European Commission - Speech

Welcoming remarks at the Brussels II Syria Conference

Brussels, 24 April 2018

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Distinguished guests,

Dear colleagues,

Dear friends,

Allow me to welcome you to the Second (2nd) Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region".

I strongly believe that it is extremely important to open the Conference with a **day dedicated to dialogue**. A dialogue with our partners.

Ministers. Representatives of international organisations. And very importantly, representatives of international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

NGOs are present on the ground every day. In Syria and the region. Very often, under dangerous circumstances. To respond to one of the most dramatic and complex crises of our time.

I want to pay tribute to each and every humanitarian worker and volunteer. Doctors. Nurses. Teachers. Social workers. Psychologists. Engineers.

In Syria, in Jordan, in Lebanon, in Turkey. Wherever Syrian refugees have gone for safe haven.

I saw your devotion and commitment in the field. During my numerous visits in the region. You are shining examples of **solidarity**.

Dear friends,

Our partners on the ground are the eyes and the ears of the humanitarian, resilience and development community. You know people's needs and concerns better than anyone else.

It is extremely important to know your expectations for this event.

Especially your priorities. Because your priorities are our priorities.

That is why the EU launched a comprehensive online consultation process with NGOs few months ago. Thanks to your answers, our discussions today will be more focused and better informed.

Unfortunately, after seven (7) years of conflict, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. The figures are very well known. They show an enormous humanitarian and human tragedy.

Just think how many parts of the country have been, and still remain, under active fighting. The latest being **Eastern Ghouta**. **Idlib**. **Afrin**.

Most of them are urban battlefields. Where civilians are caught up active battles. And of course, the victims of chemical weapons.

More than **thirteen point one (13.1) million** Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Six (6) million of these people are children and **six (6) million** are displaced inside the country.

Two and a half (2.5) million still live in UN-declared hard-to-reach areas.

Four hundred and twenty (420) thousand people live in besieged areas.

Neighbouring countries are bearing the heavy consequences of this conflict. **Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey**. Where authorities and local communities have generously assisted refugees. With

remarkable hospitality. And despite countless internal challenges.

Dear colleagues,

The day of dialogue revolves around **four (4) main topics**:

- The **first** session focuses on the key issue of **protection** of refugees across the region.

- The **second** session is devoted to improving the ways we **deliver humanitarian and resilience assistance**.

- The **third** session looks into fostering **inclusive economic and social development in neighbouring countries**.

- The **fourth** and last session for today is dedicated to the future of Syria and the region: the **young generations, education and their own future**.

I would like to thank everyone for their ideas and enthousiasm in today's sessions.

And I would also like to thank my dear colleagues who will facilitate the discussions to identify good practices and solutions.

To strengthen the **effectiveness of our assistance** we **provide** to those who in need.

Together, let us make this a very productive day ahead.

Thank you.

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