

Friends of Syria meeting in Marrakech, 12 December 2012
Nordic-Baltic Intervention

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Estonia.

First, let me thank our host the Moroccan government, for convening this timely meeting.

The situation in Syria is marked by intensified fighting and increased suffering. Close to 3 million people have been displaced internally as well as externally, and over 40.000 have died. The unabated fighting inside Syria and the consequent civilian suffering and loss of life are utterly unacceptable. If the violence cannot be halted, there is a great risk that this will affect not only Syria for a long period to come but also the whole region. The Nordic and Baltic countries continue to condemn in the strongest possible terms the widespread military attacks by the regime, including the reported use of cluster munitions and aerial bombardments, which are causing completely inexcusable harm to innocent civilians. The UN Security Council must overcome their differences. We must send an unequivocal message to the Syrian regime that its killing of its own people and destruction of the country will not be tolerated.

One of the most important developments since we last met in Paris in July has been the formation of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. We welcome this crucial decision to form a unified opposition body and the constructive support lent to it by other groups who struggle against the regime. It is now of utmost importance that the Coalition works actively and in an inclusive manner, so that a broad support for their leadership can be achieved. In this spirit, we call on other Syrian opposition groups to support the Coalition as their political representative. We hope that the Kurdish National Council will decide to join the Coalition.

The Nordic and Baltic countries accept the new Coalition as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people and stand ready to support the Coalition on its path towards building a strong and viable political alternative to the current regime. At the same time we encourage them to continue without delay the preparations for the transition to a new and democratic Syria where everybody's rights and freedoms are respected. The transition has already started in some parts of the country. We will provide our support in strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations that commit themselves to democratic and human rights principles and stress their importance for the political transition. We also extend our support to local civilian administrative structures and Local Coordination Committees.

Alarming, we have lately witnessed increasing brutality and blatant violations of international humanitarian law. We condemn all such breaches and appeal to all parties to bear in mind their responsibility to limit all violence. We are particularly concerned by reported attacks on medical personnel and installations. The Nordic and Baltic countries would therefore like to call on all parties to make every effort to secure the commitment of all armed groups to fully respect international humanitarian law, including ensuring rapid and unimpeded access to humanitarian personnel in all areas. All humanitarian personnel must be protected and respected in all circumstances. Attacks directed against them as well as against any objects displaying the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions are prohibited. We urge the National Coalition to take leadership in this matter by unequivocally committing itself and the parties it represents to international humanitarian law. The international support and the legitimacy of the Coalition will be strengthened by such humanitarian leadership. Serious human rights violations by any party must not go unpunished and those who commit or order such crimes must be held accountable. The United Nations Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court at any time. The Nordic and Baltic countries call on the United Nations Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in all aspects, including this issue.

The Nordic and Baltic countries have provided substantial humanitarian aid throughout the conflict. We will continue to intensify our humanitarian efforts, particularly in view of the approaching winter. We are channelling our aid through the ICRC, the UN, relief agencies and other organisations in order to reach the people suffering in Syria as well as the refugees who have fled to the neighbouring countries. We are also ready to cooperate with the Coalition to assist it in improving its capacity to serve the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

Sadly, threats to regional peace and security are not abstract. We are therefore also supporting the neighbouring countries who are doing their utmost to handle the increasing influx of refugees, and we commend their tremendous efforts. We have to prevent the civil war in Syria from spilling beyond its borders.

However, one thing is certain: we need to find a political solution to the conflict. The Nordic and Baltic countries hereby express their complete support to the work of the Joint Special Representative of the UN and the League of Arab States Lakhdar Brahimi and also encourage the Coalition to engage with him fully. Only a political solution that preserves the sovereignty and unity of the country can lay the foundation for lasting peace and satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to freedom, democracy and social justice.

Thank you.