Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary on Syria: "We should unite behind the Arab League plan"

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“Mr President,

I too thank the Prime Minister of Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for their reports and their powerful words, and we are all grateful to you Mr President for presiding over this debate.

Our task as a Council is clear:

We must address the horrifying violence that has engulfed Syria for the last ten months, which is an unmitigated tragedy for the people of that country and a real threat to international peace and security;

And we must do so in a way that gives the greatest possible chance of a peaceful and lasting solution.

The League of Arab States has proposed a way to achieve this and they should be congratulated and supported in doing so.

Their plan is at the heart of the draft Resolution put forward by the Kingdom of Morocco and they do so with the full support of the United Kingdom and, I think, with the support of the majority of Security Council members.

If implemented in full, the Arab League plan would lead to an end to all violence against Syrian civilians and attacks against Syrian State institutions.

It would remove the major stumbling blocks to reform and it would give confidence to the Syrian people.

It would start an inclusive Syrian-led political process that would allow the Syrian people to determine their future peacefully.

And it would lead to a national unity government and elections.

Syria needs a path out of conflict and misery and with this plan the Arab League has provided one that is credible and viable.

And they have done so after three months of engagement, described by the Secretary-General, with all sides in Syria; after multiple visits to Damascus by Ministerial delegations from Arab nations; on the basis of the work of over 150 Arab League monitors inside Syria; and in the light of their own deep understanding of their region.

The Arab world is now asking the United Nations Security Council to put its weight and authority behind this plan.

This is not the West telling Syria what to do.

It is not the Permanent Members of the Security Council seeking to impose their view.

This is the Arab Nations calling on the UN Security Council to help address the crisis in Syria and the threat that it poses to the stability of their region. And the Secretary-General has come here and urged them not to let the Syrian people down in their plight.

Members of the Council have often called for Arab leadership in the past, and that should be respected by all nations of the world.

Can any member of this Council today claim to be in a better position to judge how best to support peace and stability in Syria than these Arab nations themselves?

The resolution does not propose imposing change on Syria from outside, it calls for the Syrian people to be allowed to make their choices for themselves.

It does not call for military action and could not be used to authorise it. Indeed the Secretary-General has stressed that the plan of the Arab League specifically does not include any outside intervention.

It does not contain coercive measures. It is not a Chapter VII resolution.

It should, in our view, put the leaders of Syria on notice that measures will be considered by this Council if there is not an immediate end to the violence and if the Arab League plan continues to be ignored.

That warning is important.

For too long the Syrian government has promised reform, and continued the violence.

At any time over the last ten months they could have stopped the bloodshed, they could have seized the initiative, they could have introduced bold and lasting reform that meets the aspirations of Syrians for greater political freedom.

But the facts speak for themselves over recent months:

When this Council adopted a Presidential Statement on Syria in August last year the death toll was approximately 1,000.

When a draft Security Council Resolution was put forward in October, and vetoed here, 3,000 people had died.

Today, we believe nearly 6,000 Syrians have died in appalling circumstances. And this includes, as we have heard, 384 children.

Between 30 and 100 people currently die every single day from the violence in Syria. They will be dying as we speak. Thousands more are enduring torture, imprisonment, and sexual violence, including the rape of children.

The Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic spoke about the idealism of children in his country in the 1950s and 1960s without noting the irony that the descendants of those children, the children of 2012, are now being tortured and murdered in the name of their own government and it is not acceptable to try to blame the situation in Syria on everyone else, from outside intervention, to the Gulf States, to French diplomats, to Lawrence of Arabia. This does not excuse such repression, violence, which is a shame on any nation.

Now we know about these crimes because they have been documented by impartial bodies of this United Nations.

How long do Syrian families have to live in fear that their children will be killed or tortured, before the Security Council will pass a meaningful Resolution?

How many people need to die before the consciences of all world capitals on this subject are stirred?

The people of Syria cannot afford to wait while more false promises and half measures from their government are accompanied by brutality on the ground. There will be no reform or political progress in Syria while such violence continues. And there can be no doubt: that the violence is worsening, the risk of civil war is intensifying and the threat to the stability of the region is growing.

With each day that passes, finding a way back from the brink will be harder and innocent lives needlessly and wrongfully will be lost - deaths which this Council could help to avert by acting in a united manner.

Today, as I understand it, we all agree around this table that the Security Council has a role to play.

We all want a peaceful political solution that ensures the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

We all agree that this process should be led by the people of Syria themselves, with the support of their region and the international community.

We all agree that the rights of minorities in Syria must be safeguarded and respected. We all agree that military action would not be an appropriate response to the complex situation in Syria, something this draft resolution makes absolutely clear.

We all welcome the work of the Arab League.

So based on agreeing all those things, now, we must have the will to match such agreement by being able to agree on a Resolution. While we meet, Mr President, the gravest of crimes are being committed in Syria.

Responsibility for these crimes lies overwhelmingly at the door of the Syrian authorities.

But if this Council cannot agree to adopt a resolution condemning the violence, backing the Arab League and enabling a peaceful resolution then that failure of this Council will be judged by the people of Syria and of their region.

We should unite behind the Arab League plan, and that is what I urge all members of the Council to do this week. And we should remain seized of the situation in Syria, returning to the matter if the violence still continues.

To fail to do so would be to undermine the credibility of this institution, betray the Syrian people, snub the Arab League and fail in this Council's responsibilities.

Thank you Mr President."

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