European External Action Service (EEAS)

EU Statement – UN General Assembly: Interactive Dialogue on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

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28 March 2023, New York – European Union Statement delivered by H.E. Olof Skoog, Ambassador, Head of the European Union Delegation, at the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

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Mr. President,

The European Union and its Member States would like to thank you for convening this very important meeting in the form of an interactive dialogue. We are grateful for the presentation of the main findings in the Secretary-General's report on missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Candidate Countries Türkiye, North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Albania*, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, allow me to convey our sincere condolences to the people of Syria, following the deadly earthquakes of February. These have further demonstrated the need for safe, rapid, unhindered and sustainable access for humanitarian organisations and for aid to be distributed to all intended recipients in all areas of Syria. Such access should be afforded in the case of efforts to find the missing in Syria, as a humanitarian imperative.

I should stress that we support the recommendations contained in the Report for the establishment of a new body, which would aim to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all those missing in the whole of Syria, including the identification of human remains, and to provide adequate support to families. This is indeed a matter of utmost urgency. Families and civil society organizations across Syria and amongst the Syrian diaspora have been calling out for action for years now.

The European Union therefore supports the establishment of such an independent and international body in order to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria and to document their fate for the most humane of reasons: to alleviate the pain of families – on

all sides of the many divides in Syria - whose lives have been in suspense and despair since their loved ones went missing, their fate unknown.

The European Union recognizes the tremendous work that has already been carried out, over the several years of the Syria conflict, to keep records of those who have gone missing in Syria. I refer here to the work of a range of dedicated Syrian civil society organizations, but also of the International Commission for Missing Persons, the ICRC and many others. The new body should build upon the efforts, which have already been carried out under such initiatives; with a view to ensure complementarity, avoid duplication and articulate a clear added value. The European Union and its Member States has supported this work for many years, and intends to continue to support it.

We appreciate that OHCHR in its preparatory work has sought to involve other actors in discussions, and we would encourage work to continue in this spirit, involving broad consultations and involvement on the strategy, structure and implementation of the new body In this way, the body will work collaboratively to bring together and consolidate all the diligent efforts that have been made before, giving new impetus to tracing the missing of this terrible conflict.

A new independent and neutral body, working to a humanitarian imperative, will help reassure all relatives of the missing, that the international community is finally determined to help deliver the answers that they have been seeking. To be able to do so, it is imperative that families, victims, and their organizations are involved in the design, establishment and operation of the body from the outset. Equally, we underline the importance of transparency in the set-up of the body. Such an impartial body should engage with all actors on the ground to deliver the best possible results.

Let me assure you, therefore, today, that the EU will take an active interest, in any future initiative intended to establish a new body, and in the plans set out during its start-up phase for its longer-term strategy and structure, and looks forward to engaging constructively in any future discussions to this end.

The European Union fully supports the creation of a new body and looks forward to a further indication of a timeline for its establishment, and of how the new body should be funded.

Let us work, together, in a spirit of collaboration, in favour of a shared vision of how a new body to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, can help heal some of the numerous human wounds of twelve years of conflict.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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