

President al-Assad's Speech on the Repercussions of the Earthquake That Hit Syria

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President Bashar Al-Assad on Thursday gave a speech on Syria TV about the repercussions of the earthquake that struck the country;

Following is the full text of the speech.

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Brothers and sisters,

A homeland is a home, and its protection is a duty, regardless of the type and magnitude of the challenge, and regardless of the capabilities. This was the case since the first moments of the earthquake. This deep and overwhelming sense towards the homeland, our home, Syria, was felt by the one family inhabiting it, individuals and institutions. And there was this massive surge on the part of everyone to protect, save and help their brothers and sisters affected by the earthquake in Aleppo, Lattakia and Hama. This national patriotic and humanitarian scene is not surprising for any of us; for we have felt it at different turns of the war on Syria. But now, it is clearer and more comprehensive. More importantly, it is more expressive, for it comes after twelve years of war and embargo, with the accompanying death, sabotage and lack of resources on the national level.

However, despite the cruelty of all this, it has not changed the essence of our feeling and our thinking towards each other and towards the homeland, whether it is the land or the people inhabiting it, towards its concepts, customs and traditions.

If this war has exhausted and drained a lot of the national resources, and weakened the capabilities to face more crises, the war itself gave the Syrian society the expertise and the ability to act quickly and effectively in the early hours of the earthquake. The magnitude of the disaster and the tasks that we should all shoulder are much larger than the available capabilities. However, what our society, its individuals and institutions, was capable of doing

was also much larger than the available capabilities. This was not only because of the war and the sanctions, but also because Syria has not been an earthquake area for about two and a half centuries. Neither the buildings nor the institutions nor the equipment were prepared for different types of natural disasters. This made it the first challenge of its kind, and the largest of its kind. Nothing compensated for those weaknesses except the quick and highly effective response of the government, civil-society organizations and individuals who volunteered in the rescue work, those who made in kind or financial donations, residents and expatriates. They have tried every possible way to break the embargo in order to provide every possible assistance to their disaster-affected brothers and sisters. This is in addition to the emergency aid sent by sisterly and friendly countries, which constituted a significant support for the national efforts to alleviate the impact of the earthquake and save many of the injured.

However, from the experiences of other countries in this area, earthquakes have immediate and long-term effects. What we shall face for months and years, in terms of economic, social and services challenges is no less important than what we faced during the first days. And it needs a lot of thinking, dialogue, solidarity and organization on the part of all national sectors. It is important not to look at the repercussions as a separate case related exclusively to the earthquake; for it is a cumulative case of war, terrorist sabotage, the embargo and its effects and of the earthquake recently. Added to this are faults that have accumulated in different sectors for decades before the war.

The scene might look complicated, and it might be difficult to categorize the reasons leading to each problem separately. But it might give us an opportunity to solve those accumulated problems in an interrelated manner. This means moving from addressing the negative aspects of the emergency conditions into the positive aspects of comprehensive treatment. And it means moving forward instead of standing fixed in facing crises. This cannot happen all at once, but in a prioritized manner depending on the available capabilities, and in stages. But what is important is having the vision based on a national consensus and a broad dialogue.

But even then, we need to continue dealing with the repercussions of the earthquake step by step. After completing the rescue stage, providing emergency shelters and the basic requirement in terms of food, clothes and medicine, which have been done so far. The relevant government institutions have started to provide temporary housing, until permanent housing is provided at a later stage.

Creating a fund for supporting the affected people is under study. The fund aims at supporting them until they become capable of restoring the different aspects of their life capabilities. This will happen after the damage is assessed, and criteria are drawn for the identification of those covered and the support provided. All this should be done in parallel with curbing economic decline which usually hits affected areas and impacts the national economy in general. The necessary legislation will be passed and measures taken in order to alleviate the economic burdens on their population and accelerate the economic cycle there. These have been started to be examined before being presented for discussion and taking the appropriate decisions in the next few days. There are also some other ideas which have been proposed recently and will be announced by the relevant institutions, after being properly examined, discussed and their feasibility ensured.

Brothers and sisters,

When societies suffer different kinds of earthquakes, geological, political, military, cultural, social or other kinds of violent tremors, they are bound to lose part of their stability, because their institutional and social controls are shaken. This includes laws, regulations, concepts, traditions and morals. This, in turn, gives rise to negative aspects already there, but have been latent or limited as a result of those controls.

Enthusiasm and vigor in treating these manifestations which appear on the surface are necessary in crises, provided they are based on wisdom and awareness, on facts not exaggeration and illusions. So, let's look for the truth instead of promoting rumours which have eclipsed scenes of heroism, sacrifice, devotion, solidarity and the unlimited enthusiasm we have seen during the hours and days which followed the earthquake. For they will send messages of frustration to all those who have made that amazing and extraordinary patriotic scene, and promote instead an image at odds with the pure and honourable image we have drawn in the minds of others.

Is there an event, small or large, that can obscure the images of heroism projected by our national civil and military institutions, civil society, and individual volunteers involved in rescue work like a beehive, day and night? They are credited with all that has been achieved. They have born the homeland, with all its hopes and pain, in unlimited enthusiasm and forbearance and great sacrifice. They have embodied the homeland in all its beautiful meanings and noble values.

Was it this spontaneous popular surge to support the disaster-affected with a flood of good that suspended their poverty and need? It was a surge of activity and feeling which equaled the well-off, who gave without being asked, and the needy, who cut some of their limited resources and daily sustenance in order to help a disaster affected person. They have been a real and live model of morals in their noblest manifestations, patriotism in its deepest meanings and humanity in its most sublime attributes.

Can we ever forget those who have mobilized in order to defend the real image of our society in the different mass and social media, not allowing the distorted image that some people have been trying to market to affect our reputation as a society, and preventing that image from affecting its morals, solidarity and altruism, which is the highest value on the individual and collective levels?

There are many other stories and endless details, individuals, heroes, courageous and valiant persons who stand as role models for the present and guiding lights for the future.

For all those, residents and expatriates, who alleviated this painful tragedy with what they could, materially and morally, with something or with a word, we don't say thank you, because loving one's homeland, serving and defending it is a duty that does not require thanks, but we say to them: we are proud of you, and your homeland is proud of you.

In the midst of our pain and sadness for the victims, our pride in our compatriots, we should not omit to thank all the countries which have stood with us from the first hours of the disaster, our Arab brothers and our friends whose in kind and field assistance have made the greatest impact in strengthening our capabilities to face the difficult circumstances in those critical hours.

I would like to thank in particular the rescue teams from different countries which took active part in rescue operations and continued to work until the last moments of hope of

finding a live person under the rubble. They conducted their work with the same enthusiasm and devotion as their Syrian colleagues. They were real brothers. So, on behalf of every Syrian, we thank them and are grateful to them.

Brothers and sisters,

All of us in this homeland, Muslims and Christians, believe in God; and believing in God means believing in God's will. For us, God's will is a destiny which brings us things we like and things we dislike. If we are not in a position to comprehend God's wisdom in the calamities and graces which befall us, and their reasons, we are certainly in a position to learn the lessons from them. The first and most important thing which we should learn from this tough experience, now that we have been able, together, with all parts of our spectrum and sectors, to overcome our circumstances and limited capabilities, is to believe in our own tremendous capabilities, and to believe that our solidarity enables us to do it and that our fragmentation stifles it.

So, let's believe in God, believe in our homeland, in the will capable of making miracles when we possess it, in order for Syria to remain proud of its people, strong in its history, rich in its dignity, capable in its will.

May God grant His mercy to our missed ones and healing to our wounded. May God protect Syria and its people from all harm.

Thank you...

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