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P9_TA(2021)0088

The Syrian conflict — 10 years after the uprising

European Parliament resolution of 11 March 2021 on the Syrian conflict — 10 years after the uprising (2021/2576(RSP))

(2021/C 474/14)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, in particular that of 15 March 2018 on the situation in Syria ([1]), of 18 May 2017 on the EU strategy on Syria ([2]), of 4 July 2017 on addressing human rights violations in the context of war crimes, and crimes against humanity, including genocide ([3]), of 24 October 2019 on the Turkish military operation in north-east Syria and its consequences ([4]), of 26 November 2019 on children rights on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([5]) and of 17 November 2011 on EU support for the International Criminal Court ([6]),

— having regard to the statement of the EU Foreign Affairs Council of 6 March 2020, and the latest EU Council conclusions on Syria of 14 October 2019, 16 April 2018 and 3 April 2017,

— having regard to the previous statements on Syria by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, including those of February 2020 on humanitarian access in Idlib, of 13 January 2020 and 26 September 2019 on Syria, and of 9 October 2019 on developments in north-east Syria,

— having regard to Council Implementing Decision (CFSP) 2021/30 of 15 January 2021 implementing Decision 2013/255/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Syria ([7]), which added the new Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister to the EU list of sanctions against those responsible for violent repression in Syria,

— having regard to the EU strategy on Syria adopted on 3 April 2017, and to the Council conclusions on the EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Daesh threat adopted on 16 March 2015,

— having regard to the joint declaration by the UN and the European Union, as co-chairs of the fourth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held on 30 June 2020,

— having regard to the previous statements of the UN Secretary-General on Syria, including those of his spokesperson of 1 and 18 February 2020,

— having regard to the latest statement of the UN Special Envoy to Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, addressed to the UN Security Council (UNSC) on 22 January 2021,

— having regard to the UNSC resolutions relevant to Syria since 2011, in particular UNSC Resolution 2254 (2015) endorsing a road map for a peace process in Syria, UNSC Resolution 2249 (2015) on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and UNSC Resolution 2533 (2020) renewing the Bab al-Hawa border crossing until 10 July 2021 for humanitarian aid,

— having regard to the latest reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, submitted to the UNHRC on 1 March 2021,

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([1]) OJ C 162, 10.5.2019, p. 119.
([2]) OJ C 307, 30.8.2018, p. 117.
([3]) OJ C 334, 19.9.2018, p. 69.
([4]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0049.
([5]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0066.
([6]) OJ C 153 E, 31.5.2013, p. 115.
([7]) OJ L 12 I, 15.1.2021, p. 3.

— having regard to UN General Assembly Resolution 71/248 of 21 December 2016 establishing the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in Syria since March 2011,

— having regard to the statement by Unicef of 28 February 2021 on the safe reintegration and repatriation of all children in Al-Hol camp and across the north-east of Syria and to the Unicef Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report 2020 of 2 February 2021,

— having regard to the establishment in 2011 of the Secretariat of the EU Genocide Network for investigation and prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, hosted by Eurojust,

— having regard to Council Common Position 2003/444/CFSP of 16 June 2003 on the International Criminal Court ([8]), to its 2004 Action Plan for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to achieve universal ratification and implementation, and to the revised EU Action Plan of 2011,

— having regard to the Rome Statute of the ICC,

— having regard to the UN Charter and UN conventions to which Syria is a state party, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,

— having regard to the UN-backed Geneva Communiqués of 2012 and 2014,

— having regard to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols thereto,

— having regard to the UN Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction,

— having regard to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December 1948,

— having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas in late February 2011 Syrian children were arrested, detained and tortured in Deraa by the Syrian regime for writing graffiti critical of President Bashar Al-Assad on city walls; whereas on 15 March 2011 thousands of Syrians in Deraa and Damascus took to the streets in record numbers to demand democratic reforms, the release of political detainees, an end to torture, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the holding of free and fair elections, and an end to corruption; whereas these popular protests spread across the country for several years, from major cities such as Homs, Hama, Idlib and popular neighbourhoods of Aleppo and Damascus, to smaller towns such as Al-Hasakah in the north-east and Kafr Nabl in the north-west;

B. whereas the Syrian uprising of 2011 was a demonstration of Syria's ethnic and religious diversity, including leaders from all ethnic and religious groups and all provinces of the country;

