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Statement

By

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Permanent Representative

The Situation in the Middle East (Syria – Political)

United Nations Security Council

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Please check against delivery

Thank you, Mr. President, and thanks to you—Deputy Special Envoy Matar—for your briefing this afternoon.

It has been said many times before in this Chamber that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The only solution is through a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led credible, balanced and inclusive political process. We reiterate these sentiments again today.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines appreciates the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen, as he continues to work assiduously to support the wider political process. We must also applaud the commitment to ensuring the full engagement of all segments of society in the Constitutional Committee and that the representation of women who are involved remains at the minimum threshold of 30%. It is our hope that the next session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee will be convened soon and will yield positive results, and we encourage all parties to remain committed to working together in a spirit of mutual respect and compromise.

Mr President, Vital to the progress and the eventual success of a wider and meaningful political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), is the security situation in the country. We remain concerned about the most recent reports of violence in the northwest. Without lasting and sustained peace, the political process will be severely hampered, and the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate. We therefore implore **all** parties to abide by the ceasefire agreements in place and we remind them of their obligations under international law. We cannot stress enough that civilians must be protected and civilian infrastructure, particularly health services, must be preserved.

On this point, I must note that accountability for acts committed ought to remain a high priority. Atrocities cannot be ignored, and impunity cannot be encouraged. As such, we welcome the Board of Inquiry, established by the Secretary-General, to investigate a series of incidents that have occurred in northwest Syria.

Confidence-building measures are a critical element to the success of a wider political process. We therefore urge the Syrian government to address the issue of missing and detained persons. Further, conditions must be cultivated for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. These expressions of goodwill will undoubtedly aid the parties in the development of trust and promote active participation in the political process.

The political situation cannot be discussed independent of the current humanitarian crisis, and while the work on the process is ongoing, we have to ensure that the immediate humanitarian needs of the Syrian people are met. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines supported the renewal of the cross-border mechanism earlier this month, and we will support optimal access arrangements going forward. The suffering of one person is one too many and we emphasize the need for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access in all areas of the country.

Syria is undoubtedly one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time and it is the Syrian people who continue to pay the highest price. This Council cannot be an onlooker, while a dark cloud of despair stalls over the country. That being said, we must remain mindful that our actions should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We ought to take into consideration the perspectives of the Syrian government, as it is for the Syrian people to determine their own future.

Without a political solution the suffering of the Syrian people will continue and without commitment and dialogue the wider political process will no doubt fail. This Council has a responsibility to ensure that the Constitutional Committee and the wider process is adequately supported so that the goals may be realized. Reconciliation within Syria, the protection of civilians and the overall stability of the region is dependent on it.

I thank you.