



Kingdom of Belgium

Speech by H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Ambassador,
Permanent Representative

at the Security Council briefing
on Syria (political)

New York, 28 February 2019

Mr President,

I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Mr Geir Pedersen for his first speech to the Council. Mr Pedersen, you can count on our full support.

Mr President, I would like to address two points: the political situation and the situation on the ground.

Firstly, the political situation

In 2015, this Council asked the UN to facilitate the intra-Syrian political process for the implementation of Resolution 2254. Belgium believes that the Syrian conflict can only be resolved through a negotiated political process, in accordance with this Resolution and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. Resolution 2254 contains all the ingredients necessary for a political solution, namely a political process, a revision of the constitution and free elections with the participation of the Syrian diaspora, in an environment that protects the rights of the Syrian people.

Mr President,

For my country, a "*Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, UN-facilitated*" constitutional committee has the potential to act as an entry point, the key that opens the door to the other aspects of the political process. We support the important role that the Special Envoy has to play in its introduction. However, if we want this committee to be a real instrument and operate effectively, we must ensure that:

- a) its composition is credible, balanced, inclusive and representative of every component of Syrian society, and;
- b) any agreement on its composition also involves its working methods and procedures.

A significant amount of work was carried out last year and broad consultations were held. Unfortunately, this work has not yet been concluded, in terms of either the composition of the committee or the working procedures.

It is now the responsibility of the new Special Envoy to introduce his own strategy, and we encourage him to explore the different avenues possible under Resolution 2254, so that real progress can be achieved.

Mr President;

This peaceful, inclusive and sustainable transition must take place in a safe, stable and calm environment.

On the one hand, lasting peace is impossible without a reconciliation process. And reconciliation is impossible without justice. We attach particular importance to the fight against impunity and, in this respect, we support the IIIM, the committee of inquiry

mandated by the Human Rights Council and the mechanism for attributing responsibilities set up within the OPCW.

On the other hand, the voluntary and sustainable return of refugees will only take place if life is guaranteed in a safe, dignified environment. To guarantee a dignified returns process, we need to put a stop to pillaging, expropriation and the arbitrary application of rules. Syrians yearn for a country based on the rule of law. Security goes far beyond the absence of armed conflict; it also includes the protection of fundamental rights and the absence of repression and forced enlistment in the armed forces. Thousands of Syrians continue to be illegally arrested and arbitrarily detained. We call on all the stakeholders to continue their efforts to end these practices.

My second point concerns the situation on the ground.

Mr President,

The violence is ongoing and leading to the displacement of thousands of people, particularly in the north:

- In Idlib, the agreement between Turkey and Russia, signed in September, removed the prospect of a humanitarian disaster. But the situation remains particularly fragile. It is vital that all parties remain fully committed to respecting the agreement.
- The last fighting against ISIL took place in Deir ez-Zor. The end of ISIL as a terrorist organisation with a territorial base does not mean the end of the threat that it represents. It is essential that the international community continue its work to avoid its resurgence and ability to cause damage. As well as neutralising and judging those responsible for the crimes committed by ISIL, parallel work is also required to prevent the causes of its creation and development from re-emerging.

We must do everything we can to protect civilians, and in this respect we call for a national cessation of hostilities.

Mr President,

As this is my first speech to this Council about the political situation in Syria, allow me to end with this thought:

In order to continue with this difficult mission, the Special Envoy will need the support of the international community - the parties to the conflict, the countries in the region - and the ability of the Council members to work together. The success of the mission will also largely depend on the political will of the parties to the conflict and we urge all those with influence over the parties to use it to support Mr Pedersen's work. Lastly, we will be able to make real progress towards the essential settlement of this conflict only if there is a minimum degree of trust between the parties and if the sense of urgency is shared by us all.

Thank you.