

## Statement by Syria's Deputy Prime Minister H.E. Walid Al-Moualem at the UN General Assembly

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, Head of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic at the General Debate of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York September 23, 2017

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*President of the seventy-second session of the United Nations General Assembly,*

*I would like to congratulate you on your election as president of the current session of the General Assembly and wish you all success. I would also like to thank your predecessor for his important role at the helm of the General Assembly during the previous session. I congratulate Mr. Antonio Guterres on his appointment as Secretary-General of the United Nations and wish him the best in carrying out his responsibilities in service of the principles and purposes of the UN Charter.*

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we meet again, our world is facing mounting challenges and dangers on a daily basis, and a persistent standoff between two sets of forces: forces that seek to control and dominate nations and their riches, by turning back the clock, re-establishing a unipolar world order, fueling chaos and war, and violating international and humanitarian laws; and opposite forces that work tirelessly to create a more balanced, secure, and just world, one that respects the sovereignty of states and the right of peoples to exercise self-determination and build their own future.

As we meet again, many people continue to pay dearly and sacrifice their lives, security, stability and livelihood, as a result of the policies of certain countries. Those countries falsely believe that they could use terrorism as a tool to satisfy their greed and further their ill-conceived agendas, which do not serve the interests of any people, not even their own. No people has suffered at the hands of terrorism more than the Syrian people, who, for six years now, has fought against terrorists pouring from all over the world, supported by parties from the region and beyond.

For more than six years, Syrians have endured the worst and have made great sacrifices to defend their country in the face of a terrorist war of unprecedented brutality, which has spared no one and no-thing, targeting innocent people, services, the infrastructure and cultural heritage. Despite it all, Syria is determined, more than ever, to eradicate terrorism from every part of the country, without exception, thanks to the sacrifices of our army and the steadfastness of our people.

Mr. President,

Since the beginning of the war, our state policy has followed two main tracks: combating terrorism, and working hard towards a political solution that stems the bloodshed and restores stability.

On the counter-terrorism front, the Syrian Arab Army along with its supporting forces and allies are making daily achievements, clearing out territories and uprooting terrorists. However, the threat of this plague persists, claiming the lives of Syrians on a daily basis, and depleting the country's resources. We must all understand that terrorism and the underlying Takfirit extremist ideology will continue to spread like a tumor throughout the world and haunt all of our people unless every one of us demonstrates a genuine will to cooperate to confront it together. Any such endeavor must respect the sovereignty of states and the interests of the people, and must let go of the illusion that terrorism can be used as a tool for political gains and narrow interests.

On the political front, the Syrian government has spared no effort since the early months of the crisis to stop the bloodshed. The success of local reconciliations would not have been possible without the leadership's political support and the numerous amnesty decrees issued by President Bashar Al-Assad, which allowed everyone who had taken up arms to lay them down and resume their normal life.

These successful reconciliations have allowed tens of thousands of IDPs and refugees to go back home and helped improve the living conditions of a great number of Syrians who had fallen victim to terrorist crimes. Syria is determined to scale up reconciliation efforts, whenever possible, because it is the best means to alleviate the suffering of Syrians and restore stability and normalcy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since day one, the Syrian government has positively considered all initiatives to put an end to the war. However, these initiatives eventually failed after states that supported and fueled terrorism decided to persist in their aggressive policies against Syria and its people.

As for the Astana and Geneva tracks, the Syrian government has shown seriousness and commitment and has done its best to provide the necessary conditions for these efforts to succeed and achieve their goals.

We are encouraged by the Astana process and the resulting 'de-escalation zones' and hope that it will help us reach an actual cessation of hostilities and separate terrorist groups, such as ISIL, Al-Nusra and others, from those groups that have agreed to join the Astana process. This will be the real test of how committed and serious these groups and their 'Turkish' sponsors are. So far, Turkey under Erdogan has persisted in its aggressive policies against the Syrian people and has continued to labor under the illusion that terrorism will help serve its subversive agendas in Syria and the countries of the region. Turkey's position stands in stark contrast to the positive and constructive role played by Russia and Iran.

Notwithstanding its commitment to the memorandum on the 'de-escalation zones', Syria reserves the right to respond to any violation by the other party. Syria also stresses that these zones are a temporary arrangement that must not violate the territorial unity of Syria.

The Syrian government reaffirms its commitment to the Geneva process and further progress on that track. This process has yet to bear fruit in the absence of a genuine national opposition that can be a partner in Syria's future, and as countries with influence over the other party continue to block any meaningful progress.

Mr. President,

It is truly unfortunate that these countries that block a solution in Syria are members of this international organization, including permanent members of the Security Council.

The Syrian government has always insisted that any solution in Syria must respect Syria's non-negotiable principles, which are a red line for all Syrians. These include the complete rejection of terrorism, the territorial unity of Syria and its people, and the rejection of any external interference in political decisions regarding Syria's future. Only Syrians have the right to make such decisions, whether now or in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For decades, Israel has continued its unscrupulous thuggish actions with full impunity. This usurper entity has occupied Arab territories in Palestine and the Golan for more than seventy years and has committed horrific crimes against innocent civilians. Israel did not stop there. It has publicly interfered in the Syrian crisis since its early days. Israel has provided all forms of support to Takfirist terrorist gangs, including funds, weapons, materiel, and communication equipment. Israel has also bombed Syrian Army positions to serve terrorist agendas. Coordination between the two was at its best when terrorist groups decided to target Syrian air defense assets used to defend Syria against Israeli aggression. The unlimited Israeli support to terrorists in Syria did not come as a surprise. After all, the two share the same interests and goals. However, let me be clear: It is delusional to believe, even for a moment, that the crisis in Syria will make us forget our inalienable right to recover the occupied Syrian Golan fully to the lines of June 4, 1967.

