

Indeed, the Syrian conflict is the worst crisis of our time. We are confident that it is not possible to resolve humanitarian problems without reaching a political solution. Certain positive changes have recently taken place. Russia jointly with Turkey and Iran launched the "Astana format", within the framework of which the issues of strengthening the ceasefire regime are being discussed. Thanks largely to this initiative it has become possible to resume the intra-Syrian negotiations, the last round of which has just taken place in Geneva. Of course, the process is not easy. The parties have accumulated mutual distrust over the years of the conflict. However, the task before all of us is to help the Syrians reach sustainable agreements by themselves and in accordance with the parameters set forth in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, including on the issues related to the drafting of the constitution and the fight against terrorism. It is extremely important that the Syrians themselves determine the fate of Syria.

In this regard, we consider it unacceptable to use the humanitarian leverage to influence their sovereign choice. It is indispensable to depoliticize the humanitarian dossier, stop artificially inflating "tragedies of the day." The provision of humanitarian assistance should be carried out in direct coordination and in a mutually respectful dialogue with the legitimate Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which, unfortunately, once again was not invited to the conference. This is not the right approach.

Let us not forget that the majority of the population of the Syrian Arab Republic are concentrated in the territories under the control of the Government. Meanwhile only about 1.5 million people live in the territories under the mixed control of the forces of the so-called "moderate" armed opposition and terrorists from "Jabhat al-Nusra".

Let me mention another point of utmost importance. One should not call for the provision of humanitarian assistance to the population of Syria and at the same time expand restrictions, which affect the most vulnerable segments of the population. This abnormal situation leads, in particular, to the shortage of medicines and imported raw materials required for the production of essential medicines in Syria.

Unfortunately, in the Syrian conflict the international community still faces a gap between pledges to allocate financial assistance and bringing real assistance "on the ground" to those in need, who often need bread and water more than money.

Russia provides humanitarian assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic via both international humanitarian organizations, through which we have already allocated more than 45 million dollars, and using bilateral channels, through which we supply food and medicines directly to Syria. The Russian military distribute on a daily basis humanitarian aid to the population, including in frontline areas. This is why we are really do not understand the position of those who paid much attention to humanitarian convoys in eastern Aleppo at the time when the warehouses there, as it transpired later, were stocked up with medicines. Why the same people forgot about the need to help this city after the terrorists had been expelled from it? This is yet another sign of "double standards"!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now we should also focus our agenda on the issues of assisting Syria in restoring the social and economic

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~~infrastructure: providing electricity and water supply, reviving and setting up schools and hospitals in the~~  
areas liberated from terrorists, providing students with everything necessary to ensure a normal educational process. It is not humane to link the solution of this task with the so-called "day after agreement" and, under this pretext, to put forward preconditions for such agreement.

The reconstruction of the destroyed economy could constitute a powerful impetus for the return of refugees and IDPs to their homes. Such efforts would eradicate the social base of armed and terrorist activities in Syria. Also one should not lose sight of the desperate fate of Palestinian refugees sheltered in Syria.

Urgent measures are also required for the humanitarian demining of the Syrian territory, in particular aimed at preserving invaluable cultural treasures for future generations where terrorists and radicals have inflicted enormous damages. We call for the formation of an international coalition on demining of the Syrian territory. Russia is already actively working on it. We call upon all partners who are not indifferent to preserving the historical heritage to put aside their well-known differences and to contribute to this common cause, which requires, among other things, considerable financial investments. We expect that the UN, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and UNESCO will also actively join these efforts.

Last but not least. We understand that the Chairs are going to produce a summary of the Conference. Of course, we leave it for the Chairs' own responsibility. We hope that the Chairs will be balanced and accurate in their assessments so that to reflect all the positions expressed at the meeting.

For its part, the Russian Federation is ready to develop, on a solid international legal basis, equitable cooperation with all those who wish to make a constructive contribution to the Syrian settlement.