

Speech by Minister of State Niels Annen at the United Nations Security Council on Syria (Video conference)

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I would like to thank you, Ms. Mustafa, for your testimony today, for your call for justice. Few people have shown your courage in pressing for accountability.

According to the numbers provided by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, almost 150,000 people have disappeared and Syrian regime forces account for almost 90% of those. Where are they?

More than 14,400 Syrians have died under torture; almost 99% of them at the hands of Syrian regime forces. The stark “Caesar photos” show their agony. We must not forget these faces. We owe them progress on justice and accountability. Wafa Mustafa and all families of detainees and missing persons have a right to know what happened to their loved ones in Syrian prisons.

Resolution 2254 calls for the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. But since its adoption in December 2015, arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, torture and sexual violence in Syrian prisons and detention facilities continue unabated.

Today, this Council should be united in urging all parties to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, starting with the most vulnerable – women and children, the sick, wounded and elderly. This call should be loud and clear and directed in particular at the Syrian regime that holds the overwhelming majority of detainees.

I also call on the Syrian regime to allow immediate, unconditional and unhindered access for relevant humanitarian organizations to all its prisons and detention facilities.

Finally, the Syrian regime must inform the families of the destiny and whereabouts of the disappeared.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We fully support his analysis that peace and reconciliation in Syria can only be achieved through a political process under the auspices of the United Nations in line with resolution 2254. I therefore welcome your intention, Mr. Pedersen, to finally resume the work of the Constitutional Committee. I urge all parties to seize this invitation and to engage constructively.

And I echo Mr. Pedersen's call for a complete, immediate, nationwide ceasefire.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In its latest report, the Commission of Inquiry has detailed human rights violations and war crimes in Idlib. This reporting as well as the findings of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team and the Board of Inquiry demonstrate that the Syrian regime and its allies are responsible for indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in north-west Syria.

Germany continues to support all efforts, in particular those of the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) for Syria and the Commission of Inquiry, to ensure that the most serious crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict do not go unpunished, that perpetrators will be held accountable, and that victims receive justice.

There has to be a follow-up to the findings of all these reports. We must not tolerate impunity.

Russia and China blocked the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. It is their responsibility that those who committed and are still committing the most serious crimes in Syria cannot be brought to justice before the ICC.

But national jurisdictions are starting to fill the void. Two former officials of the Syrian regime's repression apparatus are charged with crimes against humanity at a court in Koblenz, Germany. For the first time, abductions, torture and abuse by the Syrian regime are being prosecuted in Germany. At the same time, members of Da'esh are standing before German courts; several have already been sentenced. And German authorities have recently arrested two men for their support of Jabhat al-Nusrah and for war crimes in Syria.

Our message is clear: Whoever commits crimes against humanity or war crimes cannot feel safe anywhere and will eventually be held accountable.

I call on all other states to use all legal means at their disposal to go after the perpetrators. And I call on this Council to finally live up to its responsibility, to join the fight against impunity and to ensure that those responsible for torture and killing in Syrian prisons and for other atrocities are held to account.

The victims deserve justice.

Thank you for your attention.

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