

Security Council encourages Syrian parties to take part in UN-supported talks 'without preconditions'

10 March 2017 – Looking forward to the early resumption of the United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian negotiations, the Security Council today encouraged the Syrian parties to return to talks in good faith “and to engage constructively and without preconditions” on the agenda set out by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura when they resume.

In a press statement that follows a briefing earlier this week from Mr. de Mistura, the Council welcomed the conclusion of a further round of intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva on 3 March 2017. It further welcomed the Special Envoy’s announcement that the talks had yielded a clear agenda for future negotiations as indicated by resolution 2254 (2015), focusing on governance; constitutional issues; elections; and counter terrorism, security and confidence building measures.

The members of the Security Council reiterated their commitment to ensuring the inclusion of Syrian women in the political process through sustained consultation and dialogue and promoting their full and effective participation.

Recognizing that the continuation of political negotiations was made possible by the ceasefire developed through the Astana process, the Council called on the Syrian parties to fully implement the ceasefire, established pursuant to the arrangements of 29 December 2016, including ending ceasefire violations and ensuring humanitarian access.

The Council also encouraged the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) members to use their influence over the parties to help end violations, reduce violence, build confidence and ensure safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access in line with its resolution 2165 (2014).

The ISSG established respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire. They have been meeting separately since early 2016 on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

In his briefing to the Council, Mr. de Mistura had expressed his intention “to bring the invitees back to Geneva for a fifth round with a target date of 23 March.”

Nation-building amid insurgency ‘an uphill struggle’ for Afghanistan – UN envoy

10 March 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Afghanistan today highlighted both the visible progress the conflict-torn country has made and the challenges lie ahead, urging the Government to redouble efforts while calling for continued international political and financial support.

“The Government has to pursue both an inclusive peace process and economic growth against the backdrop of an intensifying insurgency and worsening security,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Afghanistan, during a UN Security Council quarterly debate on the situation in that country.

Mr. Yamamoto said that the National Unity Government – almost halfway through its five-year term – has made visible steps forward on anti-corruption, the electoral process and women’s economic empowerment.

“Fortunately, the ground is being prepared to make Afghanistan a success,” he stressed.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), headed by Mr. Yamamoto, will launch its first anti-corruption report, titled *Afghanistan’s Other Battlefield: The Fight against Corruption* soon. The report will highlight the Government’s achievements in addressing corruption, and recommends options for further progress, he explained.

The Government has committed to holding parliamentary elections which are seen as fair, inclusive and transparent by the Afghan people, he said, noting that the commissioners of the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission have been appointed.



Special Representative and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Tadamichi Yamamoto, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Afghanistan remains one of the most difficult places in the world to be a woman, he said. However, just two days ago, on International Women’s Day, the Government launched a national plan that recognizes women as key economic actors.

The deteriorating security situation remains of great concern, he pointed out, urging the Taliban to enter peace talks without preconditions and warning against attacks by foreign fighters, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh).

Last year, UNAMA recorded the worst number of civilian casualties since record-keeping began nearly a decade ago.

Deteriorating security also led to the highest-ever level of internal displacement in 2016. More than 650,000 Afghans were displaced. Returns from Pakistan exceeded 620,000 people. Displacements and returns for 2017 are likely to remain at these levels.

Developing a nation while fighting an insurgency is an uphill struggle, he emphasized, noting that due in part to the worsening security situation over the past two years, service delivery has become increasingly difficult. “We have witnessed some downward trends in key indicators, such as access to health clinics and education facilities,” he said.

More focused action on governance, social services and private sector development to promote equitable growth will be necessary, he said.

He urged the countries concerned, particularly in the neighbourhood, to support the Afghan Government’s interest in the intensified regional peace effort, and asked the Council to renew UNAMA’s mandate, which expires on 17 March.

UNAMA is mandated to support the Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan as a political mission that provides ‘good offices’ among other key services. ‘Good offices’ are diplomatic steps the UN takes publicly and in private, drawing on its independence, impartiality and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading.

UNAMA also assists the process of peace and reconciliation; monitors and promotes human rights, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict; promotes good governance; and encourages regional cooperation.

