



Permanent Mission  
of the Federal Republic of Germany  
to the United Nations  
New York

## **Statement**

**delivered by**

**Ambassador Christoph Heusgen  
Permanent Representative of Germany  
to the United Nations**

**on behalf of the humanitarian co-penholders of  
the Syria humanitarian file**

**Belgium, Kuwait and Germany**

**at the UN Security Council Briefing on  
the humanitarian situation in Syria**

**27 March 2019**

(check against delivery)

Thank you, Mr. President,

I will deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Kuwait, Belgium and Germany. Let me thank Mr. Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division at OCHA, and USG Rosemary DiCarlo for their comprehensive briefings.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude and deep respect to all humanitarian and medical workers throughout Syria, in the region and at headquarters for their tireless efforts to care for the affected population.

The figures given by OCHA speak for themselves. With the Syrian conflict entering its 9th year, the humanitarian needs in Syria remain huge. Our response must be needs-based and comply fully with humanitarian principles. It must also include cross-line and cross-border assistance as mandated by the Security Council. In areas of Syria which recently shifted control, continuity of services must be ensured. Humanitarian access must be provided in an unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained manner. The Syrian crisis is at its core a protection crisis.

Today, I would like to focus on the following aspects: the situation in the north of the country; the protection of returnees and refugees and the recent Brussels Conference.

First, the situation in Idlib:

We are gravely concerned by the recent increase in violence against civilians and their infrastructure. Shelling and air strikes have killed civilians, including women and children. We strongly condemn the loss of civilian lives as a result of these attacks. We remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law, including humanitarian principles, and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

As penholders, we would like to amplify OCHA's clear and repeated assessment that any military offensive would lead to an uncontrollable and unmanageable humanitarian disaster. A break-down of existing support pipelines would multiply the human suffering. There would be no winners.

The fight against terrorism must not impede impartial humanitarian action. Therefore, we reiterate our call for continuous and faithful implementation of the Russia-Turkey Memorandum of Understanding. We stand united in our call for a nation-wide cessation of hostilities in accordance with Security Council resolution 2401.

Secondly, the North East:

The displacement situation is particularly unsettling with the new influx of displaced persons from Bahgouz to Al-Hasakeh province. IDP camps are overcrowded, and the most important point of refuge, Al Hol camp, is operating far beyond capacity. Ninety percent of the people in Al Hol are women and children, and many are in poor health. The special needs of the most vulnerable, including the elderly and disabled, must be urgently

addressed. We call on all conflict parties to allow sustained access to displaced people, including at screening sites. The UN and its partners must be in position to provide needs-based assistance to all people in need without delay or bureaucratic impediment.

Thirdly, the protection of returnees and refugees:

The fragile situation in Rukban and other parts of the country shows why the Council needs to closely follow the security situation on the ground. All returns and relocations must be voluntary, safe, dignified and well-informed. Compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law is an obligation. Let us be clear: those who favor more and speedy relocations bear the burden of proof that the right conditions are in place. Family unity needs to be ensured during all phases. Key protection mechanisms such as the proper monitoring along routes and in screening- and reception centers must be in place at all times. People willing to return must receive reliable safety guarantees. The outcome of the intention surveys carried out in Rukban made it clear that concerns go beyond personal security. Other important factors are access to documents and property and confirmed information on amnesty and conscription procedures.

This burden of proof does not lie with the humanitarian community or donors. In the first instance, it is essential to provide regular, free and unimpeded access of UNHCR to returnees and refugees. This is the litmus test we are facing.

In the case of Rukban, more assistance must be made available to the camp population as soon as possible. We cannot accept undue delays as in the past. This will raise serious questions on the willingness of parties concerned to help those in utter need and without protection. Reports point to urgent medical needs in particular for children and young adults. The search for long-term solutions cannot distract us from addressing urgent needs in the camp now.

Lastly:

The Brussels Conference under the leadership of High Representative Mogherini and ERC Lowcock sent an unambiguous sign of solidarity to the Syrian people. With more than 9 billion USD the level of pledges reached an unprecedented high. As penholders, we would like to thank all donors for their contributions which will sustain a high level of humanitarian engagement in 2019. As penholders, we are committed to delivering on our pledges announced at the conference. We kindly ask all donors to make their funding available as soon as possible.

The conference stressed the importance of adherence to international humanitarian law by all conflict parties and put special emphasis on the urgent necessity for improved protection of civilians and humanitarian access to all people in need inside Syria.

The conference renewed the strong commitment to the UN-led political process under the guidance of UN-SG Special Envoy Pedersen. Obviously, there can be no sustainable peace without justice. True social reconciliation in Syria requires a thorough investigation of breaches of

international law and it requires perpetrators to be held accountable. As a concrete step towards increased accountability, we support the strong call to release persons arbitrarily detained and underline that more needs to be done here.

The conference also acknowledged the extraordinary generosity of neighboring countries and host communities in providing refuge and support to millions of displaced people. We, the international community, remain committed to substantially supporting these efforts.

Thank you!