



Statement by

H.E. Walid Al-Moualem

Deputy Prime Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates

Of

The Syrian Arab Republic

Head of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic

At

The General Debate

Of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York

September 29th, 2018

Madam President of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly,

I would like to congratulate you and your country Ecuador on your election as president of the current session of the General Assembly and I wish you all success. I would also like to thank your predecessor for presiding over the Assembly during the previous session.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

Every year we arrive at this important international forum, hoping that every corner of this world has become more secure, stable, and prosperous. Today, our hope is stronger than ever, and so is our confidence that the will of the people shall eventually triumph. Our hope and confidence are the result of more than seven years of hardship, during which our people suffered from the scourge of terrorism. However, Syrians refused to compromise. They refused to succumb to terrorist groups and their external supporters. They stood their ground. They remained defiant, fully convinced that this was a battle for their existence, their history, and their future, and that they will ultimately emerge victorious.

To the disappointment of some, here we are today, more than seven years into this dirty war against my country, announcing to the world that the situation on the ground has become more secure and stable and that our war on terror is almost over, thanks to the heroism, resolve, and unity of the people and the army, and to the support of our allies and friends. However, we will not stop at these achievements. We remain committed to fighting this sacred battle until we purge all Syrian territories from terrorist groups, regardless of their names, and from any illegal foreign presence. We will pay no heed to any attacks, external pressure, lies or allegations that seek to discourage us. This is our duty and a non-negotiable right that we have exercised as we set out to eradicate terrorism from our land.

Madam President,

The governments of certain countries have denied us our right, under international law, and our national duty to combat terrorism and protect our people on our land and within our own borders. At the same time, these governments formed an illegitimate international coalition, led by the United States, on the pretext of combating terrorism in Syria. The so-called international

coalition has done everything but fight terrorism. It has even become clear that the coalition's goals were in perfect alignment with those of terrorist groups; sowing chaos, death and destruction in their path. The coalition destroyed the Syrian city of Raqqa completely; it destroyed infrastructure and public services in the areas it targeted; it committed massacres against civilians, including children and women, which amount to war crimes under international law. The coalition has also provided direct military support to terrorists, on multiple occasions, as they fought against the Syrian army. It should have been more aptly named 'The Coalition to Support Terrorists and War Crimes'.

The situation in Syria cannot be divorced from the battle raging between two camps on the world stage: one of the camps promotes peace, stability, and prosperity across the world, advocates dialogue and mutual understanding, respects international law, and upholds the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The other camp tries to create chaos in international relations and employs colonization and hegemony as tools to further its narrow interests, even if that meant resorting to corrupt methods, such as supporting terrorism and imposing an economic blockade, to subjugate people and governments that reject external diktats and insist on making their own decisions.

What happened in Syria should have been a lesson to some countries but those countries refuse to learn. Instead, they choose to bury their head in the sand. This is why ladies and gentlemen we, the members of this organization, must make a clear and unequivocal choice: are we going to defend international law and the UN charter and be on the side of justice? Or are we going to submit to hegemonic tendencies and the law of the jungle that some are trying to impose on this organization and the world?

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, the situation on the ground is more stable and secure thanks to progress made in combating terrorism. The government continues to rehabilitate the areas destroyed by terrorists to restore normalcy. All conditions are now present for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to the country they had to leave because of terrorism and the unilateral economic measures that

targeted their daily lives and their livelihoods. Thousands of Syrian refugees abroad have indeed started their journey back home.

The return of every Syrian refugee is a priority for the Syrian state. Doors are open for all Syrians abroad to return voluntarily and safely. And what applies to Syrians inside Syria also applies to Syrians abroad. No one is above the law. Thanks to the help of Russia, the Syrian government will spare no effort to facilitate the return of those refugees and meet their basic needs. A special committee was recently established to coordinate the return of refugees to their places of origin in Syria and to help them regain their lives.

