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Statement

By

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The Situation in the Middle East (Syria – Humanitarian)

United Nations Security Council

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Please check against delivery

Thank you, Mr. President and thank you USG Lowcock for your comprehensive briefing.

Unfortunately, in Syria the COVID-19 pandemic is now a nation-wide issue with cases steadily rising throughout the country. With limited testing capacity the true magnitude of the outbreak has not yet been realized. Syria's healthcare system has been debilitated by conflict, and an acute shortage of personal protective equipment and other essential medical supplies impair efforts to combat the virus. It is evident that significant gaps remain, and the scaling up of timely, safe, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian support, utilizing all available modalities, therefore remains imperative.

The dreadful complications associated with economic decline - *food insecurity, hyperinflation, and diminished access to basic necessities* - are well documented and have regrettably become commonplace in the lives of millions of Syrians. We appeal to the international community to assist with the resuscitation of the economy by lifting all unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria. These measures will only serve as the basis for further economic deterioration, increasing the burden on the Syrian people, and could significantly impede the country's COVID-19 response.

We welcome the resumption of the operations of the Alouk water station, although only at 30 per cent capacity. Further disruptions threaten the survival of nearly half a million people and could precipitate an increase in COVID-19 cases in the northeast. We remind all parties of their obligations and we urge them to pursue a sustainable solution to ensure its full and uninterrupted functioning.

We are concerned by the fires that have engulfed forests and agricultural lands in recent days. A combination of factors, including rising temperatures in the region owing to the climate crisis, have contributed to the recurrence of these incidents, which undoubtedly have a harmful environmental impact and exacerbate the current humanitarian challenges. It is our hope that these fires will be swiftly subdued to protect vital land and prevent further displacement.

The stabilization of Syria's security situation is necessary for the preservation of a robust humanitarian response. The prolongation of hostilities substantially hinders humanitarian actors from coordinating and carrying out life saving work. Further, it deters the cultivation of conditions necessary for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. In this context, we emphasize the importance of preserving the ceasefire in the northwest and we echo the call for a complete nationwide cessation of hostilities.

Mr. President,

There remains no military solution to the conflict in Syria and we continue to support a political settlement in accordance with resolution 2254. The Syrian people have endured and continue to endure immeasurable suffering. Let us not lose sight of our responsibility to them.