

**Royaume de Belgique**

Intervention de S.E. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Ambassadeur,  
Représentant permanent

au Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies

Au briefing sur la Syrie (humanitaire)

New York, le 28 mai 2019

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Mr. President,

I deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Germany, Kuwait and Belgium. I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for her valuable briefing. We also like to thank the humanitarian workers in the field for their tireless efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, in particular in the currently very challenging environment around Idlib.

Mr. President, we, the penholders, have **5 asks** today:

1. All parties should abide by their obligations under **international humanitarian law**, including the protection of civilians and civilian objects.
2. The parties should **recommit fully** to the ceasefire arrangements of the Russian-Turkish memorandum signed on 17 September 2018. .
3. The UN and its partners should have safe, unimpeded and sustained **humanitarian access** to people in need, be it in Idlib, Al Hol or Rukban, or anywhere else, including through the use of the cross-border mechanism as mandated by resolution 2449.
4. Any **return of refugees** must be safe, voluntary and dignified and continued monitoring of returnees should take place to ensure their protection.
5. Those who have committed violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be held **accountable**.

Mr. President,

The humanitarian co-penholders have called for two meetings on Idlib in the last three weeks. Once again, we cannot but start this intervention by expressing our **deep concern** about the situation in North-West Syria where a military campaign continues through indiscriminate and relentless aerial bombardment and shelling including the use of barrel bombs. This has caused the **death** of innocent civilians, **destruction** through targeted attacks on numerous de-conflicted hospitals and schools, **displacement** of 270 000 civilians, and **despair**. One million children live in this area. Many of those fleeing have been displaced several times before. These people are the most vulnerable to any military action. **This use of force is incredibly cruel and completely unacceptable.**

As we mentioned last week, we acknowledge the considerable presence of members of UN designated terrorist groups in Idlib and condemn their violent attacks. But the fight against terrorism **can not** justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Counter-terrorism operations **do not** override the responsibility of parties to protect civilians, their **obligations under international humanitarian law**, as well as Security Council resolutions 2286 and 2427. We have also learned of reports of an attack on a press crew last week, and we wish to remind that resolution 2222 condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict, and calls upon all parties to armed conflict to bring an end to such practices.

We urge the parties to recommit fully to the ceasefire arrangements of the Russian-Turkish memorandum signed on 17 September 2018 and urge the Astana guarantors to ensure that de-escalation takes place. We consider the TUR/RUS working group as a tool to swiftly de-escalate the situation. Finally, we reiterate our call for a nationwide cessation of hostilities in accordance with Security Council resolution 2401.

Mister President,

Our concern also regards the situation in **Al-Hol** camp. While humanitarian partners were able to scale up the camp's infrastructure; it remains overcrowded with a

population of over 73 000 persons, of which over 90% are women and children who face particular protection challenges. The UN and its partners must be able to provide needs-based humanitarian assistance to all its inhabitants, without delay.

The situation of over 28 000 people in **Rukban** remains dramatic. While a durable solution is needed, we continue to advocate for a much-needed third humanitarian convoy. Camp inhabitants should be able to make the choice whether or not to leave the camp in a voluntary, safe, dignified, and well-informed manner. The UN should have regular and continued access to the IDPs and returnees at every stage, including at their final destination.

Mister President,

No lasting peace in Syria is possible without justice and **accountability**. The IIIM has become a central repository of information and evidence of the crimes committed in Syria and therefore has a crucial role to play in achieving accountability and justice. Several countries have brought criminal cases to their national courts making use of the proof gathered by the IIIM.

Finally, Mr. President, we support the Special Envoy Pedersen in his efforts to reach a **political solution** in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communique of 2012.