

Kingdom of Belgium

Intervention of HE Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative
On Behalf of the Syria Humanitarian co-penholdership
(Belgium and Germany)

United Nations Security Council

New York, July 29th 2020

Thank you, Mr. President,

I will make this statement on behalf of Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders. We would like to thank Under-Secretary General Lowcock for his briefing. We also thank Amany Qaddour for describing the challenges a humanitarian NGO faces on the ground serving people in need under desperate circumstances.

Mr. President,

11 million Syrians continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. These needs are growing and becoming more acute.

On the one hand, years of war, mismanagement, oppression and the economic crisis in neighboring Lebanon, have resulted in an **economic crisis** in Syria. This has added pressure on the humanitarian needs across the country and has led to an additional 1.4 million people becoming food insecure over the last six months.

Furthermore, we are extremely concerned about the spread of **COVID 19** across the country. Over the last week, as Mark mentioned, the number of cases has increased significantly. Across the country, testing capacity remains incredibly low, so most cases may go unnoticed. The destruction of health facilities and the shortage of health workers further endanger any response.

Mr. President,

It is therefore incredibly frustrating that while these growing needs have to be met, humanitarian access is further being limited.

Since 2014, **cross-border operations** have offered the Syrian people a lifeline, allowing the UN and its implementing partners to ensure life-saving assistance, from across the borders. And although there were changes on the ground and cross-line access has improved to certain areas, the crossborder-mechanism is needed now, as it was needed 6 years ago. Following recommendations of the SG, we have worked tirelessly to continue to ensure maximum humanitarian access, both from inside Syria, as well as from across its borders. The closing of Yarubiah in January defied humanitarian arguments, the closing of Bab-al-Salam now once again contradicts humanitarian logic. While thirteen

Council members supported to renew access through two border crossings in the Northwest, two countries vetoed such renewal beginning of this month, not even accepting a transition period of a mere three months for Bab al Salam.

This current situation will result in a more costly, and more risky humanitarian operation in the Northwest, and will frustrate timely access to the region north of Aleppo.

Meanwhile, the gaps in medical access in the North East, that were left after the crossing point of Yarubiyah had to be closed at the beginning of this year, are still far from being filled. Mark just confirmed that many health stations do not receive what they urgently need to treat patients and to fight the virus.

Therefore, the burden of responsibility lies on those countries which have systematically limited humanitarian access through the cross-border modality. Because, let's be clear: Member states who vetoed the proposed resolutions are voluntarily putting human lives at stake, out of political motives.

Meanwhile, together with other European Member States, the humanitarian co-penholders have reconfirmed their support for non-politicized humanitarian aid at the recent **Brussels IV conference**.

Mr. President,

Protection issues sadly continue to persist. Not only for those in arbitrary detention, or those missing. Also, for those who become victims of air or ground offensives. We call on all parties to maximize restraint and consider the humanitarian repercussions of any military actions. We condemn the recent attacks by terrorist groups, yet underline that any response should comply with obligations under international law, in particular with international humanitarian law.

Finally, Mr. President,

Only a **political settlement in line with resolution 2254** can put Syria back on track towards peace. There is no justice without **accountability**. The humanitarian co-penholders fully support the conclusions of the BOI, and the work of the IIIM and the COI, as well as justice initiatives on a national or international level. We continue to see immense value in the humanitarian notification system and we underline, once again that parties who withdraw from this mechanism continue to be bound by international humanitarian law.

I thank you.