

Foreign Minister Steinmeier after the meeting of the International Syria Support Group in Munich

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After the meeting of the International Syria Support Group in Munich, Foreign Minister Steinmeier issued the following statement on 12 February:

Today we again had difficult and incredibly important talks at a critical moment in time.

We have gathered four times since October in the Vienna format. Four times the people in Syria and the world public were on tenterhooks, hoping for progress towards ending this terrible civil war.

Each time, there was a lot at stake. Today, this was true more than ever. We faced a stark choice, either we found a way of reaching a political solution or Syria would descend further into year-long war, violence and terror.

All key international and regional players were around the table here in Munich. We laboured with each other, even argued. The conflicts of interest are today once more plain to see. But everyone agreed on one thing: there is no military solution. All agreed here. And everyone committed without any ifs or buts to the Vienna principles and the Vienna road map.

We went further: we agreed concrete steps. From this evening, we have the Munich commitments for all parties to the conflict. Today we reached clear agreements on all sides granting humanitarian access and on a nationwide cessation of hostilities.

We will know in just a few days whether this really is a breakthrough, when the entire world gets to see whether the agreements reached today are actually respected and implemented by the Assad regime and by the Syrian opposition alike, by Hezbollah as well as by opposition militia, also by Russia.

What have we achieved?

Firstly, humanitarian access to help people in need in Syria's besieged towns and villages.

We agreed that those suffering in many specific areas are now to be provided with humanitarian aid by air or lorry convoy, above all with food and medication.

We have agreed that we will no longer accept the refusal of aid supplies in other areas of Syria, that the ~~UN.(United Nations)~~ and other aid organisations are to gain access to all areas of the country to help the people regardless of the side to which those suffering belong.

From now on there will be no pretence and no excuses. We created a ~~UN.(United Nations)~~-led task force to ensure that the Munich commitments on humanitarian access are also implemented.

I sincerely hope that this humanitarian task force will start its work immediately, ideally as early as tomorrow.

Here and now we have opened the way to save thousands at risk of their lives and to make a marked and rapid improvement to the humanitarian situation of hundreds of thousands of people in Syria.

Secondly, reducing violence and ceasing hostilities: since this evening here in Munich, we have the clear Munich commitment for all sides to do everything within just a few days to achieve a nationwide cessation of hostilities, obviously not in the fight against IS and al-Nusra.

That means that by this appointed date all parties have to halt combat, and really all. Now Moscow and Tehran need to convince the Assad regime to lay down its arms. This also holds true on the other side for the many groups and militia of the Syrian opposition who need to halt combat.

What is more, we need continued massive pressure from the outside. At the end of the day, those who do not pull their weight are not just showing to the world that they are not interested in a political solution. They also must reckon with all the consequences of non-compliance.

Here, too, there will be a tight follow-up. Co-chaired by Washington and Moscow, an ISSG task force to monitor the ceasefire is to examine whether the Munich commitments are actually being respected.

This is no guarantee. But it is a way forward and one that makes clear who is truly interested in ending the fighting and who isn't.

Thirdly, political process and Geneva negotiations.

It will be a lot of work for us to implement all this on the ground with the conflicting parties. But, if we succeed in implementing today's commitments in Syria, there is nothing in the way of continuing peace talks in Geneva.

And then in Geneva there will be no sub-plots and no excuses. Then we must and can finally negotiate on Syria's political future and on establishing a national transitional government as called for by the international community for four years now.

I am relieved and, what is more, I am pleased that new hope has emerged here in Munich, with a viable road map and a real way forward towards a political settlement – hope for the ill-treated people of Syria, for de-escalation in the Middle East and also for us in Europe hope for an easing of the pressure caused by refugee flows from the region.