

*(Check against delivery)*

Thank you Mr. President,

I will deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Kuwait, Germany and Belgium. I would like to thank Under-Secretary General Mark Lowcock for his informative briefing today on the overall humanitarian situation in Syria. We extend our gratitude and deep respect to all humanitarian and medical workers throughout Syria, especially those in the very challenging environment in and around Idlib.

Mr. President,

As the Secretary-General said last week, “The situation in Idlib is especially dangerous ... and yet again, civilians are paying a horrific price.” This Council has met on numerous occasions, and most recently last week, to address this situation. We have heard repeatedly the UN’s clear assessment that any wide-scale military offensive would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe for Syria and the region. Today again, OCHA attracted the Council’s attention to the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in northwest Syria, as a result of the continued air strikes, shelling, and the reported use of barrels bombs. We call for the protection of the three million civilians living in this region and we condemn the loss of innocent civilian lives. The 350,000 IDPs, who were left with no other choice than fleeing the violence, face a particularly dire situation. These people are among the most vulnerable: many of them having been displaced several times, or face family separation while fleeing the violence.

Mr. President,

The attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and health care facilities, over the past few weeks are deeply alarming, especially those attacks on health care facilities whose coordinates were communicated under the de-confliction mechanism. We recall Security Council resolutions 2286 and 2427 which condemn attacks on hospitals and schools, respectively.

While we strongly condemn the attacks perpetrated by Security Council designated terrorist groups, notably HTS. We remind all parties that counter-terrorism efforts can not absolve the obligations of all parties under International Humanitarian Law, including the protection of civilians, and the principles of distinction 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.

We call for a surge in diplomacy among key players to urgently stabilize and deescalate this situation.

Mr. President,

While the UN has been requesting access for months, still no agreement has been reached on a third desperately needed convoy to the Rukban camp. This is unacceptable. 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. This includes regular and continued access throughout the transition from the camp to their final destinations.

The situation in the Al-Hol camp also remains deeply concerning. It is overcrowded and the humanitarian agencies and partners working there face challenging conditions. Improved access is needed for the population of over 70,000 persons, 90% of whom are women and children who face particular protection concerns. We support all efforts to provide adequate protection to all vulnerable groups, including those children who are suspected of being associated with armed groups. Such children must be treated first and foremost as victims.

Mr. President,

Since the conflict began 9 years ago:

Syria and its people have witnessed some of the most serious crimes under international law. No lasting peace is possible without justice and accountability. We stand firm in our commitment to fight impunity. In this context, we renew our support for the work of the IIMM.

Millions of refugees remain abroad. Regarding the return of refugees, our position remains unchanged. All returns must be safe, voluntary and dignified.

Tens of thousands of Syrians remain detained, missing or unaccounted for. This Council recently adopted 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 urgent and tangible progress on this issue.

Humanitarian access remains challenging. We remind all parties to the conflict of Security Council resolution 2449 which calls “upon all parties to ensure principled, sustained and improved humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2019”. Parties must live up to their obligations here.

Finally, Mr. President, we reiterate our full support for Special Envoy Pedersen, who we will hear from in a few days, 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.