

I will deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Belgium, Germany and Kuwait. I would like to thank USG Mark Lowcock and Mrs. Susannah Sirkin for their briefings, and I would like to extend our gratitude and deep respect and appreciation to all humanitarian and medical workers throughout Syria, especially those in the very challenging and dangerous environment in northwestern Syria.

Mr. President,

We have heard once again from the United Nations about the horrors that civilians are facing in northwestern Syria, an area that has faced an ongoing military campaign for the past three months. According to the UN, hundreds of people have been killed as a result of the latest airstrikes. Other reports also state that more children have been killed in the last four weeks in Idlib, than in all of 2018.

Hospitals, schools, and markets have been deliberately targeted and destroyed by airstrikes. Many of these civilian infrastructures were “deconflicted” – which means that their coordinates were known to the parties. They knew – and they know what they’re doing. Such attacks on deconflicted civilian infrastructure are simply unacceptable and have to stop immediately. The recent attacks on health facilities and markets in Maarat al-Numan resulting in the death of so many civilians are alarming. We, as penholders, strongly condemn these airstrikes that are targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure deliberately and therefore are severely impacting civilian life and the humanitarian response in northwest Syria. We reaffirm that all parties must take all measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure as well as humanitarian workers, who were also directly targeted in the recent attacks, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We also call on the parties to the conflict to respect Security Council resolutions pertaining to civilian structures, in particular resolutions 2286 and 2427 on the protection of hospitals and schools, respectively.

We remind all parties that counter-terrorism efforts cannot absolve them of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law, including the protection of civilians, and the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality. We reiterate our call for the sustained implementation of the ceasefire arrangements of the Russia-Turkey Memorandum of Understanding of September 2018. We also reiterate our call for a nation-wide cessation of hostilities in accordance with Security Council resolution 2401. Once again, we reaffirm that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria.

Mr. President,

We, the co-penholders, believe that the Council has a responsibility towards the people of Syria, particularly those living in and around Idlib. We call for the protection of the three million civilians living in this area, one million of whom are children. That is why time and time again over the past three months we have called for meeting after meeting on the situation in

northwestern Syria, and initiated several draft statements on this military escalation and its humanitarian impact. Unfortunately, the Council was not able to unite around such initiatives. Nevertheless, we will not tire. We recall that the number of displaced persons in northwestern Syria has almost tripled since we, the penholders, first called for a meeting in early May on the impact of this military escalation; from 176 thousand people displaced then, to over 440 thousand people today. One cannot help but ponder whether the inaction of the Council is partly to blame for the dramatic increase in the number of displaced and what – if anything – could we have done differently. This is also why we will continue to draw attention to the events unfolding in northwestern Syria. This Council cannot continue to stand by and watch Idlib turn into the worst humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century, as Mr. Lowcock has warned us several times. It is time we heard his call – and acted upon it.

Mr. President,

The situation in the Rukban camp is desperate. The UN and its partners must be able to provide assistance to those remaining in the camp. Inhabitants should be able to make an informed choice on whether or not to leave the camp in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner. For those who are willing to leave the camp, key protection standards must be in place.

In Al-Hol camp, the situation remains deeply concerning for the 70,000 people there, 90% of whom are women and children who face protection concerns. Improved humanitarian access is needed for the population of the camp.

Mr. President,

Syria and its people have witnessed some of the most serious crimes defined under international law. We echo the Secretary-General's call in his statement of July 11 that "Perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable." There can be no lasting peace in Syria without justice & accountability. We stand firm in our commitment to fight impunity. In this context, we renew our support for the work of the IIIM.

With regards to the return of refugees, our position remains unchanged. All returns must be safe, voluntary and dignified.

Mr. President,

Tens of thousands of Syrians remain detained, missing or unaccounted for. This Council adopted last month resolution 2474, the first resolution of the Security Council on Missing Persons in Armed Conflict. This resolution is particularly relevant to the situation in Syria today.

The families of those detained or missing deserve to know the fate of their loved ones. We call for tangible progress on this issue.

As for humanitarian access, we would like to emphasize that it must be provided in an unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained manner. We remind all parties to the conflict of Security Council resolution 2449 on humanitarian access and cross-border assistance, which called “upon all parties to ensure principled, sustained and improved humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2019.” It is high time for all parties to the conflict to live up to this obligation and do more to ensure sustained quality access to all in need throughout Syria.

Finally, Mr. President, we reiterate our full support for 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 Communique of 2012. It will also be conducive to a sustainable, long-term improvement of the humanitarian situation in Syria.