C. whereas the Syrian regime responded to the legitimate democratic aspirations of its people with sheer brutality from the Syrian security forces and allied militias under its command; whereas more than 500 000 people have lost their lives and more than one million have been injured; whereas according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), since March 2011 over 230 000 civilians have been killed, 88 % of whom by the Syrian regime, 3 % by Russian forces, 2 % by Daesh and 2 % by armed opposition groups; whereas over 15 000 civilians have been tortured to death, 99 % of whom in regime prisons; whereas over 150 000 civilians have since been forcibly disappeared and remain detained, 88 % of whom by the Syrian regime, 6 % by ISIL/Daesh and 3 % by armed opposition groups; whereas over 3 400 healthcare staff have since been forcibly disappeared or detained, 98 % of whom by the Syrian regime;

([8]) OJ L 150, 18.6.2003, p. 67.

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D. whereas the parties to the conflict, including government forces and their allies, anti-government armed groups and UN-listed terrorist organisations such as ISIL/Daesh, have perpetrated gross human rights violations to various degrees, including war crimes and crimes against humanity; whereas the tactics deployed by both the brutal regime and jihadists were directed at the annihilation of moderate and pro-democratic forces; whereas all those responsible for these crimes must be held accountable;

E. whereas the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons, Scud missiles, conventional artillery and air-dropped bombs, as well as barrel bombs, cluster bombs and incendiary bombs, on densely populated civilian neighbourhoods such as Homs, Hama and East Aleppo; whereas peaceful protesters who were injured by live fire from Syrian security forces were denied treatment and tortured to death in military hospitals and detention centres across the country, as evidenced by the Caesar report presented by France to the UNSC in May 2014; whereas families have been routinely prevented from burying their dead in cemeteries; whereas entire cities have been under siege and deliberately starved; whereas collective punishments, extrajudicial killings and multiple massacres of hundreds of men, women and children in rural towns, such as in May 2012 in Houla, have taken place; whereas the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria reported on the systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war by Syrian regime forces and their militias;

F. whereas the UN has established a series of initiatives through the mandate of its UN Special Envoys in order to reach a ceasefire between all parties, release detainees, guarantee humanitarian access to all parts of the country, protect journalists and NGOs and engage in an inclusive dialogue for a political solution to the conflict that ensued after 2011; whereas this process and the UN-mandated Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC) remain at a standstill;

G. whereas the SCC was established in October 2019 with the mandate to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict, under the auspices of the UN Special Envoy for Syria and in line with UNSC Resolution 2254 (2015); whereas, in spite of its structural deficiencies and Assad's continuing resistance to constructive cooperation within the SCC, the SCC remains a crucial tool for achieving a peaceful political resolution to the conflict;

H. whereas Russia, supported by China, has vetoed 16 UNSC resolutions since 2011, including on a referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and on increasing humanitarian access; whereas Iran and Hezbollah have been directly involved in supporting the Syrian regime's repression of civilians; whereas Russia has been devoting logistical, diplomatic and financial resources since 2015 to a large-scale military intervention by the Russian Air Force in support of the Syrian regime;

I. whereas Turkey has been intervening directly in Syria since 2016 with a view to occupying the northern parts of the country, predominantly consisting of Syrian Kurdish enclaves, in violation of international law, including by invading in October 2019 territories controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); whereas, in response to these actions by Turkey, a number of EU Member States have formally suspended arms sales to Turkey;

J. whereas according to the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, Turkey has transferred Syrian mercenaries to Nagorno-Karabakh;

K. whereas the Global Coalition is continuing its efforts in Iraq, Syria and globally to thwart ISIL/Daesh's ambitions and the activities of its branches and networks;

L. whereas the EU and its Member States suspended diplomatic relations with the Syrian regime in 2012; whereas the EU closed its EU delegation in Damascus in December 2012, following the closure of Member State embassies in early 2012;

M. whereas the Council adopted sanctions on individuals and entities involved in the repression of civilians, which were adopted in 2011 and have since been expanded, in order to reach a negotiated political settlement; whereas these sanctions have humanitarian exemptions;

N. whereas the Syrian regime's response to the uprising has led to the destruction of Syria's economic and social fabric; whereas the collapse of the Syrian pound has been amplified by the collapse of the Lebanese economy as of 2019, and the global economic repercussions related to the COVID-19 pandemic as of March 2020; whereas the cost of basic staples has increased by over 100 % since 2019;