News story: Jetty completion marks major milestone in Carrier works

This is a major milestone in preparations at the naval base where £100m has been invested by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

USNS Robert E Peary on the Jetty

The jetty, parts of which date back over 90 years, has been refurbished to prepare for the first of the Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers. This is in addition to the dredging of the approach channel, inner harbour area and berth in order to make them deep and wide enough for the new ships, moving three million cubic metres of clay, sand and gravel from an area the size of 200 football pitches.

Bespoke navigational lights, a high-voltage electrical supply and specialist carrier-specific gangways, known as 'brows' are also being provided as part of the huge programme of works. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has worked with VolkerStevin and BAE Systems to deliver the package of infrastructure needed for the carriers.

DIO Project Manager Philip Wise said:

"I am delighted that the works to the jetty are completed. It is a crucial element of the £100m infrastructure package being delivered to support the arrival of the carriers into their homeport of Portsmouth. We are looking forward to seeing the first of the ships berthing against the new and improved jetty later this year."

With the core jetty works complete and new specialist equipment delivered, the Naval Base's preparations for the arrival of the Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) Carriers are centred on a programme of Familiarisation, Integration and Testing, otherwise known as FIT.

This has been designed by BAE Systems on behalf of the Portsmouth Naval Base Commander and Naval Base staff to prepare equipment, personnel and processes for the arrival of the Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carriers. They provide a valuable means to practice and refine standard operating procedures designed for the QEC and to role-play emergency scenarios.

David Mitchard, Managing Director, BAE Systems Maritime Services said:

"In readiness for the arrival of HMS Queen Elizabeth our team at BAE Systems in Portsmouth has put in place a rigorous testing programme for the new infrastructure at the Naval Base. We have a long expertise in maritime support and servicing and are committed to delivering the most innovative and cost-effective solutions to the Royal Navy for these remarkable ships."

Today (10th March) saw the start of Phase 3 of the FIT trials, using the visit to the Naval Base of the 40,000 Tonne United States Naval Ship Robert E. Peary for live testing of people, processes and equipment.

Royal Navy Captain Iain Greenlees, the QEC Infrastructure Director said:

"This jetty lies at the very heart of the preparations for the arrival of HMS Queen Elizabeth and the wider development of the Base for this century. It is tangible evidence of how close we are to the dawn of the QEC era and I am proud of the way the Royal Navy, DIO and Volkerstevin have been able to work together on this challenging project to get us ready for today."

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[Speech: Priti Patel: Commonwealth Trade speech](#)

My Lord Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm delighted to be here with you this evening to celebrate the inaugural Commonwealth Trade Ministers' Meeting.

I'd like to thank Lord Marland and the Commonwealth Secretariat for organising the event, and the Lord Mayor for hosting this wonderful reception in such a fantastic setting.

And thank you to all of you who have travelled so far to contribute to this event, at a time when we are seeing great change across the world in terms of economic development and our shared prosperity.

A crucial juncture for the Commonwealth

You heard this morning from the Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox, that this is a time of historic change for Britain.

Our Prime Minister could not have been clearer – it is time for Britain to rediscover our place as a champion of global trade.

We must stand tall in the world as the brightest beacon for free trade and liberal markets.

And I want to be clear, that as Britain fixes its gaze on the global horizon, the Commonwealth, and how we can strengthen and deepen our cherished ties with our Commonwealth partners, is foremost in our minds.

Secretary of State for International Development Priti Patel gives her Commonwealth Trade speech

In some of the darkest days in world history, it has been our friends and allies in the Commonwealth who have remained steadfast on the side of freedom.

We're at a new and exciting moment in history, one that presents a vital chance to revitalise our partnerships with Commonwealth countries, and secure a stable and prosperous future, built upon our shared institutions, cultures, values and often a shared language.

My Lord Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that in this new era Britain and the Commonwealth should be ambitious about the future.

The benefits of trade

And breaking down barriers to free trade will be a central part of this.

Trade between nations has the power to lift millions out of grinding poverty.

It is both a crucial driver of development, and one of the most dynamic forces for good in the world.

It creates jobs, and fosters peace. It raises incomes and it unleashes the power of private enterprise.

It changes individual lives, and by doing so it can transform entire economies.

As Margaret Thatcher once said:

"The market is a more powerful and more reliable liberating force than government can ever be."

Promoting trade, free markets, private enterprise and liberal economies are the most powerful way we can break the cycle of debt and dependency,

And put countries on the path to long term economic growth so that they can provide for themselves and their people.

The Commonwealth is an exemplar of this potential.

