

Syrian Conflict Has To End Now - Ahmad Zahid

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From Abdul Muin Majid

NEW YORK, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- In a powerful speech at the United Nations Security Council, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi told the international community that after five long years, now was the time to once and for all resolve the conflict in Syria.

Since 2011, he said, the conflict had metastasized, spawning a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions that everyone was struggling to contain.

"The conflicting parties in Syria seem to have willfully jettisoned all reasons and humanity, unable to say enough is enough to prevent more casualties, especially of children," he said at the Security Council High-Level Meeting on Syria here Wednesday.

Not mincing his words, Ahmad Zahid said the bloody and protracted conflict in Syria continued to sorely test the Council's ability to unite around a common approach, for a credible and sustainable political solution to the crisis.

Against this background, he said, the Council must remain resolute and continue to strive for unity and coherence in both its purpose and action to effectively discharge the mandated responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.

In noting the various formats pursued in seeking to resolve the Syrian conflict, I wish to underscore that the Council can never be sidelined and has a central role to play," Ahmad Zahid said.

The deputy prime minister is leading the Malaysian delegation to the ongoing United Nations General Assembly in this city.

As a current member of the UN Security Council, he said Malaysia's support for the implementation of its decisions on Syria was unwavering, especially those related to the cessation of violence and on the humanitarian situation.

Nevertheless, he said that Malaysia shared the view of many that the time for endless meetings and resolutions on Syria needed to end as the urgent focus should be on achieving long-lasting peace in the war-torn country.

He noted that the conflict had provided space and enabled environment for the cancerous growth of terrorism, most notably the rise of the murderous militant group Daesh, whose heinous acts and barbaric atrocities reverberated far across the globe.

Ahmad Zahid said Malaysia was horrified and outraged by the attacks on the UN-backed humanitarian convoys near Aleppo on Monday night.

"We strongly condemn the killing of unarmed civilians and humanitarian workers in that incident as yet another flagrant violation of international law that reflects an absolute disrespect, disregard and contempt that the parties to the conflict have for the values of humanity," he said.

He took a moment to reflect on the grim reality facing Syrians, especially when the bombs rained down on the population.

"We winced at images of children gasping for their last breath after being attacked with chemical weapons, and we were heartbroken by the sight of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh covered in dust and blood, sitting quietly, alone and in shock, waiting in an ambulance after he was pulled out from the rubble of his family home.

"Many others, sadly, did not make it alive," he said, stressing that particular attention must be given to the protection of children as the most vulnerable group in any violent conflict.

Ahmad Zahid said another incident that shocked Malaysians to the core was the bombing of a maternity hospital in Idlib which sent babies crashing to the floor in their incubators.

"We strongly demand that the conflicting parties respect international humanitarian law, particularly in providing unfettered humanitarian access, and in protecting civilians and civilian objects, including children, relief or rescue personnel, schools and hospitals," he said.

Ahmad Zahid said Malaysia stood in solidarity with other friends of Syria in helping to alleviate the situation of its citizens.

"In this regard, we have taken certain steps including making modest, direct financial and in-kind contributions to Syrians in need, especially those at the border areas. We have also committed to take in several thousand Syrians fleeing the violence in their homeland and I am pleased to share that this initiative has been implemented," he said.

He said Malaysia remained committed to seeking accountability for the various violations and abuses committed in the course of the conflict in Syria and stood ready to cooperate with all interested partners and support initiatives to this end.

He noted that despite some highly publicised setbacks in recent days, the Russia-US package of agreements reached on Sept 9 represented the latest concrete effort towards halting the violence and subsequently laying the ground for a credible and inclusive political process on the future of Syria.

"While the 2012 Geneva Communique remains relevant, Malaysia is of the view that moving the political process forward should be guided by the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2254, taken in parallel with implementation of the Russia-US arrangement.

"We call on all interested partners and stakeholders to support the way forward," he said.

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