O. whereas Syria, under intense international pressure, signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention in October 2013 after committing its largest chemical attacks to date on a civilian neighbourhood east of Damascus in Eastern Ghouta; whereas the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team found the Syrian regime responsible for using chemical weapons on civilians multiple times since; whereas in July 2020 the OPCW Executive Council formally requested once again that the Syrian regime declare its chemical weapons facilities;

P. whereas the conflict has resulted in almost 7 million refugees, with over 13 million people dependent on humanitarian aid in Syria, including 6 million women and children, 6,8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 3 million people living in hard-to-reach besieged areas; whereas humanitarian needs have risen by a fifth in the last year alone, with an additional 4,5 million Syrians suffering from food insecurity and 90 % of Syrians living below the poverty line; whereas humanitarian access to all populations in need remains vital and 40 % of the Syrian population reside in non-government controlled areas; whereas in addition to general healthcare for the population, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how cross-border access into north-west and north-east Syria remains crucial; whereas winter and the subsequent flooding, which affected some 121 000 people at 304 IDP sites in north-west Syria, brought an additional level of distress to a population that was already extremely vulnerable; whereas the Syrian Government continued to impose severe restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid in government-held areas of Syria and elsewhere in the country;

Q. whereas around 12 000 foreign nationals, mostly suspected of having direct or indirect ties to ISIL/Daesh, are imprisoned in seven prisons run by the SDF in north-east Syria; whereas 9 000 of them are held in Al-Hol camp, Syria's largest, which hosts a total of 64 000 people, mostly families with ties to ISIL/Daesh, of whom 94 % are women and children, including EU citizens; whereas current conditions are highly alarming, especially after the latest killings recorded since the start of this year;

R. whereas the conflict has had a particularly severe impact on the lives and human rights of children in Syria; whereas over 29 500 children have been killed, 78 % of whom by the Syrian regime and Iranian militias, 7 % by Russian forces and 3 % by ISIL/Daesh, according to the SNHR; whereas more than 2,6 million girls and boys have been internally displaced from their homes and whereas the mental health of many Syrian children has been and will continue to be deeply affected by the sheer brutality of the conflict; whereas the inability of children in Syria to obtain birth registration and identity documents puts them at risk of statelessness; whereas millions of children have missed years of education, with 2,8 million currently out of school in Syria;

S. whereas continuing attacks on health facilities have decimated Syria's health system and left Syrians struggling to cope with the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 crisis; whereas less than 64 % of hospitals and 52 % of primary healthcare centres across Syria are functioning; whereas 70 % of the health workforce has fled the country, according to the World Health Organization (WHO);

T. whereas regular attacks on healthcare facilities have been a hallmark of the Syrian conflict since its onset, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law, and persisted in 2020 during the pandemic; whereas over the past decade, international recognition of the systematic nature of attacks on healthcare in Syria has grown, but clear accountability has proven elusive despite UNSC Resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2286 (2016); whereas the UN Secretary-General established an internal UN Board of Inquiry which examined a limited number of incidents in north-west Syria between September 2019 and April 2020;

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U. whereas humanitarian advocates and practitioners continue to raise concerns about the security and protection of returnees and displaced individuals in the light of the conditions in many areas of the country and the questions about the Syrian Government's approach to political reconciliation;

V. whereas since 2011 the EU and its Member States have mobilised EUR 20 billion for humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance to Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring countries; whereas the EU has been the driving force behind the Syria pledging conferences which took place in Brussels over four consecutive years (2017-2020), and the fifth Brussels conference, which is due to take place on 29 and 30 March 2021;

W. whereas UNSC Resolution 2533 (2020) of 11 July 2020 on cross-border aid renewed only the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, for a one-year period until 10 July 2021, thereby closing the Bab al-Salam, Al Yarubiyah and Al-Ramtha crossings;

X. whereas since 2011 millions of Syrians have been stripped of their property rights by new Syrian property laws against those evading military service or fleeing the country without prior authorisation;

Y. whereas the Golan Heights are Syrian territory and have been occupied by the State of Israel since 1967;

Z. whereas a number of attacks on cultural heritage have been carried out by different parties throughout the course of the conflict, including the destruction and pillaging of archaeological sites at the hand of ISIL/Daesh and the bulldozing, looting and destruction of archaeological sites and Yazidi shrines and graves by the Syrian National Army in Afrin;

