

Kingdom of Belgium

Intervention of the Humanitarian co-penholders
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Representative

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I will deliver this statement on behalf of the co-penholders Germany and Belgium. We would like to thank Under-Secretary General Lowcock for his briefing today. We also extend our gratitude to all humanitarian and medical workers. Your work, in the most difficult circumstances, is *not* taken for granted.

First, we fully support the statements of the SG and of Special Envoy Pedersen on the necessity of a nationwide ceasefire. The WHO warned that the impact of **COVID-19** could be truly catastrophic in Syria. The war has and is taking its toll. Healthcare facilities have been targeted and destroyed. There is a rampant shortage of medical equipment and health professionals. Recent military offensives have left Syrians traumatized, vulnerable, and in particularly acute need, living in informal, crowded and unhealthy settings. These elements compound the risks of an outbreak.

We welcome the relative calm in the **North West**. While the ceasefire seems to be holding, it remains fragile. Yet, we remain deeply concerned about the drastically deteriorated humanitarian situation of the 4 million civilians in this region. The cross-border modality constitutes the **only** aid- channel for people in need in this region.

In the **North-East**, the presence of the virus has been confirmed. Yet, not one single district there meets the minimum standard of 18 hospital beds per 10,000 people, and the ability to deliver medical items to parts of the region has been further impeded by the removal of Al Yarubiyah as an authorized border crossing for UN cross-border operations.

Three months after the closure, crossline assistance to the North East, is falling woefully short. COVID 19 only makes this more acute. There has been no progress on cross-line access compared to this period last year. Most health facilities which had depended on deliveries via Yarubiah have not received any supply crossline. We have no information so far that recent WHO transports to Quamishli meaningfully changes this picture. The Council and its Member States must face those facts. From a humanitarian point of view, the way forward is clear: Member States in this Council should urgently consider reopening cross-border access to the north-east, as supported by the UN Secretary General, while cross-line access should be further enhanced.

Furthermore, In **Al Hol**, over 65 000 persons continue to receive humanitarian assistance, yet the situation remains deeply concerning. We call also upon all parties to keep the water station of **Allouk** fully functioning.

In **Rukban**, several thousand people remain stuck in the camp, in a desperate situation. The UN and its partners must be able to help them to leave in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner, or provide assistance to those remaining in the camp.

Mr. President,

More than 9 years after the start of the war, 11 millions of Syrians continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. 4.2 million of them remain in acute need. The Syrian authorities are unwilling to allow the delivery the requisite humanitarian

assistance to all regions and civilian populations in need. Those humanitarian needs are more challenging than ever in light of the dire economic situation. The grave risk of COVID 19 only heightens the imperative of using every possible means of reaching people in need and of allowing the UN and its humanitarian partners to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Mister President,

Since the start of **cross-border operations** in 2014, pursuant to resolution 2165, the UN and its implementing partners have been able to ensure, through this mechanism, life-saving assistance that reaches millions of people. The recently published report pursuant to OP7 of resolution 2504 draws clear conclusions:

- The monitoring mechanism is robust and reliable.
- In the north-west, there is no alternative that can match the scale and scope of the current cross-border operations: cross-border authorization for the use of Bab al Salaam and Bab Al Hawa must be renewed for an additional 12 months.
- In the north east, a combination of more cross-border and cross-line access is required to sustain recent levels of, and preferably increase, humanitarian assistance.

These recommendations should guide us, and we encourage all Council Members to cooperate over the next weeks in order to renew the mandate for cross-border operations. Germany and Belgium as co-penholders of the humanitarian resolution on Syria are ready to facilitate the process in an inclusive and transparent manner. And Mark, we carefully listened to your words: No life should be lost because this Council does not act in time! This is the time for responsible decisions, based on clear humanitarian needs. These decisions should come sooner rather than later, and reflect the reality on the ground. Whether in the north-east or north west, the pandemic has only made worse an already dire situation. The Council needs to act accordingly.

Thank you.
