

Intervention of
H. E. Mr Marc Pecsteen, Permanent Representative of Belgium to
the United Nations on behalf of the three co-penholders: Belgium,
Germany and Kuwait

Syria: Humanitarian Situation
United Nations Security Council

New York, 29 August 2019

Thank you Mrs. President,

I will deliver this statement on the humanitarian situation in Syria on behalf of the three co-penholders Kuwait, Germany and Belgium. I would like to thank Under-Secretary General Mark Lowcock for his important briefing today on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Mrs. President,

The Secretary-General stated, last week, that he was *“deeply troubled by the continued escalation in northwest Syria and the prospect of an offensive deeper into Idlib, which could trigger a new wave of human suffering possibly impacting up to three million civilians, strongly condemning the continued attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including on healthcare and educational facilities.”*

Over the last four months, the ongoing military campaign, using continuous air strikes, shelling, and reportedly barrel bombs, has caused **immense human suffering** and took an enormous toll on the population. It has caused death, displacement and destruction. As described once again in detail by OCHA during its briefing, over 500 civilians, including many children, have been killed. Over **400 000 people** have fled the violence, once or several times, not knowing where to spend the night, with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps overcrowded. Hospitals, schools, markets and IDP locations have been targeted, hit and destroyed by airstrikes. Many of these strikes occurred in sites that were deconflicted, which means that the parties that launched these attacks were well aware of their location.

Time after time, we have called upon the parties to uphold the September 2018 Memorandum of Understanding on Idlib. We have called for the protection of the three million civilians living in the region. We have deplored the loss of innocent civilian lives. We have condemned the violations against international humanitarian law and have called for accountability. We have also condemned the attacks perpetrated by Security Council designated terrorist groups, while reiterating that counter terrorism efforts can never absolve the obligations of all parties under International Humanitarian Law, including the principles of distinction and proportionality. We have called for a surge in diplomacy amongst key players to urgently stabilize and deescalate the situation.

Tragically for all concerned on the ground in Syria: To no effect so far.

OCHA has repeatedly called for a unified Security Council to take action. Since the beginning of the escalation in Idlib, at the end of April, the humanitarian co-penholders have strived to keep the attention of the international community on this important humanitarian situation. We have found support amongst many around this table.

Today, we call for the Council to urgently **take a unified stance, with us, against this violence** that has caused so much human suffering. This situation cannot continue. This is why the co-penholders for the humanitarian situation in Syria, Kuwait, Germany and Belgium **presented a draft resolution to the Members of this Council**, that aims to urgently alleviate the humanitarian situation in Idlib. We look forward to working constructively with all Council members on this text.

In the meantime, Mrs. President, our attention also goes to **other parts of Syria**. In **Al Hol** Camp, over 70 000 persons still receive humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian agencies were able to scale up their response, but the situation remains deeply concerning nonetheless. In **Southern Syria** (across Dar'a, Quneitra and Rural Damascus) where high-levels of population movement continue to be recorded, 2.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. In **Rukban**, the UN was able to conduct an assessment mission last week. This is welcome news. But what is crucial now is that the UN is permitted back to Rukban in the weeks to come to provide assistance to those who decide to stay in the camp, and to help others to leave in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner.

Mrs. President, I would like to finish this intervention by recalling this: with the crisis in Idlib in mind, **cross-border operations** - renewed under resolution 2449 - are more than ever of life-saving importance. There is no other way to provide adequate support to the three million civilians in the area, who rely on this mechanism.

I thank you.