AA. whereas the Rome Statute of the ICC, signed and ratified by all Member States, affirms that the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole — in particular genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes — must not go unpunished;

AB. whereas all Member States have ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC as of 2009; whereas in 2011 the Council established the Secretariat of the EU Genocide Network for investigation and prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, hosted by Eurojust; whereas the EU strategy on Syria calls for the EU to promote accountability for war crimes committed in Syria, with a view to facilitating a national reconciliation process and transitional justice;

AC. whereas a Joint Investigative Team (JIT) led by law enforcement and judicial authorities in France and Germany was launched in 2018 for the first time to facilitate the arrest and prosecution of Syrian war criminals following the publication of the Caesar report on the systematic starvation and torture of tens of thousands of women and men in Syria's detention centres since 2011;

1. Conveys its support for the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people who, 10 years ago on 15 March 2011, peacefully demonstrated for democratic reforms in Deraa, Damascus and the rest of the country; pays tribute to the 500 000 victims of the repression and conflict in Syria since the beginning of the popular uprising; believes that the future of Syria should rest in the hands of Syrians; conveys its support to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state and its people;

2. Expresses its deep concern over the persistent political deadlock, and commends the efforts of the UN Special Envoy, Geir O. Pedersen, to find a political solution to the conflict; shares the Special Envoy's concerns over the lack of any progress; reaffirms that a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict cannot be achieved militarily; is equally concerned by the economic collapse and the disastrous humanitarian crisis affecting Syria;

3. Expresses its support to UNSC Resolution 2254 (2015) establishing a Syrian-led constitutional reform process; deeply regrets the Syrian regime's lack of engagement despite repeated engagement and readiness of Syrian opposition representatives to negotiate with the Syrian regime in the drafting of a new Syrian constitution; emphasises in this regard the need for the establishment of a UN-led ceasefire monitoring, verification and reporting mechanism;

4. Opposes any normalisation of diplomatic relations with the Syrian regime as long as there is no fundamental progress on the ground in Syria, with clear, sustained and credible engagement in an inclusive political process; considers the upcoming 2021 Syrian Presidential elections to be lacking any form of credibility in the eyes of the international community in the current context; firmly condemns the visits of MEPs to the Syrian regime, and stresses that those MEPs do not represent the European Parliament;

5. Regrets that some players further divided a fragmented Syrian opposition, obstructing the Geneva Process;

6. Strongly condemns all atrocities and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular by the Assad Regime, but also by Russian, Iranian and Turkish actors and calls on Russia, Iran and Hezbollah to withdraw all forces and proxies under their command, except for those participating in an international peacekeeping or stabilisation force under mandate of the UN Security Council; deplores the role of Russia and Iran in backing the Syrian regime's all-out repression of its civilian population, and their takeover of Syria's political process and economic resources;

7. Calls on Turkey to withdraw its troops from Northern Syria which it is illegally occupying outside of any UN mandate; condemns Turkey's illegal transfers of Kurdish Syrians from occupied Northern Syria to Turkey for detention and prosecution in violation of Turkey's international obligations under the Geneva Conventions; urges that all Syrian detainees who have been transferred to Turkey be immediately repatriated to the occupied territories in Syria; is worried that Turkey's ongoing displacements could amount to ethnic cleansing against the Syrian Kurdish population; stresses that Turkey's illegal invasion and occupation has jeopardised peace in Syria, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean; firmly condemns Turkey's use of Syrian mercenaries in conflicts in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, in violation of international law;

8. Firmly believes in Syria's religious and ethnic diversity; deplores the Syrian regime's long-standing discrimination against Kurdish Syrians; condemns the Syrian regime's targeted attacks against critical voices, such as European Parliament Sakharov Prize winner Ali Ferzat for his criticism of President Assad, as well as the Syrian regime's attacks against 124 Christian churches, which was documented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR); firmly condemns the assassinations of religious minorities by ISIL/Daesh, and particularly its crimes of genocide against Yazidis and people of the Shiite Muslim and Christian faiths in 2014-2018; deeply deplores the persecution of minorities under armed opposition groups;

