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Statement by the US Office of the Syrian Coalition on Senate Foreign Relations Committee Markup and Vote in Support of S.960, the Syria Transition Support Act of 2013

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Media Advisory
 Syrian Coalition
 Washington, DC
 May 22, 2013

Today the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with strong bipartisan agreement, approved S.960, the Syria Transition Support Act of 2013, and in doing so also rejected a series of amendments that would have weakened the legislation.

We believe the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today expressed support for a more active US role in supporting the Syrian Coalition (SC) and increasing support by the US for various policies, including:

- more effective delivery of humanitarian aid to affected Syrian populations;
- building rule of law and governmental capacity in opposition-controlled areas;
- planning for a democratic and pluralistic transition government, promoting reconstruction and reconciliation efforts; and
- effecting the balance of military power on the ground in order to accelerate a political transition of full executive powers to a transitional government.

We urge the US Administration to see the crucial logic behind this legislation and to act accordingly and urgently: by supporting the politically moderate Syrian Coalition and the democratically-minded Supreme Military Command, the US will help promote a mainstream moderate opposition, and thus marginalize the extremist groups operating in Syria with outside support, while at the same time accelerating the defeat of the brutal Assad regime and beginning the important processes of political transition, reconstruction, and reconciliation.

The US has already expressed strong political and humanitarian support for the Syrian people, and we are working together to increase the amount and types of such aid, in order to support the Syrian people. Overall, although not perfect, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's markup today reflected a growing bipartisan domestic will for the US to do even more in order to promote democracy, inclusiveness, stability, and a negotiated political transition in Syria.

This includes providing direct support under significant chain-of-custody and vetting procedures to the Supreme Military Command of the Free Syrian Army in order to change the balance of power on the ground, which will increase pressure on the regime and counter the influence of armed extremist groups that pose a threat to both US interests and the future Syrian state. In concordance with S.960, the SMC already subscribes to a proclamation of principles that respects international humanitarian law, democracy and protection of all Syrians of all backgrounds, and respect for civil authority of armed forces. The SC recently issued a series of videos to instruct all fighters on the ground about the tenets of international humanitarian law, urging all parties to respect and implement these important laws. These videos have been used to train military and legal cadres of the Free Syrian Army on the rules of warfare and international human rights laws. Meanwhile, the Assad regime continues flagrantly to flaunt any form of international humanitarian law in its indiscriminate use of weaponry against civilian areas and it slaughter of innocents.

Today's vote by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee shows that there is a national recognition of the grave threat to the Syrian people and to US interests posed by the current conflict and by the Assad regime. It also reflects bipartisan political pressure on the Administration to take these steps, even before this legislation progresses further, in order to promote changes on the ground that will accelerate a political transition. Bipartisan support for measures such as safe zones and selective arming of the FSA continues to grow in the US Congress. We urge the US Administration to take the actions supported by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today, and other appropriate actions, and we stand ready to serve as an effective and responsible partner to work with the US and other allies to implement the important and urgently-needed measures in this bill.

Today's vote follows an overwhelming vote by the United Nations General Assembly last week also recognizing the wide international support and legitimacy of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, and pressuring the regime to abide by international law and participate in political negotiations to implement the Geneva agreement.

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