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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Statement of
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Deputy State Secretary

Brussels II Conference
“Supporting the future of Syria and the region”

Ministerial Conference

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Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Friends and colleagues,

I would like to express my thanks to the European Union and the United Nations for the organisation of this important conference.

Recent months have shown that the armed conflict is far from over: Syrians are victims of more bombing, more fighting, and more destruction. The number of displacements in the first quarter of this year is staggering: close to 700'000 Syrians had to leave their homes, were displaced for a first, second or third time, and now live in dire conditions – in overcrowded shelters and unfinished buildings where protection needs are coupled with needs for food, water, health care and sanitation.

Violations of international humanitarian law as well as violations and abuses of human rights by all parties to the conflict continue unabatedly. Switzerland underlines that the fight against terrorism never justifies the violation of international law – neither in Eastern Ghouta, Afrin, Raqqa, nor elsewhere. Such violations are an enormous obstacle to any cease-fire negotiations or future peace and reconciliation processes.

We call on all parties to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including the requirements on the conduct of hostilities, and to respect and protect civilians and civilian infrastructures. Humanitarian personnel has to be granted rapid, unimpeded and sustainable access. This year, attacks on health facilities have increased dramatically. We call on all parties to the conflict to make a particular effort to protect medical workers and facilities, patients and the humanitarian personnel working to help the people in need.

Switzerland firmly believes that all perpetrators of violations must be held accountable. We reiterate our call to refer the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The work of the UN Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) are

crucial in view of ongoing and future judicial proceedings against alleged perpetrators in Syria.

Looking at the immense needs in Syria, Switzerland highlights its continued humanitarian commitment. Due to the protracted nature of the conflict, we combine emergency assistance with resilience-based humanitarian interventions. We also underline the importance of tackling questions of civil documentation and Housing, Land and Property rights – questions which, if left unresolved, will lead to new disputes and expose civilians to serious protection risks.

Furthermore, we commend the relentless efforts undertaken by Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq as host-countries to Syrian refugees – efforts which are crucial as conditions for voluntary return in safety and dignity to Syria are currently not in place. To this end, we reaffirm our support to neighboring countries, the refugees and host communities. We also cannot forget the plight of the Palestinian refugees in Syria, in Lebanon and in Jordan.

This year, Switzerland is pledging CHF 61 Mio to assist the people in need in Syria and in the region. We have also decided to allocate CHF 7 Mio in support of peace promotion, respect of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Today's conference is the occasion to appeal once more for the political resolution of the conflict. In this regard, our country is following the current developments with concern and calls on all parties involved to stop any further acts of escalation. The only way to reach a peaceful solution remains through an inclusive dialogue under the umbrella of the United Nations. This is why Switzerland continues to support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

It is only a joint effort, a true commitment by all which can give Syrians – women and men, girls and boys – a chance for a future in peace.

Thank you.