

Supporting Syria and the Region Conference

Brussels - April 5th, 2017

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The despicable toxic gas attack in Idlib province yesterday is yet another proof of the fact that some parties to the conflict still believe in military solutions. They are mistaken, but how many lives need to be lost before they come to this conclusion themselves?

Unfortunately talk of reconstructing Syria comes too early, but the European Union and the international community should make clear that we are ready to strengthen the resilience of the Syrian people today and rebuild their country as soon as a credible transition is on its way tomorrow. The renewed strategy adopted on Monday by the European Union offers such perspective.

Belgium is pleased that Syrian civil society has been given the opportunity to voice its concerns and aspirations in the run-up to this conference. Syria's civil society plays a key role, both in helping the Syria of today to survive and in preparing to rebuild the Syria of tomorrow.

Now, turning to the situation on the ground,

On a daily basis we witness blatant violations of the cease fire agreement. This must end. An effective monitoring mechanism needs to be set up urgently to make sure that violators of the agreement are held responsible for their actions.

Yesterday's gas attack and the recent reports of the Commission of Inquiry of the UN have once again demonstrated the need to fight impunity. That is why Belgium has supported the UN resolution adopted last December to create a mechanism that collects evidence of these horrendous crimes. It is essential that this mechanism is set up as soon as possible.

The efforts of the anti-Daesh Coalition are bearing fruit. Daesh expansion in Iraq and Syria has been stopped and Daesh is facing major territorial loss. Belgium, which is contributing significantly to this military effort, very much salutes this progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

BE remains committed to providing support to Syria's neighbouring states Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. We commend the hospitality of these countries and acknowledge the enormous strain it has put on their population.

During the London conference, BE pledged 75 million EUR over 2016 and 2017 for the Syrian crisis. We have largely surpassed this pledge. Instead of 75 million EUR we have already disbursed or committed 143 million EUR humanitarian actions in Syria and its neighboring countries.

Allow me to conclude,

Belgium commends the Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and his team for their tireless efforts in bringing the parties together. We also understand the difficulty for the opposition to debate the future of Syria with members of the Assad-regime but there is no alternative to the Geneva-process.

Our gratitude goes out to the organizers of this conference, foremost the European Union and High Representative Mogherini who has taken the initiative to set up this crucial event, but also of course the United Nations and the co-chairs who have been actively promoting this conference.

I thank you .