

Kingdom of Belgium
Intervention of Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Ambassador,
Permanent Representative

United Nations Security Council
The Situation in the Middle East (Syria – political)

New York, 16 June 2020

Mr. President,

We would like to start by thanking the Special Envoy for his briefing, as well as Ms. Ghazi for her intervention and powerful testimony. We continue to support the Special Envoy's call for a nationwide ceasefire, for large scale releases of detainees; and for the need for full humanitarian access.

We welcome the **relative calm** in the north west of the country, since The Russian-Turkish cease-fire arrangement in the beginning of March. However, recent Russian airstrikes and Syrian artillery illustrate the fragility of the situation. The risks for hundreds of thousands of vulnerable civilians in this region are enormous. We urge all parties to refrain from violence, reduce tension and exercise maximum restraint. The UN should play a central role in the implementation of a **nationwide ceasefire**, as well as in its monitoring.

The war in Syria has now raged for over nine years. We have said it before so many times, and I repeat it today again: **there is no military solution to this war**. Meanwhile, the devastating effects of the economic collapse brought about by years of mismanagement and corruption are reverberating ever wider through Syria. The recent protests unfolding in Suwayda and elsewhere are a mere symptom of a far greater crisis striking at the heart of Damascus. Nine years of violence and brutal suppression have not led to the results the Syrian Authorities had hoped for. Instead, it has left the country in shambles. Only a political solution can break the cycle of violence and put Syria back on track. The **Constitutional Committee** and the wider political process should urgently be reinvigorated, and we fully support the Special Envoy's efforts, as an important contribution to the UN facilitated political process mandated by Security Council resolution 2254. And we urge those member states with influence over Damascus to urgently use it. Furthermore, any elections, including parliamentary elections, should be fair, transparent and open to the members of the Syrian diaspora, in order to constitute one step on the path to such a political solution. On the issue of **political prisoners and missing persons**, so far hardly any progress has been made. It is high time for Damascus to move beyond 1 for 1 prisoner exchanges and to release prisoners and information as an important confidence-building measure.

More than ever before, **full humanitarian access** must be ensured. Belgium as a humanitarian co-penholder together with Germany, will continue its work towards the renewal of resolution 2165 concerning cross-border assistance. We urge all Council Members to be **fully aware** of the **common responsibility** that we bear in this file. We must shoulder this work together, guided solely by the humanitarian interests of the Syrian men, women and children.

At the end of this month, the fourth Brussels conference will take place. The EU and its member states are the most important **humanitarian donor** for Syria, having contributed over 17 billion euros since the beginning of this Syrian war. Yet, until this war is over, and a political solution is well under way, we reconfirm our position that the EU will not fund **reconstruction**.

To conclude, a few words about sanctions: the EU **sanctions** are targeted at those responsible for ordering or carrying out attacks and torture against their own people, making or using chemical weapons, or building their personal fortune on the war economy. They are carefully crafted to avoid *any* adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons who are *not* targeted.

Thank you.