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R E M A R K S

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton at the Geneva II

Conference on Syria

"Thank you very much Secretary-General. Can I thank you and your team for convening this meeting and salute the efforts that the United Nations has made, especially Lakhdar Brahimi, and the efforts of the Russian Federation and the United States to gather together the people who are here today.

We know that what's happening in Syria has no parallel in recent history. The situation is shockingly unique, and we know that it's in the interest of all Syrian people to save the country and the interest of all of us to help that be achieved. We must stop this conflict. So we're all here for the Syrian people and all the efforts that are made today and beyond today need to be focused in the first place on alleviating the suffering that the people of Syria are facing.

We have to ensure that there is agreement on a political transition. We have to ensure that we see an end to violence, that we see access to food, to water, electricity and medical care. And we have to keep in mind that we are all accountable in this crucial engagement to try and ensure that we support the process that can bring this about.

We need to see a clear will to heed the call of Security Council Resolution 2118 when it says "we should fully implement the Geneva communique of June 2012. Our commitment to work together to bring about an end to the violence and human rights abuses and to facilitate the

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launch of a Syrian-led process that will lead to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people."

We know Secretary-General that getting to the point of reaching the goals of the Geneva Communiqué will not be easy, but we think it is really important for all parties to start working to promote measures that can build confidence.

The population of Syria is stretched beyond these limits and even small progress would be welcome if not enough: eg. more humanitarian access to those trapped in conflict zones.

We recognise too the impact of this conflict far beyond the borders of Syria. We pay tribute to the tremendous efforts of countries who are supporting and helping refugees, while themselves feeling the effects of the conflict.

We have the ambition in the European Union to help in all possible ways. At the Humanitarian Conference in Kuwait, and I pay tribute to Kuwait for hosting this, we pledged an additional 550 million euros in an effort that overall gathered together 2.6 billion euros. But we acknowledge that the capacity of international donors has limits.

And the International Community was generous in Kuwait but only a third of the sum that is needed was raised. We will also continue our hard work to support civil society groups with the view to achieving a political solution and I salute the Member States of the European Union who have also provided assistance and helped to build capacity.

It has been mentioned by my colleague William Hague, but I repeat it, it is so important to include women in the process. I met yesterday with the Syrian women who were sitting in Geneva and who are not here, and talked with them. Women from across the divide, women from different parts of the country, of different faiths who come together in support of the objective of finding peace.

They, Secretary-General, must be part of the peace building process for Syria.

They indeed have many good and great ideas for how to bring peace, how to build peace and how to sustain peace. And they need to be fundamentally part of any transition process.

I know that Lakhdar Brahimi and you Secretary-General are determined on this too but I say to all that we need to ensure that that happens.

So again as I began Secretary-General, I thank you for convening this meeting.

I wish, not just today, but success to all the efforts that will continue this week and beyond and pledge our support to help in that success.

Thank you."