

Intervention of H.E. Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations at the Security Council's briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria - on behalf of the co-penholders for the Syria humanitarian file (Belgium, Germany and Kuwait)

Mr. President,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the three humanitarian co-penholders: **Germany, Belgium and Kuwait.**

The situation in northwestern Syria remains deeply unsettling. The violence continues, and its toll on civilians is growing. We **call on all conflict parties to uphold the basic principles on the conduct of hostilities and call on the Council to show unity in addressing the situation in Northwestern Syria.**

We would like to thank **Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock** for his briefing and update. We sincerely thank and pay tribute to the whole humanitarian community for its efforts to continue to bring live-saving assistance to people in need.

Mr. President,

We reiterate our deep concern over the **continuing violence in recent days in northwestern Syria**, including indiscriminate and relentless aerial bombardments and heavy shelling. As a result, we have witnessed more civilian casualties and more displaced people. The number of internally displaced persons goes well beyond 300 000 since April. We see people—including many children—living without any shelter. We also condemn the loss of innocent lives as a result of this escalation.

The use of **indiscriminate weapons, especially in densely populated areas, is completely unacceptable.** The use of such weapons shows complete disregard for human life and follows a strategy of collective punishment. We said this before.

Reports on the **intentional use of incendiary ammunition to destroy farmland and agricultural equipment** add a new horrific dimension to the conflict. Farmers are already struggling to access their land and harvests. Now, they are facing literally scorched earth.

We are highly alarmed by **persistent attacks on civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools:** 37 educational as well as 25 health care facilities came under fire. This is extremely appalling. It seems as if we are losing the very essence of humanity. Once again, we recall the obligations under Security Council resolutions 2286 and 2427.

We, the co-penholders, remind all parties of their **obligations under international humanitarian law**, based on the Geneva Convention and its protocols, and including the humanitarian principles, to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Those who have committed violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be held accountable. We stand firm in our commitment to fight impunity.

Mr. President,

We welcome all sustained efforts and ongoing dialogue to reinstate the ceasefire arrangements of the **Russian-Turkish Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 2018.** We call on all parties to fully implement it to deescalate the situation and protect the lives of 3 million people, including 1 million children. **We amplify the**

Secretary-General's clear and repeated assessment that any wide-scale military offensive will lead to an uncontrollable and unmanageable humanitarian disaster for Syria and the region. A break-down of existing support pipelines will multiply the human suffering.

The co-penholders are unified in **their condemnation of any attack by members of UN designated terrorist groups such as HTS.** However, the fight against terrorism can never justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. **Counter-terrorism operations do not override the responsibility of parties to protect civilians; neither should they impede impartial humanitarian action.**

To the contrary: all conflict parties must **allow and facilitate principled humanitarian action.** Humanitarian access must be provided in an unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained manner. The UN and its partners must be in a position **to assess needs properly and to deliver humanitarian assistance without obstacles,** including through the cross-border mechanism in accordance with resolution 2449, which remains the crucial lifeline to millions in northwestern Syria.

Finally and last but not least, Mr. President, we reiterate our **full support to Special Envoy Pedersen in his efforts to reach an inclusive and credible political solution** in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué of 2012.