9. Reminds the international community of the gravity and the magnitude of human rights violations in Syria perpetrated by different parties to the conflict; points to the Syrian regime's overwhelming responsibility for its decision to meet peaceful protests with all-out repression through unspeakable means; recalls the importance of the Caesar report and the confirmation, presented to the UNSC by France in 2014, of the credibility of the photos of the 11 000 identified prisoners who were starved and tortured to death in detention centres and military hospitals around Damascus between 2011 and 2013; urges the EU and its Member States to support the UN Commission of Inquiry's recommendation of March 2021 to facilitate the creation of an independent mechanism with an international mandate and a victim-led approach to locate the missing or their remains, including those found in mass graves;

10. Firmly condemns the killing of 550 international and Syrian journalists by the Syrian regime and dozens by ISIL/Daesh and other armed groups; calls on the Syrian regime to immediately release from prison the 400 journalists it is holding in detention, according to the SNHR;

11. Condemns in the strongest terms the use of rape as a weapon of war against women, whether by the Syrian regime and its militias as documented by the UN International Independent Committee, or by ISIL/Daesh on Yazidi and Shiite women; recalls the role played by women in the 2011 uprising and the fundamental importance of including women at all levels of Syria's political, economic, judicial power structures, including in transitional justice; reiterates the importance of including women and young people in the conflict resolution process;

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12. Reiterates its strongest condemnation of Russian airstrikes which have killed a total of over 6 900 civilians including 2 000 children using cluster munitions, vacuum bombs and long range missiles, targeting independent media centres, hospitals, humanitarian infrastructure including over 207 medical facilities, according to the SNHR, and Syrian civil defence units such as members of the White Helmets humanitarian organisation; denounces Russia's attempts to tarnish the image of the White Helmets in Western media through an aggressive and sustained disinformation campaign on social media; condemns in the strongest terms the involvement of Russian warplanes in the Syrian regime's chemical attacks, such as in the chemical massacre of Khan Sheikhoun of April 2017, after which Russian warplanes immediately bombed the only hospital where the victims were being treated;

13. Urges the Syrian regime to immediately release the 130 000 political prisoners unjustly detained, including women, men and children forcibly disappeared by Syrian security forces; firmly condemns the systematic use of torture, inhuman treatments and sexual violence in the horrendous conditions in which they are being held, without any access to a civilian court, a lawyer, medical care or their families; stresses that they are being denied their basic rights to a fair trial, including the withholding of information on their arrest and torture to extract bogus confessions; urges the Syrian authorities to without exception provide immediate and unhindered access to detention facilities for recognised international humanitarian NGOs and monitoring organisations without prior notification;

14. Stresses that ISIL/Daesh is still active in the region and has not been defeated; expresses its concerns about the difficulties encountered in preserving and obtaining access to evidence of crimes perpetrated by ISIL/Daesh and uncovering the fate of those kidnapped; calls on the EU and its Member States to support efforts on the ground to document and preserve evidence of those crimes; welcomes the prosecution of EU and non-EU nationals who have joined ISIL/Daesh;

15. Expresses its concern over the resurgence of ISIL/Daesh in north-east Syria; commends the efforts of the international coalition against ISIL/Daesh; stresses the importance of continued, long-term US engagement in the coalition; reaffirms its support for the efforts of the Global Coalition against ISIL/Daesh, and underlines the significant contribution made by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as an ally in the fight against ISIL/Daesh;

16. Expresses its concern about the rising tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan, which has enjoyed more stability in recent years than Syria, and has provided a safe haven to Syrian refugees;

17. Reaffirms that the persons responsible for core international crimes must be duly prosecuted, including by EU Member States, in the absence of other international or national processes of transitional justice; emphasises the key importance of resolving the issue of those detained and disappeared by all parties to the conflict as a fundamental part of any transitional process with the aim of achieving peace;

18. Recalls that the International Criminal Court (ICC) should remain the primary jurisdiction for international justice for crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression; considers that the lack of accountability provides a breeding ground for further atrocities and compounds the suffering of the victims; insists, therefore, on the need to hold all perpetrators to account, notably through the application of the principle of universal jurisdiction, and to provide reparation to victims; stresses that the introduction of restorative justice measures cannot wait until the end of the conflict and urges the EU and its Member States to step up their support for processes led by representative groups of Syrians; firmly condemns Russia's 16 UNSC vetoes, with the support of China, to referring Syria to the ICC;

19. Welcomes the first ever sentencing of a Syrian regime security officer for complicity in crimes against humanity on 24 February 2021 at the court in Koblenz in Germany;

