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Statement

By

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The Situation in the Middle East (Syria – Humanitarian & Political)

United Nations Security Council

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Thank you, Mr. President and I thank Under Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Envoy Pedersen for their usual informative briefings.

We remain alarmed by Syria's dire humanitarian situation, which has been made worse by sporadic violence, severe socio-economic downturn, the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and now the onset of the harsh winter months. Humanitarian aid, through the Cross-Border Mechanism, therefore, continues to be a vital lifeline for millions of Syrians, plagued by food insecurity and lack of access to health care and basic commodities. While the Mechanism is undoubtedly lifesaving, it is not enough on its own to bridge the substantial gaps which exist. For this reason, the Mechanism must be bolstered through the scale up and utilization of all available modalities to remedy access challenges and to safeguard timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance, in line with humanitarian principles.

Even the most optimal humanitarian response is unable to withstand the effects of sustained conflict. Hostilities severely impede humanitarian aid deliveries, destroy infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and injure and kill civilians. In this vein, we reiterate the Special Envoy's call for an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities and we further appeal to parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint and to fully respect the ceasefire in the northwest.

We recognize the threat posed by Security Council designated terrorist entities to Syria's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We however remind parties that counter-terrorism and other military activities must comply with international law, particularly the fundamental principles of armed conflict.

In an effort to assist Syria's rapidly deteriorating economy, we yet again echo our appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on the country. These measures further burden an economy struggling under the weight of hyperinflation and they undermine the country's capacity to respond to the increasing humanitarian concerns.

The need for a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Alouk water station remains. The continuous interruptions leave thousands without its vital supply, including many in the overstretched and overcrowded Al Hol camp. We appeal to all parties to work together to ensure the sustained flow to civilians in need, especially in consideration of the pandemic.

We must also address the increasingly concerning issue of children's access to education. While the pandemic has obstructed this basic human right, efforts ought to be made in far as it is safely possible to facilitate learning.

Additionally, we reiterate our appeal to the international community to contribute to Syria's reconstruction. Restoration of the country's infrastructure not only helps to cultivate conditions for the safe, voluntary, dignified and well-informed return of IDPs and refugees, but it also assists in alleviating the overall humanitarian situation.

Mr. President,

We cannot discuss Syria's humanitarian condition in isolation, as it is intimately intertwined with the country's political situation. Lack of progress on one track leads to stagnation and decline on the other and it is therefore necessary to discuss both employing a holistic and pragmatic approach.

Consequently, we are pleased to note the progress made during the recently concluded fourth session of the Small Body of the Constitutional Committee and we welcome the agreement on the agenda and the date for the fifth session. The Committee is still a relevant and important component in the wider political process, and we continue to urge all parties to negotiate in good faith for the benefit of all Syrians. We also commend and support the Special Envoy's continued efforts in this regard.

Urgently addressing the outstanding issues of detainees and missing persons is another important step in the wider political process. Meaningful action on these matters is critical to confidence building and national reconciliation and they must be given the priority which they merit.

Discussions related to Syria must always place the Syrian people at the forefront. Geopolitical quarrels must therefore be set aside in favour of practical efforts towards peace and stability. The international community has an obligation to render all necessary support to Syria in the pursuit of this objective.

I thank you.