We have called upon the international community and humanitarian organizations to facilitate these returns. However, some western countries and in line with their dishonest behavior since the start of the war on Syria continue to prevent the return of refugees. They are spreading irrational fears among refugees; they are politicizing what should be a purely humanitarian issue, using refugees as a bargaining chip to serve their political agenda, and linking the return of refugees to the political process.

Today, as we are about to close the last chapter in the crisis, Syrians are coming together to erase the traces of this terrorist war and to rebuild their country with their own hands, whether they stayed in Syria or were forced to leave. We welcome any assistance with reconstruction from those countries that were not part of the aggression on Syria and those that have come out clearly and explicitly against terrorism. However, the priority is for our friends that stood by us in our war on terror. As for the countries that offer only conditional assistance or continue to support terrorism, they are neither invited nor welcome to help.

Madam President,

As we move ahead on counter-terrorism, reconstruction and the return of refugees, we remain committed to the political process without compromising on our national principles. These include preserving the sovereignty, independence, and territorial unity of the Syrian Arab Republic, protecting the exclusive right of Syrians to determine the future of their country without external interference, and eradicating terrorism from our country. We expressed time and again our readiness to respond to any initiative that would help Syrians end the crisis. We have

engaged positively in the Geneva talks, the Astana process and the Syrian national dialogue in Sochi. However, it has always been the other parties that rejected dialogue and resorted to terrorism and foreign interference to achieve their goals.

Nevertheless, we continue to implement the outcomes of the Sochi Syrian national dialogue on the formation of a constitutional committee to review the current constitution. We presented a practical and comprehensive vision on the composition, prerogatives and working methods of the committee and submitted a list of representatives on behalf of the Syrian state. We stress that the mandate of the committee is limited to reviewing the articles of the current constitution, through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process that may be facilitated by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. No preconditions should be imposed on the committee, nor should its recommendations be prejudged. The committee must be independent since the constitution is a Syrian matter to be decided by Syrians themselves. Therefore, we will not accept any proposal that constitutes an interference in the internal affairs of Syria or leads to such interference. The Syrian people must have the final word regarding any constitutional or sovereign matter. We stand ready to work actively with our friends to convene the committee along the parameters I have just mentioned.

In addition to these international initiatives, local reconciliation is well underway. Reconciliation agreements allowed us to stem the bloodshed and prevent destruction in many areas around Syria. They restored stability and a normal life to these areas and allowed people to return to the homes they were forced to leave because of terrorism. Reconciliation, therefore, will remain our priority.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The battle we fought in Syria against terrorism was not only a military one. It was also an ideological battle, between the culture of destruction, extremism, and death, and the culture of construction, tolerance, and life. Therefore, I launch an appeal from this rostrum, calling for fighting the ideology of terrorism and violent extremism, drying up its support and financial resources, and implementing relevant Security Council resolutions, notably resolution 2253. The

military battle against terrorism, albeit important, is not enough. Terrorism is like an epidemic. It will return, break out, and threaten everyone without exception.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

We fully condemn and reject the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances, wherever, whenever, and regardless of the target. This is why Syria eliminated completely its chemical program and fulfilled all its commitments as a member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as confirmed by numerous OPCW reports. Although some western countries are constantly trying to politicize its work, we have always cooperated with the OPCW to the largest extent possible. Unfortunately, every time we express our readiness to receive objective and professional investigative teams to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons, these countries would block such efforts because they know that the conclusions of the investigations would not satisfy the ill-intentions they harbor against Syria. These countries have ready-made accusations and scenarios to justify an aggression on Syria. This was the case when the United States, France, and the UK launched a wanton aggression on Syria last April, claiming that chemical weapons were used without any investigation or evidence and in a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty, international law and the UN charter.

