Statement

By

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Counsellor

The Situation in the Middle East (Syria – Humanitarian)

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Thank you Madam President and I thank Under Secretary-General Lowock and Ms. Khush for their briefings.

After a decade of conflict, Syria’s humanitarian situation remains a cause for considerable alarm, as humanitarian needs are rising steeply across the country. The crisis is regrettably aggravated by severe weather conditions and the country’s continued economic downturn, which has left millions food insecure and facing malnutrition. Unquestionably, the provision of timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance, in line with the humanitarian principles, must remain a foremost priority and should be scaled up, where possible, utilizing all available modalities.

The global pandemic has further compounded the country’s complex humanitarian emergency and necessitates urgent action. We note that Syria’s request to secure COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX Facility has been accepted. It is our hope that the vaccine rollout will begin shortly and that they will be administered efficiently. We echo the appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures, which are incompatible with international law, thwart socio-economic recovery and hinder the country’s efforts at combatting the pandemic.

The continuation of hostilities serves as yet another factor which intensifies the humanitarian crisis. It is crucial that parties to the conflict exercise maximum restraint and immediately end the violence to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, prevent further displacement and allow humanitarian actors to effectively carry out their work. Indeed, a sustained nationwide ceasefire will also cultivate conditions necessary for much needed reconstruction. In this regard, we continue to encourage the international community to contribute to the restoration of schools, medical facilities and other essential services, to assist in alleviating the humanitarian situation by reducing vulnerabilities and promoting overall development.

We are becoming increasingly concerned by the deteriorating security situation in displacement camps, particularly at Al-Hol. Those residing and working in these camps must be afforded protection and access to basic necessities.
We recognize that counter-terrorism operations are required for the protection of Syria’s people, sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, we remind parties of their obligation to comply with international law. Military objectives should never take precedence over the protection of civilians and all activities must respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Impunity for violations of international law should not be tolerated.

Madam President,

The political and humanitarian situations are undoubtedly interwoven and the only resolution to the conflict and protracted humanitarian crisis is through the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254. Peace, prosperity and stability can return to Syria with the positive engagement and support of the entire international community.

Thank you.