and will continue to support efforts to gather evidence with a view to future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) for Syria and the Commission of Inquiry.

Regarding the situation of refugees and of internally displaced persons, the EU continues to voice strong concern about reports of social and demographic engineering in areas throughout Syria, and mass waves of displacement, inter alia in parts of the northwest and northeast. The EU insists that the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin can only be encouraged if it can take place in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner, in line with the parameters defined by UNHCR and in accordance with international law. The underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed through the implementation of UNSCR 2254.

The EU remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state, and recalls that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition in line with UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva communiqué negotiated by the Syrian parties within the UN-led Geneva process.

The EU reiterates that all elements of UNSCR 2254 must be implemented, including the issue of detainees and missing persons and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in order for free and fair elections to be held under UN supervision.

The EU, in line with EU Council Conclusions, will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, in the framework of UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva process, is firmly under way.

In closing, allow me to draw your attention to the fifth Brussels conference on the future of Syria and the region on 30 March, which we have the pleasure to co-host with the UN. The Conference aims to consolidate international support for urgent progress towards a political solution to the conflict, in line with UNSCR 2254, to mobilise international financial support to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people in Syria and in the region, and to support Syria's neighbours and hosting communities. It will also provide a unique platform for interaction between policy-makers and Civil Society that has been playing a crucial role in shedding the light on human rights violations in Syria during years of conflict. We will also use the Conference to stress the importance of progress on other parts of the UNSCR 2254, such as detainees and missing persons, and highlight the demand for safe and unhindered humanitarian access and the crucial need to renew and broaden the cross-border resolution in the UNSC in July, which preserves a vital lifeline into Northern Syria.

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

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-united-nations-general-assembly-high-level-panel-human-rights-syria_en