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**Statement**

By

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Counsellor**

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

United Nations Security Council

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Please check against delivery

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

The restoration of peace and stability in Syria can only be achieved through a credible and inclusive political process that reflects the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The success of this process requires an environment conducive to cooperation and reconciliation. As such, the country's security situation is closely linked to its viability and advancement.

We are therefore deeply troubled by the continued reports of violence and escalating tensions, particularly in the northwest, despite the appeals for a nationwide ceasefire. We implore parties to exercise maximum restraint and to commit to a complete cessation of hostilities to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to ensure a sustained humanitarian response. On this point, we underscore that all acts committed contrary to international law, *including in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations*, must be condemned by the international community. Accountability must remain a high priority.

Confidence building measures are vital to the success of the wider political process. Consequently, the issue of missing and detained persons should be urgently addressed to foster goodwill. Further, conditions must be cultivated for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These conditions naturally include the reconstruction of Syria's devastated critical infrastructure, to enable access to essential services and reduce vulnerabilities. We once again appeal for the international community's assistance in this regard.

We remain supportive of the Special Envoy's determined efforts to facilitate the wider political process. We appeal to parties to engage constructively and in a spirit of compromise on the matter of the Constitutional Committee. We also reiterate that the meaningful participation of women in the negotiation process is imperative to ensure fair and balanced outcomes for all.

Mr. President,

Syria's moribund economy has exacerbated the country's dire humanitarian emergency and remains a cause for concern. At the same time, the continued application of unilateral coercive measures has only served to intensify and prolong the anguish of the Syrian people. For this reason, we appeal, again, for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures to assist Syria in facing these seemingly insurmountable challenges.

The Cross-Border Mechanism remains a lifeline for millions of Syrians in need of humanitarian aid. The Secretary-General's most recent report reinforces this reality and emphasizes the need to preserve and scale up both the Mechanism and the cross-line modality. This will optimize the humanitarian response and provide timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance for the benefit of the Syrian people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the humanitarian crisis. Those persons forcibly displaced by ten years of war and who now reside in overcrowded IDP camps are especially at risk for contracting the virus. The efficient and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is therefore of critical importance. We welcome the impending vaccine rollout.

Persons who live and work in IDP camps must be afforded protection, dignity and access to humanitarian aid. To this end, we remind authorities that activities aimed at maintaining security in camps such as Al Hol, where the security situation *is* worsening, must never result in a suspension of humanitarian access or violations of the rights of residents.

We urge parties to work together to achieve a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Alouk water station. Interruptions cannot continue, as they leave hundreds of thousands without its supply each time it ceases to function. Water should not be weaponized and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population must never be rendered useless.

The international community must demonstrate respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This obligates the withdrawal of unauthorized foreign forces present in the country and regard for the perspectives of the Syrian government in all discussions.

As this conflict rages on and the humanitarian situation deteriorates, lives are lost and are irreparably damaged. With over 13 million Syrians now in need of humanitarian assistance – *almost half of which are children* - there is desperate need for a political resolution to this conflict. This is the only path to ensure lasting peace and stability and the protection of the Syrian people.

Thank you.