Gulfsands Managing Director, John Bell's visit to Washington DC

Hot on the heels of my recent trip to Syria, it was great to be back in Washington, DC to report on Gulfsands' plans and discuss with senior government representatives the international cooperation required to ensure that the positive momentum in Syria is maintained.

I was also pleased to catch up with many of my Syrian expert friends for the first time since the fall of the Assad regime. I was particularly grateful to secure meetings with the National Security Council, the White House, and the State Department, as well as with the offices of a key Senator who shares our interest in Syria. I was also pleased to visit the British Embassy in Washington, I thank them for their ongoing support. Indeed, I would like to recognise everyone's support in making this important trip happen at short notice.

During my meetings, I was able to provide feedback from my trip to Damascus. I explained how I had found a real sense of positivity from the Syrian people and its new government, with a clear desire for peace, progress and, critically, international partnerships to help revive and rebuild the country.

I cautioned that this sense of optimism, while prevalent, is also fragile. There is only a short window of opportunity for international leaders to take the necessary action to ensure that momentum towards rebuilding Syria as a united, inclusive and cohesive country is maintained. Many malign actors from the times of the Assad regime have retreated, but there is a clear risk that they will re-emerge if the international community sits on the sidelines for too long.

The US has a major role to play, not only through its political influence and leadership, but also through the worldwide impact of primary and secondary US sanctions. I urged the US Government to ease the appropriate sanctions so as to allow business and commerce to return to Syria, to equip the country to begin building self-sufficiency for long-term peace and prosperity.

Gulfsands' believes the energy industry and Syria's indigenous oil & gas resources can play a huge role in the country's future. Providing vital energy for the local population and a means to generate

important foreign currency revenues for the Syrian Treasury. These benefits cannot be realised with current sanction restrictions in place.

This is a 2-way street of course, and when in Damascus, I also urged the new Syrian Government to do what it can to facilitate the lifting of such sanctions, and to continue to build trust and confidence with the international community.

I look forward to more trips to Syria and the US in the coming months. I am optimistic we will see continuing progress towards a prosperous and peaceful new era in Syria, powered by the rebuilding of Syria's energy industry, including Gulfsands' long-awaited return to operations.