

Joint Statement

following the teleconference of the BRICS Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs/Special Envoys on the Middle East and North Africa

(26 August 2020)

1. On 26 August 2020, a teleconference of the BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was held under the Russian Chairmanship to exchange views on the current situation in the MENA region.

2. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys closely followed the spread of COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa and supported the efforts made by these countries to actively fight against the pandemics. They called upon the international community to strengthen coordination and forge synergy, provide more support to MENA states to fight against COVID-19 at an early date and help them defeat COVID-19 so as to recreate a sound environment conducive to peace, stability and development.

3. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed serious concern over continued conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa that remain a source of threat to regional and international stability and security. At the same time, they stated that regional crises should be resolved exclusively through political and diplomatic means based on unconditional respect for independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of all MENA States.

4. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys reaffirmed their commitment to the basic principle that peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa should be achieved and sustained in accordance with, and in full respect for international law and the UN Charter. Confirming the primary role of the UN Security Council in this process, they urged the North Africa countries to respect the AU Charter and the leading role of the AU Peace and Security Council. They advocated for the strengthening of the multilateral framework of

international relations, while opposing unilateralism and promoting peace, stability and development in the Middle East and North Africa region.

5. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys shared the view that peoples of each of the countries in the MENA region need solidarity and support in fulfilling their legitimate aspirations to enjoy full civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and fundamental freedoms.

6. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed serious concern over the humanitarian situation of all religious minorities in the areas of conflict, especially those who were displaced or forced to flee their places of origin or stay in conflict zones or in the territories controlled by terrorist groups and live under the constant threat of violation or infringement of their human rights. They therefore called upon all Middle East states to reaffirm their commitment to respect the rights of every citizen in the areas of conflict.

7. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their solidarity with the people of Lebanon in connection with the massive explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 which resulted in considerable casualties and large-scale destruction. They called upon all the members of the international community to provide assistance to Lebanon with the purpose of overcoming the consequences of the catastrophe and the speedy normalization of the political and socio-economic situation in the country. They advocated that, taking into consideration the legitimate aspirations of the Lebanese people for political solutions to the current challenges faced by the nation, Lebanese political forces should be able to work together in the current complicated conditions and take decisive steps for the sake of de-escalation of tensions, renunciation of violence and prevention of the situation sliding out of control.

8. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys noted that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, whenever, wherever and by

whomsoever committed. They reiterated that the fight against terrorism must be conducted under the coordinating leadership of the UN in accordance with the norms and principles of international law, including the principles of respect for sovereignty, independence and equality of all States, and opposing double standards. They reiterated that countries must urgently consider expediting finalization of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) under the UN umbrella.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys welcomed the activities of the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group, in particular the progress achieved on the Draft Counter-Terrorism Strategy. They noted the timeliness of this document and expressed their confidence that it would greatly contribute to the consolidation of the efforts of the BRICS States in the fight against terrorism.

9. Regarding the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, the BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the country. They expressed their conviction that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. They also reaffirmed their commitment to advancing a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated political process in line with UNSC Resolution 2254, culminating in constitutional reform and free and fair elections. They noted in this context the importance of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva launched with the decisive participation of the countries-guarantors of the Astana Process and all states engaged in efforts to address the conflict through political means and welcomed the efforts of Mr Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Syria, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the Committee. They expressed their conviction that, in order to reach general agreement, members of the Constitutional Committee should be guided by the commitment to compromise and cooperate constructively without foreign interference.

They also welcomed the signing of the Additional Protocol to the Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-Escalation Area. They reaffirmed the international obligations to fight terrorism in all its forms and highlighted the importance of unity in the fight against terrorist organizations in Syria as designated by the UN Security Council.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys emphasized the fundamental importance of allowing unhindered humanitarian aid in accordance with the UN humanitarian principles and the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria that would create conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of permanent residence thus contributing to achieving long-term stability and security in Syria and the region in general. They also expressed concern with all those in vulnerable situations and condemned persecution on ethnic or religious grounds.

10. Reaffirming their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya, the BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys called on the Libyan parties to the conflict to show mutual restraint and stressed the importance of establishing a long-term lasting ceasefire in Libya, in order to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable solution through a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process under the auspices of the United Nations. They stated the need to fully implement the decisions of the International Conference on Libya held in Berlin on 19 January 2020 and UNSC Resolution 2510, noting the importance of parallel progress on all three tracks of the intra-Libyan negotiation process (military, political and economic), with substantial assistance from the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Encouraging the UN Secretary General to promptly designate a Special Representative for Libya, the Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys noted a significant role played by the African Union and the League of Arab States in promoting a peaceful intra-Libyan dialogue and political process.

11. The BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys reaffirmed their continued support for efforts made by the Iraqi Government towards national reconstruction, development and a mutually respectful and inclusive national dialogue with a view to overcoming common challenges and enhancing stability. Stressing the need to unconditionally respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and the inadmissibility of any interference in its internal affairs, the BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys noted the importance of supporting the Iraqi people in their fight against manifestations of extremism and terrorism and promoting economic recovery of the country. They further acknowledged the importance of stability in Iraq for regional and international security. They further condemned in the strongest possible terms the heinous and inhuman violence perpetrated by terrorist and extremist groups, such as the self-styled ISIS, in the territory of Iraq.

12. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their grave concern over the ongoing conflict in the Yemen Republic that affects security and stability not only in that country, but throughout the entire region.

They noted in this regard the need for a full cessation of hostilities and establishment of an inclusive negotiation process in Yemen mediated by the UN. They reaffirmed the general consensus that progress towards resolving the numerous challenges confronting Yemen, cannot be achieved without a constructive dialogue with due account of the legitimate interests of different political forces of the country.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys stressed the importance of providing urgent humanitarian assistance to Yemenis and facilitating the rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian supplies to all people and across all regions of the country. They warned that without sustainable peace in Yemen, the humanitarian crisis will only continue and worsen.

13. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys are convinced that failure to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to hamper peace and stability in

the Middle East. They remain committed to a just and lasting peace in the region, stating that a two-state solution must be sought, guided by the international legal framework previously in place, such as the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, resulting in the creation of an independent and viable State of Palestine, existing peacefully side by side with its neighbours. They expressed the need for new and creative diplomatic efforts to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement and emphasized the importance of an early launch of direct negotiations between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides.

14. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their serious concern over the ongoing tensions, including one-sided actions in the Gulf region. They reaffirmed the support of the BRICS countries for the efforts to resolve the existing disagreements through negotiations and diplomatic engagement, stressed the need for promoting a positive and constructive agenda in the region, in which all countries jointly respond to common threats and challenges.

15. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys supported the steps taken by the Sudanese leadership to strengthen national accord and overcome social and economic crisis in the country. Welcoming the commitment of the Sudanese government to the nationwide effort to bring an end to internal armed conflicts, primarily in Darfur, they looked forward to the successful outcome of the negotiations between the Sudanese government and the opposition movements.

The BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed support for the responsible drawdown of the United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and its transition into the future United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), taking into full consideration, in the process, the opinion of the Sudanese people.

16. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys committed themselves to meet again in India during its Chairmanship in BRICS in 2021. They also

reaffirmed the advisability of holding regular consultations on the Middle East and North Africa at various venues, including the UN, and expressed their readiness for holding relevant working-level consultations when required.