20. Commends EU Member States' efforts since 2019 to secure broad international support for securing long-term funding within the UN general budget for the UN's International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in Syria since March 2011 (IIIM);

21. Welcomes the Franco-German Joint Investigative Team (JIT) to support the prosecution of the crimes against humanity documented by the Caesar report; welcomes the international arrest warrants issued by both countries in 2018 to arrest three high-ranking security officials; commends the role played by local Syrian NGOs in verifying, documenting, gathering and protecting evidence of crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as the complementary role played by NGOs such as the Commission for International Accountability and Justice in assisting European law enforcement and judicial authorities in effectively prosecuting war criminals present on EU Member States' territory; calls on the EU to provide more legal training to Syrians to enable them to play a role in the fight against impunity;

22. Calls on the Commission to present an EU action plan on impunity, with a specific chapter on Syria; stresses that this action plan should seek to better coordinate and harmonise Member States' resources and efforts to prosecute war criminals in the EU; is of the view that transitional justice plays a fundamental role in securing peace in the long term; calls on the EU to launch a designated European fund for victims of crimes against humanity in Syria;

23. Supports Member States' efforts to improve coordination of judicial, police and immigration resources through the development of pooled jurisdictions in order to mutualise their judicial competences and facilitate prosecution; stresses that better-equipped Member States should share their experts and interpreters in order to facilitate efficient and effective investigations, while each Member State should endeavour to appoint a designated prosecutor for these crimes in order to speed up judicial coordination efforts;

24. Calls on Member States to automatically share at EU level information on war criminal suspects under Article 1F of the Geneva Convention; is of the view that there also needs to be closer cooperation between immigration authorities and public prosecutors on suspected war criminals at national level;

25. Urges all EU Member States without exception to be fully cooperative in the fight against impunity; expresses its deep concern over certain Member States' lack of cooperation in prosecuting Syrian war criminals;

26. Fully supports European efforts led by the Netherlands since September 2020 to launch legal proceedings against Syria at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its violation of the UN Convention against Torture;

27. Calls on Member States to request the suspension of Syria's membership to the OPCW for falsifying evidence of the use of chemical weapons at the upcoming spring 2021 OPCW conference; reiterates its shock at and condemnation of the Syrian regime's 336 documented chemical attacks dropping chlorine gas, sarin and sulphur mustard gas on civilians;

28. Firmly condemns attacks on humanitarian workers by all sides, especially by the Syrian regime and ISIL/Daesh; points out that the Syrian regime bears particular responsibility for targeted killings of humanitarian workers since 2011; highlights Russia's overwhelming responsibility for attacks on humanitarian workers, particularly for its bombing of 21 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) field hospitals in October 2015;

29. Expresses its profound concern at the ongoing suffering of the Syrian people, 10 years after the conflict began; is particularly concerned that humanitarian needs in Syria have risen by a fifth in the last year alone, and that an additional 4,5 million Syrians now suffer from food insecurity, while 90 % live below the poverty line; considers that humanitarian access must remain a central priority for the EU in Syria, and that increased needs require an greater financial and political response from the EU; notes that UNSC Resolution 2533 on the border crossing at Bab al-Hawa is coming up for renewal in July 2021; regrets the fact that Russia and China abstained from the last vote instead of voting in favour of the resolution; is of the opinion that cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance cannot be relied upon to deliver for the people currently relying on cross-border delivery; recalls that 2,4 million Syrians depend on this border crossing for survival. and that failure to extend this crossing for a minimum of 12 months would have severe and life threatening consequences; condemns the actions of those UNSC members that have sought to limit humanitarian access for political purposes; urges all UNSC members to support the renewal of the cross-border resolution in order to avoid a worsening humanitarian crisis and to ensure the expansion and support for cross-line interventions carried out in line with humanitarian principles; highlights the importance of ensuring the immediate reauthorisation of the Bab al-Salam and Yarubiyah border crossing points in line

with UN General Assembly Resolution 74/169, in order to ensure that aid reaches populations in need in both the north-west and north-east by the most direct routes; underlines the importance of ensuring that humanitarian aid is exclusively directed to those most in need;

