

Opening Statement to Press by General Robert Mood Head of UN Supervision Mission in Syria

5 July 2012, Damascus

I am happy to be back with you here in Damascus, it one of these places that I always look forward to coming back to, in a country that indeed has a special place in my heart.

Last time we sat like this, was the day before I decided to suspend the activities of the Mission. Since then many events and meetings have taken place.

The escalation of violence, allow me to say, to an unprecedented level, obstructed our ability to observe, verify, report as well as assist in local dialogue. Basically, we were no longer able to carry out our mandated tasks. And because of that, I took a decision to suspend our activities, with the intention of resuming once the Parties recommit to the sustained cessation of violence and the implementation of the six-point Plan.

When the Security Council took a decision to deploy a monitoring mission in Syria on April 21st, this was taken on the basis that the parties involved in the conflict would uphold their commitments to a cessation of violence in all its forms. The Council did not deploy the Mission to stop violence or to observe an escalation in violence, but to monitor the cessation of violence implemented by the parties. Absent a demonstrable recommitment to a sustained cessation of violence and a viable political process, the Mission's continued implementation of its mandated tasks will be limited.

This message was echoed clearly by the Security Council members which I briefed on June 19th and by the Action Group Members in Geneva on June 30th. Also stressed was the international community's strong commitment to the welfare of the Syrian people and to the urgency of stopping the violence in all its forms.

Kofi Annan convened the Geneva meeting at a critical stage in the crisis to bring the international community and the countries with influence together to take concrete action. It was a difficult meeting, but the final outcome was, in my opinion, the best that could have been achieved under the current circumstances.

The Action Group Members stressed that conditions conducive to a political settlement must now be put in place.

For that to happen, the bloodshed must stop. The longer the violence goes on, with more civilians killed or trapped in the line of fire, the more difficult it will become to have a peaceful transition.

UNSMIS stands ready to support the Parties in taking the needed steps towards a peaceful dialogue.

We are consolidating the Mission to enable better support to the Syrian people in the coming days. We will reinforce our presence into Regional Team Sites to give us, once our operations resume, the flexibility to effectively work on facilitating political dialogue and stability projects. In the next week we will consolidate our 8 local team site locations into Regional ones. The Mission will relocate personnel and assets from Hama, Idleb and Tartus to boost our presence in other locations. This consolidation will not affect the Mission's current mandate or the total deployed personnel.

When the Mission was established in April, we needed to locate in cities to establish and build contacts with the local populations on the ground and to get to know the geography and social fabric of the country. This was also very useful in monitoring the ceasefire, when it was adhered to, and reporting on violations.

Now, we are in a situation in which we have the contacts and knowledge, but we have no ceasefire. So it is time to stop spreading ourselves out too thin and restructure in a way that will allow us, once we resume our activities, to conduct targeted tasks that require longer periods of stay in particular area as well as larger number of observers, specialized in a variety of civilian and military affairs.

As I said last time we spoke in this room, UNSMIS is not a static Mission. It will continually adapt and reconfigure to best serve the needs and aspirations of the Syrian people, and that is what we are doing now.

In addition, over the next days and weeks, the Security Council will make an assessment as to the future of the mission.

Whatever decision the Security Council makes, the international community's continued responsibility to the Syrian people is moral as well as political. We cannot and will not turn our eyes and ears away from your plight and will continue our work to find new paths to political dialogue and peaceful resolution to the crisis.

Thank you.