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Statement

By

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The Situation in the Middle East (Syria –Political)

United Nations Security Council

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Thank you, Madam President, and I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr Duhaime for their briefings.

The Syrian conflict has created violent instability - claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands, displacing millions and decimating the country's economy and infrastructure. And today, 10 years after the harrowing conflict began, the Syrian people continue to pay the highest price with their untold suffering.

Madam President,

Special Envoy Pedersen underscored earlier today that the Syrian conflict is undoubtedly the darkest chapter in recent human history. How much longer will we remain on this path—saying and doing the same thing and expecting a different result. It is past time to set aside self interest, it is past time to set aside the need to be right, it is past time to climb down and think anew. It is time for self-reflection, it is time to challenge one's own perceptions, perspectives, approaches and ask the really hard questions—how could we continue to say with any real credibility that we care about the people of Syria. Recently, I had the privilege to speak with persons on the ground, at the end of it I cried, they cried. They concluded by simply saying: “ We just want to live, to live in dignity and in peace.” The situation is catastrophic. What are we doing?

There remains no alternative to a political resolution to this protracted crisis. For this reason, the work of the Constitutional Committee must be reenergized, and the parties must endeavour to make tangible progress in the pursuit of peace and stability. In this regard, we recognize the work

of the Special Envoy thus far and we continue to urge the parties to recommit to working together in a spirit of mutual respect and compromise. Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of the meaningful participation of women and youth in all discussions to ensure a sustainable and equitable peace for all Syrians.

The viability and eventual success of the wider political process requires parties to the conflict to undertake confidence building measures. These acts of goodwill will undoubtedly cultivate trust and encourage much needed national reconciliation. Accordingly, the issues of missing and arbitrarily detained persons necessitate urgent attention.

Resolution 2254 acknowledges the close linkage between a ceasefire and the parallel political process. The perpetuation of hostilities denies an environment conducive to the fulfillment of the process and the restoration of stability. March 5th marked one year since the Idlib agreement, which has largely held, yet we remain concerned by the continued reports of sporadic violence. The security situation is fragile, and we therefore strongly urge parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint to preserve the ceasefire. We further appeal to the parties to respect their obligations under international law in the conduct of all military and counter-terrorism activities. The link between justice and peace has long been recognized and we reiterate that accountability for atrocities committed since the commencement of the war ought to remain a high priority.

The cessation of hostilities is also indispensable to the creation of conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and IDPs. So too is the reconstruction of the country's critical

infrastructure. Syria cannot go it alone. As such, we echo our appeal to the international community to contribute to the country's rebuilding.

The suffering of the Syrian people will continue in the absence of a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led credible, balanced and inclusive political process that meets their legitimate aspirations. In support of this, the international community bears a great responsibility to engage in a pragmatic way, by prioritizing the people of Syria and setting aside geopolitical disputes, which have compounded the complexities of the conflict. This dictates the removal of all unauthorized foreign forces in respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It further requires the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures, which are incompatible with international law and have a detrimental impact on Syria's socio-economic condition.

We reiterate that the political and humanitarian situations are inextricably linked. Stagnation of the political process has the disastrous effect of prolonging the conflict and in turn worsens the dire humanitarian situation. A wholistic approach remains imperative.

Syria and its people deserve peace and prosperity. A decade of conflict has already taken too much from them and the country will only emerge from its despair through positive action. The protection of millions of civilians and the overall stability of the region is dependent on it. We must not continue to fail them.

I thank you.