Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary: "we have to intensify the pressure" on Syria

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Speaking following his attendance, the Foreign Secretary said:

“I’ve had a very encouraging meeting with the leaders of the Syrian National Council (SNC), who have stated very strongly their commitment to democratic principles, to trying to unify opposition groups to the protection of minorities in a future Syria, a very important issue. And indeed the leader of the SNC has given a powerful speech to the conference based on those principles, setting out the vision of a future democratic Syria.

“I think that has made a very powerful impact on all the countries represented here. I think it reinforces what I said earlier about recognising them as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people. And we’ve also seen from, from everyone who has spoken so far a real determination to tighten a diplomatic and economic stranglehold on the Assad regime; to make greater efforts to coordinate humanitarian assistance and to return to the United Nations Security Council with this issue. And so it is a very determined and forceful event”.

Speaking about the nature of the Syrian opposition, the Foreign Secretary said:

“Well there are other representatives as well as the SNC, and that’s why we say ‘a legitimate representative of the Syrian people’. We are encouraging them to bring together as many of the opposition groups as possible, based on common principles. But of course they are not in control - the Syrian National Council - of any of the territory of Syria. This is therefore a different situation than that we faced in Libya last year. But I do believe they are making progress. I do believe they justify our intensified support and that’s why we are working with them. So I have offered the political opposition outside Syria additional, practical help and I believe that they are doing the right things and that they will be able to bring greater unity to the opposition in Syria”.

Speaking about the impact of the Friends of Syria meeting on the situation on the ground, the Foreign Secretary said:

“Of course it won’t change it immediately and there is immense frustration about that. But this is a situation that has now gone on for nearly a year in which more than seven thousand people have died. So we have to intensify the pressure. We have to continue all this work. I

think that the fact that so many countries have come together and will now be taking many measures together - diplomatic measures, reducing diplomatic ties, increasing the economic pressure and so on. I think that is going to make a steadily greater impact, frustratingly slow though that is".

Text of Foreign Secretary's intervention at the meeting

This meeting is the latest move by the international community to back the

Arab League's

plan for a Syrian-led solution to the crisis, following the United Nations

General Assembly Resolution

on 16 February. Key aims for the meeting are to:

Demonstrate widespread international support for the Arab League plan, and increase the level of that support;

Put further pressure on the Assad regime, including by encouraging other countries to follow the EU, US and Arab League lead on sanctions and pressing work to ensure accountability for human rights abuses;

Increase support for the political opposition - by encouraging it to come together around the Syrian National Counci (SNC). It is crucial that it develops a united vision and a strategy;

Press for immediate, free and safe humanitarian access while ensuring a co-ordinated international response under the UN. The meeting will also look at economic recovery.

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