



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, 23 July 2020

Mr. President,

I would like to start by thanking Mr. Pedersen for his briefing and Mrs. Mustafa for her moving intervention.

Mr. Pedersen,

At the end of March, you made a call. A call that comprised three main elements:

- The need for an immediate nationwide ceasefire;
- The need for large scale releases of detainees;
- The need for full humanitarian access.

These are, indeed, essential elements, also in the fight against COVID19 and we continue our support to fully implement those points. Because, let's be clear: during the last month the infections have doubled in Syria. Although the numbers are low, the fact that the pandemic has been spreading throughout the country is worrying, especially as testing capacity remains limited. The prevention of this spread must be an absolute priority for Syria; as the virus may not only entail a health crisis, but can also lead to a further severing of the socio-economic conditions for Syrians across the country.

Mr. President,

We are relieved about the relative calm in the north west, since the Russian-Turkish cease-fire arrangement in the beginning of March. However, recent attacks illustrate the fragility of the situation. We repeat that any counter terrorism activity should respect human rights and international humanitarian law. The risks for hundreds of thousands of vulnerable civilians in this region are enormous. We therefore 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.

Mr. President,

The recent protests in the South and elsewhere are a symptom of a far greater crisis. Little progress has been made on the political level. However, after nine years of violence and brutal suppression, the long road to peace can only pass through an inclusive political process. We therefore encourage all parties, in

particular the Syrian authorities, to fully engage in the upcoming planned meeting of the Constitutional Committee. The political track must urgently be reinvigorated, in line with an immediate and full implementation of resolution 2254.

Tangible progress must also urgently be made regarding the political prisoners and missing persons. It is high time to move beyond 1 for 1 prisoner exchanges. It is high time for the Syrian Authorities to release those arbitrarily detained and to share information on all missing persons. Access to detainees must be ensured, in line with international regulations. As Mrs. Mustafa has mentioned, families of the disappeared continue to suffer due to lacking information concerning their missing loved ones. They grieve emotionally, but also have to face the consequences of continuous administrative and judicial limitations impacting their lives on a daily basis. We therefore encourage the sustained engagement of the Special Envoy in this regard.

Mrs. Mustafa, we also salute your courage and actions concerning accountability. In order to break the cycle of violence, justice must take place. Belgium fully supports all accountability initiatives, including IIM and its support to criminal proceedings in national and international courts

Finally,

The current state of the Syrian economy is a consequence of nine years of war, corruption, mismanagement and oppression. The EU sanctions are targeted at those who ordered or carried out attacks and torture against their own people, made or used chemical weapons, or built their personal fortune on the war economy. These sanctions are carefully crafted to avoid *any* adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons who are *not* targeted. The EU and its member states have continuously supported the Syrian people and are the most important humanitarian donor for Syria; as clearly demonstrated during the last Brussels Conference at the end of June, having contributed over 17 billion euros since the beginning of the Syrian war.

Thank you