For more than six years, states and parties that were behind the war on Syria, have continued to peddle lies and falsely accused the Syrian government of using chemical weapons, despite a confirmation by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons that Syria has fully eliminated its chemical program. This is enough proof that there is an ill-conceived intention to tarnish the real image of the Syrian government in the international public eye, and come up with new excuses to continue the aggression against Syrian favor of terrorists and their supporters. This was the case when the United States blatantly attacked the Shayrat airbase, claiming that it contained chemical weapons used in the alleged Khan Shaykhun attack. And as was the case after every accusation of this kind, we confirmed our readiness to receive and cooperate with UN investigation teams.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Certain countries have boasted about fighting terrorism in Syria and having the interests of Syrians at heart. They have established 'coalitions' and held dozens of conferences under deceiving titles, such as 'friends of the Syrian people'. It is quite ironic that those are the same countries that are shedding the blood of thousands of Syrians by supporting terrorists, bombing innocent civilians, and destroying their livelihoods.

The so-called 'International Coalition' led by the US, which was created three years ago to

allegedly fight terrorist groups such as ISIL, has killed much more innocent Syrians, mostly women and children, than terrorists and has destroyed vital infrastructure that Syrians have worked for years to build. It has also used phosphorus bombs and other internationally prohibited weapons before the eyes of the whole world.

We cannot understand the silence of the international community in the face of these crimes. The international community has not condemned or sought to stop these crimes, even though the Syrian government has made a number of appeals to the Security Council to assume its main responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. The Syrian government has urged the Council to implement its own resolutions on counter-terrorism, in particular resolution 2253, and prevent the Coalition from committing more crimes against the citizens of my country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While the coalition failed to make any meaningful progress against the terrorist group of ISIL, the Syrian Army, along with its allies and friends, has been able to secure real and significant gains and drive out terrorists from large parts of the Syrian Desert. In what was considered a strategic achievement, the Army was recently able to break the siege imposed on the city of Deir Ezzor and its people by ISIL more than three years ago. This achievement will significantly improve the humanitarian situation in the city and contribute to the fight against terrorism in general.

We have declared more than once that it is impossible to combat terrorism without coordination with the Syrian government. This is the only way to make real gains in the war on terrorism. Any presence of foreign troops on Syrian grounds, without the consent of the government, is considered a form of occupation, a wanton aggression, and a flagrant violation of international laws and the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

The war that the most powerful countries and terrorist groups are waging against Syria is not only a military war. It has taken other forms, no less brutal or aggressive, to break the will of the Syrian people and punish it for its firm support of the Army in its efforts to defend Syria's political independence and territorial unity. For this reason, those countries have imposed a suffocating economic blockade on Syria, in blatant violation of international law, to destroy the livelihoods of Syrians and increase their suffering.

These unilateral coercive measures have been imposed on vital sectors, most notably health care services. Syria used to have an advanced health care system. Today, however, Syrians are denied access to many types of medicine, even those used to treat life-threatening conditions, such as cancer. Such sanctions are a clear sign of the hypocrisy of certain countries that shed tears over Syrians while practicing a different form of terrorism.

The refugee problem is one of the consequences of terrorism. As Syria will need the efforts of every Syrian over the upcoming period, the Syrian government has made the return of Syrians to their homes a top priority. To this end, the Syrian government has embarked on a mission to liberate and secure the areas occupied by terrorists and improve the basic living conditions of all Syrians.

Mr. President,

Given the United Nations' failure to uphold its own Charter and the principles of international law, we must all consider reforming this international organization to be able to effectively play its role and to defend the legitimate rights against the law of the jungle that some are trying to impose.

Our nations yearn for a safer and more secure, stable and prosperous world. Such a world will remain a fantasy as long as certain countries believe that they can go around, spreading chaos, creating troubles and imposing their will with full impunity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My country, along with its steadfast people and its brave army, supported by our loyal allies, is marching steadily towards the goal of rooting out terrorism. The liberation of Aleppo and Palmyra, the lifting of the siege of Deir Ezzor and the eradication of terrorism from many parts of Syria prove that victory is now within reach.

I am confident that, when this unjust war on Syria is over, the Syrian Army will go down in history as the Army that heroically defeated, along with its supporting forces and its allies, the terrorists that came to Syria from many countries and received large support from the most powerful countries of the world, including arms, funding, training, access and political cover. Those terrorists have tried and failed to impose their backward ideology on a peaceful nation that has been for decades a cradle of civilization.

The annals of history will recall for generations to come the achievements of the Syrian people and their steadfastness in the face of a barbaric terrorist campaign and unjust measures, which have compounded their suffering and deprived them of their basic needs. The Syrian people have stood their ground, against all odds, because they knew that this was a war that sought to eliminate their country, and with it, their own existence. They are an example to follow by any people who might face, now or in the future, similar attempts to break their will and deny them their freedom and sovereignty.

Thank you Mr. President.

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