



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today opened the high-level segment of the Geneva conference on ending the nearly three-year-old civil war in Syria. “Today is a day of fragile but real hope,” the Secretary-General said in his opening remarks.

Representatives of some 40 countries and regional organizations attend the high-level part of the conference which is held in Montreux in Switzerland. This will be followed on Friday by talks between the Syrian parties at UN headquarters in Geneva in what will be the first time the Government and opposition meet at a negotiating table since the conflict started in March 2011.

“For the first time, the Syrian Government and the Syria opposition, countries of the region, and the wider international community are convening to seek a political solution to the death, destruction and displacement that is the dire reality of life in Syria today,” Mr. Ban told the conference.

Ban emphasized that the purpose of the conference was to “embark on a meaningful political

process to achieve a Syrian-led transition – a vision first put forth a year and a half ago in the Geneva Communique, and endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.”

The Geneva Communique sets out a number of key steps for a Syrian-led transition, starting with the establishment of “a transitional governing body with full executive powers, formed by mutual consent” – including over the military forces and security and intelligence services. “You have an enormous opportunity and responsibility to render historic service to the Syrian people”, Mr. Ban said.

“I count on you to encourage the Syrian sides and their delegations to reach a comprehensive settlement based on the Geneva Communiqué.”

Well over 100,000 people have been killed in the three year old conflict. More than 6.5 million people are internally displaced. More than 9.3 million people in Syria need humanitarian aid, with more than 2.5 million of them living in areas where humanitarian access is seriously constrained – and many have not been reached at all. 2.3 million people – half of them children – to flee to neighbouring countries and beyond.

The UN Secretary-General called on both government and opposition to allow immediate and full humanitarian access to all communities in need – particularly in besieged areas where hundreds of thousands of people have been cut off from any assistance for months, with disturbing reports of malnutrition and desperate health conditions.