European External Action Service (EEAS)

EU Statement – United Nations Security Council Arria-formula meeting: Accountability in the Syrian Arab Republic

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29 November 2021, New York - European Union Statement by H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, at the Security Council Arria-formula meeting on Accountability in the Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving the European Union the floor. Allow me to thank Estonia and the other co-sponsor for organising this very timely meeting on accountability in Syria. Allow me also to thank the three briefers for their interesting remarks.

The General Assembly has highlighted the continued commitment of the wider UN membership to press for justice and accountability for the serious crimes committed in Syria during the last decade by all parties.

The European Union and its Member States promote and stand for a global order based on the rule of law. We believe that there cannot be sustainable peace without justice, in Syria or elsewhere.

We are determined that the crimes perpetrated during the last ten years, since Syrians took to the streets to demand democracy and the respect of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, will not defeat the Syrian people’s aspiration for dignity, justice and for peace.

Accountability and justice for victims are essential for a stable, peaceful Syria, based on a credible, inclusive and viable political solution in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.

This is our common responsibility as international community: those responsible for war crimes, or crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. The atrocities committed, including the tragedy of the disappeared, for which the regime and its supporters bear the main responsibility, need to be brought to a conclusion.

Therefore, we once again call upon the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court

With a view to prepare and facilitate future proceedings before international and domestic tribunals, the European Union and its Member States strongly support efforts to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

This includes our continuing support to the IIIM (triple I M), as well as to the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, in order to ensure that facts surrounding the crimes committed in the course of the conflict are well documented, including the enforced disappearances described in the reports of the Commission of Inquiry.

We will continue to fully support and cooperate with the IIIM, as well as complementary mechanisms contributing to the fight against impunity, such as the Commission of Inquiry and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPWC).

The prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity under national jurisdiction, where possible, can make an important contribution to securing accountability. A number of such proceedings are under way in several European Union Member States, and the initiative of the Netherlands to invoke Syria’s responsibility for human rights violations represents an important contribution towards securing justice.

Unquestionably, while joining in the call for justice and accountability, we must continue to support the Syrian people in need. Humanitarian needs in Syria have continued to increase: from 11 million people in 2020, there are now 13.4 million people in need in 2021. The European Union, as the largest donor to this cause, has provided 22 billion EURO during the last 10 years - an average of 2.2 billion EURO every year. We will continue to show our solidarity.

We must also continue to press for the political process to move forward and support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, to advance all aspects of Security Council Resolution 2254 in a comprehensive approach. This includes the issue of detainees in the hands of the regime and missing persons, and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in order for free and fair elections to be held under United Nations supervision. And we continue to encourage the work of the Syrian-led Constitutional Committee.

Thank you.

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