The Netherlands and Canada take the next step towards justice in Syria

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Ten years after the conflict in Syria began, the regime has said it is willing to engage in dialogue with the Netherlands about the latter’s decision to hold Syria to account for gross human rights violations. Canada has announced that it will also hold Syria accountable. The two countries wish to work together to achieve justice for the victims of the Syrian civil war.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok believes it is important that such a step is being taken. ‘This is a point of light in a long, dark tunnel. The Syrians who have been living with war for nearly 10 years still deserve justice.’

On 15 March 2011, during the Arab Spring, peaceful protests against the Assad regime began in Syria. The demonstrations were soon brutally crushed by the authorities. Ten years later gross human rights violations are still commonplace in Syria. The Assad regime is guilty of carrying out widespread torture, murder and chemical weapons attacks. More than 11 million Syrians have fled their homes and many have lost everything.

The Netherlands welcomes the decision of Canada’s foreign minister, Marc Garneau, to also hold Syria to account. Foreign minister Blok: ‘By joining forces, we strengthen our position. These are positive and important steps in our quest for justice and our efforts to end impunity.’

Now that Syria has agreed to engage in talks about accountability, the details of how, where and when those talks will be held can be worked out. The Netherlands wants to take up this task with Canada. The two countries are committed to bringing an end to the crimes that are still being committed daily, achieving justice for the Syrian victims of the most serious human rights violations and holding the perpetrators to account. If the talks fail to lead to justice for the victims, the Netherlands and Canada will not hesitate to take the matter to an international court.

Fighting impunity

In recent years, the Netherlands has fought tirelessly for international justice and to end impunity. It has been a driving force behind efforts to collect evidence of human rights violations in Syria. To that end it actively supports organisations such as the International,

Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), established by the UN to collect and analyse evidence and information.

Mr Blok: ‘The accounts of those who have witnessed the most horrific atrocities are etched in our collective memory. They make it possible for us to take the next step in our quest to achieve justice and hold the Syrian regime to account for the crimes it has committed.’

UN Human Rights Council speech

On Monday 15 March, Mr Blok will address the Human Rights Council by video conference during a special session on the conflict in Syria.

Read the joint statement of Canada and the Kingdom of the Netherlands regarding their cooperation in holding Syria to account.

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