

## **Syria: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the refugee conference in Damascus**

A number of EU member states' foreign ministers and the High Representative have received an invitation to a conference on the theme of refugee returns, on 11-12 November, in Damascus.

The EU and its member states will not attend this conference.

The European Union is of the view that the priority at present is real action to create conditions for safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin, in line with international law and the *Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria*, as issued by the UN in February 2018, with the UNHCR enjoying full and unhindered access throughout Syria. As such, the conference is premature.

While the decision to return must always be an individual one, conditions inside Syria at present do not lend themselves to the promotion of large-scale voluntary return, in conditions of safety and dignity in line with international law. The limited returns that have taken place illustrate the many obstacles and threats still faced by returning internally displaced persons and refugees, in particular forced conscription, indiscriminate detention, forced disappearances, torture, physical and sexual violence, discrimination in access to housing, land and property as well as poor or inexistent basic services.

The European Union reiterates that UN Security Council Resolution 2254 sets the framework for the comprehensive and sustainable political solution to the Syria conflict, addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and of the refugee and internal displacement crisis.

We reiterate therefore our urgent call on the regime and its sponsors to engage fully and in good faith in the work of the Constitutional Committee, as well as in all other issues mentioned in UNSC Resolution 2254, notably the release of detainees.

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The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania<sup>1)</sup>, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

1) The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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