Statement by H.E. Mr. Salman Khurshid
Minister for External Affairs
Government of the Republic of India

International Conference on Syria
(Geneva-II)

(22 January 2014, Montreux, Switzerland)
His Excellency UN Secretary-General,
His Excellency Acting Director General of the UN Office at Geneva,
His Excellency UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative,
Distinguished Foreign Ministers,
Distinguished Invitees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to be part of this historic political process towards the resolution of the ongoing Syrian conflict. All parties and stakeholders, external and internal, deserve credit for taking this important decision to support the peace initiative for Syria, which will impact not only on Syria but the region as a whole. I compliment the efforts of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, the UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi, as well as my counterparts, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the US Secretary of State John Kerry, for their sustained efforts for convening this International Conference on Syria. I share the sentiments of the UN Secretary General that this Conference is a mission of hope and vehicle for a peaceful political transition that will fulfill the aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom and dignity as well as provide guarantees for the safety and protection of all communities.

2. The conflict in Syria has raged for far too long. It would be unacceptable not to seize this opportunity to bring an end to the tragic suffering and destruction it has caused. The conflict has resulted in the death of more than 120,000 people. Estimates by the United Nations Refugee Agency show that about 9.3 million people, nearly half the Syrian population, are now in need of humanitarian assistance. This includes an estimated 6.5 million internally displaced people and about 2.3 million registered Syrian refugees, mostly in regional countries of
Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. The severe strain of infrastructure resources that this has caused for the host countries is very well appreciated.

3. It is well recognized that the lethal conflict within Syria, which occupies an important place in West Asia as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country, is not only the tragedy for the people of Syria but also threatens the stability and security of the region, with potentially long term impact on the geo-strategic dynamics. The conflict has sharply intensified the sectarian fault-lines across the region, with very serious consequences. In particular, the infiltration of all shades of religious extremism in Syria from all parts of the world has rendered the situation extremely dangerous and complicated. Today’s Conference, aimed at peaceful settlement of the conflict, is a positive and timely step to prevent further destabilization of the region.

4. Excellencies, India has important stakes in the Syrian conflict. It shares deep historical and civilizational bonds with the wider West Asia and Gulf region. We have substantial interests in the fields of trade and investment, diaspora, remittances, energy and security. Any spill-over from the Syrian conflict has the potential of impacting negatively on our larger interests.

5. We are encouraged that this Conference is a convergence of the positions of global and regional powers with India’s own consistently stated position of supporting a comprehensive political settlement of the crisis. We have supported full implementation of Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, which focuses on ceasefire and negotiations between all parties, leading to the formation of a transitional governing body and to be followed by democratically held elections. India believes that societies cannot be re-ordered from outside and that people in all countries have the right to choose their own destiny and decide their own future. In line with this, India supports an all-inclusive Syrian led process to chart
out the future of Syria, its political structures and leadership. There can be NO military solution to the crisis. India’s stand on various resolutions in the Security Council and General Assembly has been in support of efforts to bring about an end to violence by all parties.

6. India has responded positively to the international appeal for humanitarian assistance for Syria, being deeply conscious of the humanitarian dimension of the conflict. We supplied essential food items to Syria last year, delivered through the World Food Programme. At the 2nd International Pledging Conference for Syria held in Kuwait on 15 January 2014, India pledged US$ 2 million to the United Nations Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (UN-SHARP) in support of its prioritized humanitarian activities for Syria.

7. India supported the Russia-US framework agreement on the time bound safeguarding and destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, in line with India’s stance of supporting the complete elimination of chemical weapons worldwide. India is encouraged by the steps taken by Syria to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and cooperation being offered by it in the destruction of its stockpiles. As part of the international effort, India has offered technical expertise to the Organization for Protection of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for destruction, verification and training activities. Additionally, India has offered a financial contribution of US$ one million to the OPCW Trust Fund for activities relating to destruction of chemical stockpiles and related facilities in Syria.

8. Excellencies, I extend India’s full backing to this important peace initiative and wish all participants successful conclusion of the deliberations, resulting in meaningful resolution of the conflict. Sustained peace and stability in the region is in our common interest. It is expected that all regional and international
partners will demonstrate their meaningful support for constructive negotiations, in alignment with the UNSC Resolution 2118 (2013). But ultimately, it is the Syrian parties themselves who have to chart out their own future and we will be watching this process very carefully as they begin their discussions two days later in Geneva. So far, they have shown great courage in coming to the negotiating table. As a next step, I would like to express my earnest hope that they will be able to show the required flexibility in resolving their differences in a spirit of reconciliation and come to pragmatic conclusions that can be implemented on the ground, in the best interest of the Syrian people who are undergoing tremendous suffering on account of the conflict.

9. India stands fully prepared to play its part in the peace process in any manner required of it, conscious of its larger regional and global responsibilities. It will also be willing to assist appropriately in the implementation of the Conclusions deriving from the deliberations of the Syrian parties in Geneva towards the establishment of long term peace and stability in the region and beyond.

Thank you.

****