

*Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

One of the so far largest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century has claimed more than 400,000 lives and left 13,5 million people in need of aid. Yesterday we witnessed one of the most brutal attacks since the beginning of hostilities, and we condemn these attacks very strongly.

These crimes prove once again that no matter how much we try, we cannot achieve substantial progress without a political settlement.

Inside Syria, ongoing fighting has resulted in widespread violence, decimated infrastructure and crippled economic markets.

Therefore, I welcome the EU Foreign Affairs Council discussion two days ago, where the new European strategy for Syria was adopted. This strategy shows that the European Union grants its full support to the political process in Syria and is prepared to get engaged in the future reconstruction of the country.

It worries me that the number of attacks on children, women and elderly in homes, schools and hospitals continues to rise. These challenges, together with violations of human rights and continuous lack of humanitarian access and protection, require more than ever our immediate attention.

Since 2015, my country has put the humanitarian situation in Syria and the neighbouring region as one of its top priorities within our SlovakAid programme. Hence, we have managed to provide more than 14 million euros to assist refugees fleeing from their homes.

In 2017 we will continue to help Syrians in need of assistance. Overall, my country will have allocated over 23 million euros to this humanitarian crisis by year 2019. Our focus will be put to the reconstruction of Syria in order to help the Syrian people retrieve their homes, be more resilient and, most important, live a decent life.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Let me conclude by reiterating that humanitarian aid is only a temporary fix.

On behalf of Slovakia, I convey our full support for a peaceful solution. This requires firm political will and political solutions supported by all parties. Hence, I call upon all parties involved to cease the hostilities and to look for a way out of this vicious circle of violence.

*Thank you for your kind attention!*