

Mr. President,

I will deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Belgium, Germany and Kuwait, who have called for this meeting, after last week's consultations, to follow up on the concerning military escalation in the north-western de-escalation zone of Syria. We would like to thank both Under Secretary General Lowcock as well as Under Secretary General Di Carlo, for keeping us up to date on the different aspects of this crisis.

Mr. President,

We would like to start by expressing our **deep concern** about the escalation, over the last few weeks, of violence in North-West Syria, including aerial bombardment, heavy shelling and reported use of barrel bombs. This has led to the loss of life of many innocent civilians, including health workers and has forced over 180 000 people to leave their homes. We are particularly concerned by the attacks on **civilian infrastructure**, which have left i.e. 18 health facilities, caring for 170 000 people and at least 17 schools unable to provide their service, impacting 400 000 students.

Mr. President,

We acknowledge that there is a considerable presence of members of UN designated terrorist organizations in Idlib and we clearly condemn the violent attacks they have carried out. But the fight against terrorism **can, in no way** justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Counter terrorism operations **do not** override the responsibility of parties to protect civilians, neither should they impede impartial humanitarian action. The use of barrel bombs, in any place and especially in populated areas, is completely unacceptable as it demonstrates a **complete disregard** for human life and represents a strategy of collective punishment.

We, the co-penholders, remind all parties of their **obligations under international humanitarian law**, based on the Geneva Convention and its protocols, including the humanitarian principles to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Accountability must be ensured for those who have committed violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We stand firm in our commitment to fight impunity.

We also recall Security Council **resolutions 2286 and 2427**, which condemn attacks on hospitals and schools, respectively. We are particularly alarmed and shocked by reports of attacks on civilian infrastructure such as medical facilities whose location has been notified under the **de-confliction mechanism**. **This seriously undermines the very purpose of this notification as a tool to increase the security and acceptance of humanitarian actors in the field.**

Mr. President,

The **Russian-Turkish MOU signed in September 2018** was significant in deescalating the situation in North-West Syria. We reiterate our call for the continuous and full implementation of the ceasefire arrangements of the Memorandum. We recall that 3 million people, including 1 million children, live in this area. A wide-scale offensive would lead to a **humanitarian catastrophe** for Syria and the region. We, as the Council, must not let this happen. A lasting ceasefire in Idlib is paramount. **We urge all parties to avoid further escalation, and to use their influence to this end.**

Humanitarian access must be provided in an unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained manner. We would like to salute the heroic work of humanitarian workers in these particularly difficult circumstances. The UN and its partners continue to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance based on humanitarian principles, including through cross-border assistance in accordance with resolution 2449, which is a lifeline to millions of people in the northwestern part of Syria.

Finally, Mr. President, as we, the co-penholders, continue to follow the situation in the North-West of Syria closely, we reiterate our support for the Special Envoy Pederson in his efforts to reach a **political solution** in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué of 2012.