Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Onus on Syria to allow the UN to do its work

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Thank you very much Madame President. I hadn't intended to speak today in the chamber but I wanted to respond to some of the things we've just heard. So I'll take the opportunity to thank Staffan de Mistura and his team for all their work, which is not proving as fast or as productive as all of us would like, but I think we're very grateful to you Staffan for all your efforts. And I was interested to hear the Chinese account of the work of their Envoy.

Madame President, I think we all know what needs to be done. We've had very many discussions in this chamber and in the consultations room about Syria. I think what we struggle with is how to get it done and how to take the next step so I hope that when we leave this chamber and we go next door into closed consultations we can actually have a proper discussion, without polemics, about what it takes to get the Constitutional Committee up and running. What are the concrete steps that need to be taken and how we as the Council can best facilitate and support that. And what it takes to get Idlib protected. Lots of speakers today have referred to Idlib. I think we all know the importance and the scale and the significance of Idlib. I would urge those Astana progenitors to do what they can to ensure that on the ground the people in Idlib are safe and that we avert a humanitarian catastrophe there. But I'd like to have a proper discussion next door about how the Council can actually support that.

I wanted to turn to this issue of the Syrian government engaging with the UN. The Russian Representative referred to backsliding from a political settlement and entrenching Syrian unwillingness for a negotiated solution. I think those two statements are very damning but they are not damning about us, they are damning about the Syrian regime. We really need all those with influence on Syria, and that includes Russia and Iran, to encourage them to set aside a military strategy to resolve this conflict and to engage with the United Nations across the board so that we can get back to Geneva and we can get back to a political settlement. It is not us in the West who are stopping that happening, Madame President. The onus really is on Syria to follow the will of the Council and the Security Council resolutions and allow the UN to do its work to help the people of Syria.

Those were the main things I wanted to say but I'd like to touch on three more points, if I may. We support what the Special Envoy said about bringing women in, I think that's long overdue and he can count on the UK's full support for that. I also wanted to reference Iran and the strikes on Israel from Syrian territory, and we very much agree with what the American

representative said on that and we have been very vocal about that in public. But I also wanted to refer to what the Russian representative said about the airstrikes. And I won't rehearse why we took the action, why France, the US and the UK, took the action we did, except to say that we did so to avert a humanitarian catastrophe, and in taking that action we helped to protect civilians on the ground, we deterred and degraded Syria's ability to use chemical weapons, and in doing that we upheld the global WMD prohibition. And I think those things remain very important but they shouldn't be used by anyone in this Council as a reason to let the Syrian government off the hook for engaging with the UN on the political process. The political process has been necessary since 2012 when Geneva was started. It's been necessary in increasing tenor every year since that point. And it remains necessary now, Madame President.

So I hope when we go next door we can have a really detailed discussion about how we as the Council can get back to the spirit of Sweden and actually help Staffan de Mistura and his team do something concrete to achieve this and not have any more mudslinging.

Thank you.

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