30. Calls on the international community to urgently address the record levels of humanitarian need of the Syrian people inside and outside Syria; encourages the EU as a convener of the Brussels V Syria pledging conference to rally other international donors towards increasing support for the health sector of the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) through increased, flexible, multi-year funding that covers population needs in the long term; calls on international donors to specifically invest in programmes that repair, restore and strengthen damaged or destroyed health facilities, in addition to other civilian infrastructures that have suffered damage;

31. Urges the UNSC to include explicit calls for the protection of health workers in forthcoming UN resolutions and official discussions; calls on EU Member States, in this regard, to offer political backing and operational support to UN-led accountability initiatives and investigations to uphold international humanitarian law;

32. Stresses, ahead of the Brussels V Donor Conference of 29-30 March 2021, the importance of not only maintaining humanitarian assistance pledges but increasing them for Syrians, IDPs and refugees, as well as for communities affected by the crisis in the region; points to the fact the EU and its Member States have been the largest humanitarian donors to respond to Syria's humanitarian crisis, with donations since 2011 reaching EUR 20 billion; is deeply concerned about alleged UK Government plans to cut its aid contributions significantly, including reductions of 67 % for Syria and 88 % for Lebanon;

33. Commends the role played by neighbouring states that offer solidarity and assistance to Syria's refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq; urges EU Member States to continue to fund humanitarian assistance programmes in refugee host countries, as well as for IDPs in Syria; urges EU Member States to provide all necessary funding and support to ensure all Syrian refugee children in host countries have access not only to primary, but also to secondary education; urges all host countries to adopt all necessary measures to achieve this, and to remove any administrative or legislative obstacles; encourages host countries to focus on access to employment, health services and education, and civic documentation, which will promote the ability of refugees to work towards becoming self-reliant;

34. Notes that the EU's Madad Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis will expire by the end of 2021; calls on the Commission to secure financial means for the EU's humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, and to ensure the unhindered functioning of its projects;

35. Calls on all Member States to support principled humanitarian assistance, without normalising relations with the Syrian regime; warns against investing EU financial assets whether directly or indirectly in Syria's general reconstruction if the Syrian regime does not implement a credible political process; calls on the VP/HR, as part of the long-term planning for the response in Syria, to develop a robust human rights due diligence policy for future rebuilding interventions in close cooperation with Syrian civil society, including a monitoring framework with dedicated indicators for human rights standards; deplores Russian, Iranian, Chinese and Turkish business plans to profit from Syria's destruction;

36. Calls on Member States to maintain sanctions on individuals and entities involved in the repression in Syria; stresses the importance of avoiding any unintended negative consequences of sanctions through humanitarian exemptions for principled humanitarian action, and the importance of addressing banking over-compliance challenges jointly with the US;

37. Urges the EU and its Member States to renew and expand the list of those subjected to targeted sanctions under the new EU Global Human Rights Sanction Regime, including the Syrian, Russian and Iranian civilian and military commanders who are credibly implicated in war crimes;

38. Commits to the adoption of effective EU corporate due diligence legislation imposing human rights due diligence obligations to EU companies and companies operating in the single market;

39. Reminds all Member States that Syria is not a safe country to return to; believes that any return should be safe, voluntary, dignified and informed, in line with the EU's stated position; calls on all EU Member States to refrain from shifting national policies towards depriving certain categories of Syrians of their protected status, and to reverse this trend if they have already applied such policies; urges Lebanon, Turkey and all countries in the region to suspend deportations of Syrians back to Syria against their will;

40. Condemns the irreparable damage that Assad's scorched earth tactics have inflicted on cultural sites, and the looting and smuggling of artefacts by jihadists, who use them to finance their role in the conflict;

41. Is extremely concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian, sanitary and security situation at camps in north-east Syria, notably Al-Hol and Roj camps, which remain breeding grounds for radicalisation; believes that EU nationals suspected of belonging to terrorist organisations and detained in those camps should be tried in a court of law; expresses its shock at the killing of an MSF employee working in Al-Hol camp on 24 February 2021, which further demonstrates the human toll of the violence and unsafe living conditions in the camp;

42. Calls on Member States to protect child nationals who may be detained for security-related offences or association with armed groups;

43. Calls on Member States to repatriate all European children, taking into account their specific family situations and the best interests of the child as a primary consideration, and to provide the necessary support for their rehabilitation and reintegration in full compliance with international law;

44. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European External Action Service, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and the Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Regional Government of Kurdistan and the Government and Parliament of the Russian Federation.