We only have to look around this room to be reminded of the stunning impact trade can have as a weapon in the fight against poverty.

In recent months I've visited India, Kenya, and Pakistan and been struck again by the power of jobs and economic growth to enhance people's choices and prospects – particularly women and their families.

Embracing free trade can jump-start an economy and turbo-charge growth.

On the other hand, shutting a country off from trade means depriving people the power of innovation, technology, ideas, and the chance of a better life.

And they set themselves up to remain poor and weak, with growing inequality.

But those countries which embrace reform, who welcome the free flow of trade, technology and ideas, and who want to be a part of a globalised world, will

be well-placed to be prosperous and strong.

Faster growth for our partners in developing countries is a win-win.

We can enable countries to trade their way out of poverty, liberate them from aid dependency, and build stable, strong trading partners for the future.

And with an unprecedented number of young people in many Commonwealth nations, the need to create jobs and better economic opportunities has never been more pressing.

In the long run, it is sustainable growth, trade and investment that will really tackle poverty, and build shared prosperity.

We need to work to ensure free markets deliver for everyone, and that the benefits of economic success are felt by all our citizens.

Trade, development and continuity

So development must be, and will continue to be, at the heart of the UK's approach to international trade.

My department and this Government will continue to support humanitarian relief. We will continue to help alleviate poverty.

We will continue to support better health and education services in developing countries.

And we will also support stronger governance so that developing countries can have the confidence to embrace trade, markets, and investment.

The Commonwealth countries will be right at the heart of this effort.

And my department is also accelerating our work on trade, to help link developing countries to global markets and to enable them to reap the rewards of trade access.

The cost of bilateral trade for Commonwealth partners is, on average, 19% lower than between non-Commonwealth members – because of the similarities in language, institutions and regulatory systems.

Some 80% of Commonwealth members benefit from preferential access to UK markets.

These mutually beneficial ties grow stronger every day.

UK trade with these Commonwealth partners has increased by a staggering 50% since 2005, to over £42 billion in 2015.

So as we leave the EU, a key priority will be to ensure that we do not disrupt our vital trading partnerships with the Commonwealth.

And my Government confirmed last month that we aim to achieve continuity and a smooth transition in our trading arrangements with all developing

countries.

Breaking down the barriers to trade

So the UK's commitment to free trade has never been stronger, and we will place the Commonwealth front and centre in this work.

But, let's be clear, tariff barriers aren't the only things that hold back trade.

Burdensome regulations, high transport costs, delays at customs and weak infrastructure all increase the cost of trading, and stop countries from competing on a level playing field.

Tackling corruption and building stronger, more accountable and more open governance structures and institutions are key to breaking down trade barriers.

And I know you are also working hard to ensure that the opportunities free trade offers are available to all.

It is this government's ambition to tear down the barriers to free trade, and help support our partners to build open economies, where the poorest are free to work and trade.

That way we can empower those groups who have been excluded.

Small businesses, rural communities, women and minority groups – they all stand to benefit from the growth and job creation that trade brings.

My Department is committed to using our programmes to do this, and to helping our partners create the hard infrastructure for trade.

A few months ago I saw a fantastic example of this myself when I visited Mombasa Port. This is East Africa's biggest port and serves 200 million people across the region. And over the last few years the UK has helped modernise this port, by building viable roads and expanding docking points.

This has helped reduce the amount of time that it takes to move goods from Mombasa to neighbouring countries by 75%, contributing to a 10% increase in Kenya's annual exports and hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of additional trade.

Helping countries harness the power of trade to reduce poverty, including investment in infrastructure and other areas that drive economic growth, is a top priority for my Department.

Conclusion

Now more than ever, we must remember that free trade, open markets and the expansion of global commerce have not just fuelled unprecedented growth, lifting millions of people out of poverty.

They have also bound nations more tightly together. Trading nations are less likely to be warring nations.

Trade is not a zero-sum game. Trade between nations creates jobs, prosperity and strong economies. It underwrites peace, it drives down prices and it increases choice.

We must recognise the risks, but be bold in our solutions.

And we must continue to speak up for free trade as one of the bedrocks of global prosperity and stability.

We must entrench the Commonwealth's position as a beacon of co-operation, trade and partnership.

And through the crucial institution of the Commonwealth, we can and must work together to build a better, more prosperous, and more stable world for us all.

Thank you.