

Press release on the BRICS consultative meeting on the Middle East and North Africa
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On June 20, 2018, the fourth BRICS consultative meeting on the Middle East and North Africa took place in the capital of South Africa, Pretoria. The meeting was attended by Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Presidential Representative for the Middle East and Africa Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa Luwellyn Landers, Undersecretary General for Africa and the Middle East of Brazil Fernando Jose Marroni de Abreu, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government on the Middle East Issue Gong Xiaosheng, and Additional Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs Gitesh Sarma.

Following the meeting, the participants adopted a joint statement for the media.

The BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) met on 20 June 2018 in Pretoria, South Africa to exchange views on the current situation in the Middle East and North African regions.

Underlying their deliberations was the commitment to the basic principle that international peace and security should be achieved and sustained solely in accordance with, and in full respect of international law, including the UN Charter. No effort to undermine the multilateral system, however imperfect and unreformed it might be, should deter international cooperation at all levels to prevent and resolve conflict, to create the conditions for peace, development and prosperity.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys restated their conviction that there is no place for unlawful resorting to force or external interference in any conflict and that, ultimately, lasting peace could only be established through broad-based, inclusive national dialogue with due respect for the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of each of the countries of the region. They emphasized the importance of the UN Charter and the role of the UN Security Council as bearing the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys agreed that in each of the countries in the region, citizens have legitimate aspirations to fully enjoy civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, from all quarters and in the name of any cause. They reiterated their countries' commitment to supporting inter-BRICS and other multilateral efforts in countering the global threat of terrorism under the UN auspices. They stressed that the fight against terrorism, including counter-terrorism measures, must be conducted in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and relevant UNSC Resolutions. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys highly valued the 3rd BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group Meeting held in Nelspruit on 19 and 20 April 2018. They called for an expedited adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the UN General Assembly.

The BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys remained concerned about the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. They reaffirmed their commitment for an inclusive "Syrian-led, Syrian-owned" political process which safeguards the state sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, in pursuance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015). In this regard they highlighted their support for the continuation of the important work done in the context of the Geneva Peace Talks and welcomed key contributions of the Astana Process, which showed signs of positive developments on the ground in the last months, in particular the creation of de-escalation zones and holding of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi on 30 January 2018. They reiterated their strong condemnation of the use of chemical

weapons by any party, for any purpose and under any circumstances and renewed calls for comprehensive, objective, independent, and transparent investigations of all alleged incidents.

With regard to the State of Libya, the Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their serious concern about the political and security situation in that country, highlighting its extremely negative consequences for the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel region. It was noted that the military intervention in the country in 2011, led to instability, dire humanitarian consequences and the spread of terrorism, extremism and other criminal activities in the region. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their support for the continued efforts of the UN Special Representative for Libya, Ghassan Salame, as well as of regional actors to engage all Libyan stakeholders in a constructive dialogue in pursuance of the UN Action Plan for Libya announced in September 2017. They welcomed the 4th meeting of the African Union (AU) High Level Panel on Libya at the level of Heads of State and Government, chaired by President Denis Sassou-N'Guesso. They noted the steps taken by Libyan authorities in combating the terrorist threats and encouraged the need to build consensus among the Libyan political forces with regard to an inclusive political solution in pursuance of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA).

The BRICS Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys welcomed the Iraqi parliamentary elections held in May 2018, the first since the announcement in December 2017, and the complete liberation of the territories previously occupied by ISIS in Iraq. They expressed the hope that the elections contribute to strengthen Iraq's democratic institutions and widen the dialogue, negotiation and promote political co-existence. They condemned in the strongest possible terms the heinous and inhumane acts of violence perpetrated by terrorist and extremist groups, such as the self-styled ISIS, in the territory of the Republic of Iraq and reiterated the need for strong international support to the Government and people of Iraq in their relentless efforts to fight against terrorism.

With respect to the Republic of Yemen, the Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their grave concern about the conflict, which is having a disastrous impact on human security as well as regional security and stability. They recognised that the conflict has already led to unspeakable suffering among the civilian population, including women, children and the elderly, as well as to the destruction of a significant part of vital essential services infrastructure, bringing the situation in Yemen to what amounts to a major humanitarian crisis. They called for unhindered access for the provision of humanitarian assistance to all parts of Yemen and urged the international community expeditiously to make use of such access to relieve the health, social and economic situation in this country. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys urged all parties to fully respect international law to cease hostilities and to return to the UN brokered peace talks. They further underscored their support for UN Special Representative Martin Griffiths' efforts to restart talks among all Yemeni parties and agreed that the way forward to achieve peace, prosperity and security in Yemen is through an inclusive Yemeni-led dialogue towards the achievement of a political solution to the conflict.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys were unanimous in their resolve that the conflicts elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa should not be used as pretext to delay resolution of long-standing conflicts, in particular the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys reiterated the need for renewed diplomatic efforts to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and previous agreements between the parties through negotiations with a view to create an independent, viable, territorially contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys reiterated that the status of Jerusalem is one of the final status issues to be resolved in the context of negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed concern regarding the escalation of violence in Gaza and called for restraint and full respect for international law in line with the UN General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/ES-10/20) on the protection of the Palestinian population.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys reiterated their countries' support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). They commend the vital role it plays in providing health, education and other basic services for almost 5.3 million Palestinian refugees and underscored its relevance to bringing stability to the region and the need for ensuring a more adequate, sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for the Agency.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys expressed their concern about the ongoing diplomatic crisis in the Gulf region. They welcomed efforts by Kuwait to resolve the existing disagreements through negotiations and diplomatic engagement.

The Deputy Ministers/Special Envoys committed themselves to convene again at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers of BRICS countries in Brazil in 2019. The participants of the meeting also agreed on the advisability of holding regular consultations on the Middle East and North Africa at various venues, including the UN. They confirmed their support for hosting informal meetings of their representatives when required.

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