

## **Friends of the People of Syria – Istanbul 1 April – Joint Nordic-Baltic Statement**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and my own country, Sweden.

Five weeks ago we met in Tunis, against the backdrop of escalating repression and violence in Syria as well as a deadlocked UN Security Council, to consolidate our support for peace, democracy and dignity for the people of Syria.

And we all welcomed the appointment of Kofi Annan as Joint Special Envoy of the UN and the League of Arab States.

The weeks since then have seen further repression and violence, more death and destruction.

And the deeper the scars of confrontation becomes, the more difficult will be the path of diplomacy and reform.

Nevertheless, this is the path we must seek to pursue.

We fully endorse the six-point plan presented by Kofi Annan, which now has the support also of the UN Security Council. We note that the Syrian regime has accepted the plan. But the violence has not stopped. We must keep the pressure on the Syrian regime to force them to deliver on their promise.

It is only by having the solid support of the entire international community that Kofi Annan has the possibility to convince the regime in Damascus and everyone concerned into going from words to deeds in the step-by-step implementation of this plan.

Nothing of this will come easy, and failure can certainly not be excluded.

But we have a collective duty to do our utmost to prevent the country and region from descending into the hell of full-scale civil war.

It could take decades to recover, and the lives lost would be lost forever.

Our support for the democratic forces of Syria is steadfast.

We welcome the presence here today of representatives of these forces.

Your task is to create the confidence among all of the citizens of Syria - whatever their creed or convictions - that you will and you can offer a better future for all of them.

Syria is, and must remain, a nation of many beliefs and traditions. It is from this that it historically has drawn its strength.

We also salute the efforts of the Syrian National Council and other democratic movements. We welcome the results of the conference of the opposition here in Istanbul, and encourage the opposition to continue to unite, and to strengthen the coordination between groups inside and outside of Syria.

As members and partners of the European Union we have set out our position on Syria clearly.

We are now implementing increasingly rigorous sanctions and restrictive measures against the regime.

These are meant to reinforce our call for true political reform.

But we also stand ready to help a new Syria develop its economy and its full potential.

It is important that we are already starting to prepare this work. We welcome the proposal to set up a working group on this as well as on other topics.

The immediate humanitarian situation is grave, and it is deteriorating.

The Syrian authorities must allow full humanitarian access. This is an imperative demand.

And the Nordic and Baltic nations are ready to further increase our contribution to these efforts.

Our hope is that a political process can soon start. But we commend Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan for keeping their borders open for those fleeing the violence and repression, and we stand ready to give them our help.

Finally, and on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries, I would like to express my appreciation to Turkey and Qatar for co-hosting this important meeting of the Friends of the People of Syria.