



Kingdom of Belgium

Intervention of Mr. Philippe Kridelka, Ambassador,  
Permanent Representative

United Nations Security Council  
The Situation in the Middle East (Syria – humanitarian)

New York, 16 September 2020

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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 would also like to thank the humanitarian workers in the country, for their lasting engagement. They are at the forefront of every humanitarian disaster and this is no different in the current COVID-19 crisis. Their protection should be, and is, our constant concern.

Mr. President, I will make three points.

1. First, Mr. President, some claim that the situation in Syria has stabilized.

Indeed we are relieved to see that the situation in the North West remains relatively calm, despite ongoing violence, and we – Germany and Belgium - call for the continued implementation of the Turkish-Russian ceasefire agreement.

However, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains alarming: 11 million Syrians remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Moreover, the economic crisis and COVID 19 have added additional burden on an already very dire situation; and the winter is right ahead of us.

- The war, mismanagement, corruption and oppression have resulted in an **economic crisis** without precedent, sharply limiting the purchasing power of Syrians all over the country. This has led to an additional 1.4 million people having become food insecure, over the last six months.

- **COVID 19** is claiming victims across the country. The number of cases has grown exponentially. This is alarming. Statistics are unreliable. The identified cases are only the tip of the iceberg. Testing capacity remains far too low, everywhere in the country, including in the North East and the North West. So, prevention falls short. Treatment options are inadequate as this crisis is also, once again, so acutely showing the limitations of the Syrian healthcare system: healthcare facilities that were deliberately bombed and destroyed during years of war are unable to cope with current crisis. The shortage of health workers further endangers any suitable response.

- **Wintertime** adds to challenging humanitarian circumstances, and this will especially be the case for the 2.7 million IDPs, among them one million children, in the North West. We remember the deeply dehumanizing circumstances under which many of those people massively fled their areas of origin and arrived in camps last year. We - Germany and Belgium - encourage OCHA and the humanitarian partners to undertake all efforts to

prepare for winterization – we know that, with limited access, this will not be an easy exercise.

2. This brings me to my second point, Mr. President:

Humanitarian **access** remains limited, which is intolerable and defies humanitarian logic. We, the co-penholders, call upon all parties to allow neutral and non-political access to all parts of the country, without limitations and fully in line with humanitarian principles. Administrative hurdles are not acceptable. Secretary General Guterres and USG Lowcock have consistently called for it throughout this year: more cross-line and more cross-border access to all Syrians in need.

While the majority of this Council was in favor of supporting this request in the interest of the Syrian people, some have chosen to deny it. They have blocked draft Security Council resolutions seeking adequate access to the North East (via Yarubiyah) and the North West (via Bab al Salam). They claim that cross-line deliveries from Damascus and deliveries passing conflict lines from Bab al Hawa would compensate for the closure of cross-border posts.

However, the sad reality is that the non-renewal of Bab al Salam has so far resulted in a more costly, and more risky humanitarian operation in the **North West**. So far no crossline delivery have taken place, and we still have to see if the current planning transforms into reality. At the same time, access from Damascus to the **North East** seems to have further complicated recently, as you mentioned, USG Lowcock, and gaps in medical access to this region, are still far from being filled. What is also clear is that we cannot accept Damascus deciding who is to receive aid and who isn't. Humanitarian action has to be neutral, independent and impartial.

3. Thirdly, Mr. President, humanitarian access is not limited to the delivery of food or shelter.

- Access should also be facilitated, by all parties, to those who need protection, for instance those in arbitrary detention.
- It should be guaranteed to those who are located in hard-to reach locations, such as the camp of Rukban.
- It should be, urgently and unconditionally guaranteed, in order to keep civilian infrastructure fully functioning, such as the water station of Allouk that provides the essential water supply to over half a million people, including to the camp of Al Hol.

Each of these points illustrates the immeasurable human suffering that Syrian children, women and men are undergoing on a day to day basis. Therefore we - Germany and Belgium - the humanitarian co-penholders, once again, call for sustainable, durable and unconditional solutions.

4. Finally, Mister President, to change the situation for the Syrian people for the better, action will be needed, and we to reiterate our call for the full implementation of resolution 2254 and for accountability. We fully support the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry, and the work of the IIIM and the Commission of Inquiry, as well as justice initiatives on a national and international level.

I thank you.