Meanwhile, these same countries disregarded all reliable information we provided on chemical weapons in the possession of terrorist groups that used them on multiple occasions to blame the Syrian government and justify an attack against it. The terrorist organization known as 'the White Helmets' was the main tool used to mislead public opinion and fabricate accusations and come up with lies on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The White Helmets was created by British intelligence under a humanitarian cover. It has been proven however that this organization is part of the Al-Qaida-affiliated Nosra Front. Despite all allegations, we remain committed to liberating all our territory without concern for the black banners of terrorists or the theatrics of the White Helmets.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In another episode of the terrorist war on Syria since 2011, suicide bombings orchestrated by ISIL rocked the governorate of Suwayda in southern Syria last July. It is worth noting that the

terrorists behind that attack came from the Tanf area where US forces are present. The area has become a safe haven for ISIL remnants who are now hiding in the Rukban refugee camp on the border with Jordan, under the protection of US forces. The United States also sought to prolong the crisis in Syria by releasing terrorists from Guantanamo prison and sending them to Syria, where they became the effective leaders of the Nosra Front and other terrorist groups.

Meanwhile, the Turkish regime continues to support terrorists in Syria. Since day one of the war on Syria, the Turkish regime has trained and armed terrorists, turning Turkey into a hub and a corridor for terrorists on their way to Syria. When terrorists failed to serve its agenda, the Turkish regime resorted to direct military aggression, attacking cities and towns in northern Syria. However, all these actions that undermine Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity and violate international law will not stop us from exercising our rights and fulfilling our duties to recover our land and purge it from terrorists, whether through military action or reconciliation agreements. We have always been open to any initiative that prevents further deaths and restores safety and security to areas affected by terrorism. That is why we welcomed the agreement on Idlib reached in Sochi on September 17th. The agreement was the result of intensive consultations and full coordination between Syria and Russia. The agreement is timebound, includes clear deadlines, and complements the agreements on the de-escalation zones reached in Astana. We hope that when the agreement is implemented, the Nosra Front and other terrorist groups will be eradicated, thus eliminating the last remnants of terrorism in Syria.

Any foreign presence on Syrian territory without the consent of the Syrian government is illegal and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the UN charter. It is an assault on our sovereignty, which undermines counter-terrorism efforts and threatens regional peace and security. We therefore consider any forces operating on Syrian territory without an explicit request from the Syrian government, including US, French, and Turkish forces, occupying forces and will be dealt with accordingly. They must withdraw immediately and without conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Israel continues to occupy a dear part of our land in the Syrian Golan and our people there continue to suffer because of its oppressive and aggressive policies. Israel even supported

terrorist groups that operated in southern Syria; protecting them through direct military intervention and launching repeated attacks on Syria. But just as we liberated southern Syria from terrorists, we are determined to liberate fully the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of June 4th, 1967. Syria demands that the international community put an end to all these practices and compel Israel to implement relevant UN resolutions, notably resolution 497 on the occupied Syrian Golan. The international community must also help the Palestinian people establish its own independent state, with Jerusalem as its capital, and facilitate the return of Palestine refugees to their land, pursuant to international resolutions. Any actions that undermine these rights are null and void and threaten regional peace and security, especially the Israeli racist law known as “the nation-state law” and the decision of the US administration to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and stop funding UNRWA.

Madam President,

Syria strongly condemns the decision of the US administration to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement, which proves once again the United States’ disregard for international treaties and conventions. We express once again our solidarity with the leaders and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran and trust that they will overcome the effects of this irresponsible decision. We also stand with the government and people of Venezuela in the face of US attempts to interfere in their internal affairs. We call once again for lifting the unilateral economic measures against the Syrian people and all other independent people around the world, especially the people of the DPRK, Cuba, and Belarus.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

With the help of allies and friends, Syria will defeat terrorism. The world must never forget that and should treat us accordingly. It is time for all those detached from reality to wake up, let go of their fantasies, and come to their senses. They must realize that they will not achieve politically what they failed to achieve by force. We have never compromised on our national principles even when the war was at its peak. We will surely not do that today! At the same time, we want peace for the people of the world because we want peace for our people. We have never attacked others. We have never interfered in the affairs of others. We have never exported

terrorists to other parts of the world. We have always maintained the best relations with other countries. Today, as we seek to defeat terrorism, we continue to advocate dialogue and mutual understanding to serve the interests of our people and to achieve security, stability, and prosperity for all.