Statement

By

Ambassador Inga Rhonda King
Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Consultations on the Situation in the Middle East (Syria – Humanitarian)

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Thank you Nicolas and I thank Ramesh for his briefing.

Colleagues, I am reading a book by acclaimed Syrian writer, Khaled Khalifa, entitled “Death is Hard Work” — it is the story of the journey of a family to bury their father who died of old age during the ongoing conflict and how they must navigate their country with its many impediments and checkpoints to bury him. This story underscores, too, that people are no longer likely to live to old age, it underscores the precarious and heart-wrenching circumstances of the Syrian people. Though it illustrates more sharply the need for an end to this conflict, it is painful to read and it is a stark reminder of this Council’s responsibility to the people in need. This work of art is suggesting that even Death is Hard Work for Syrians. That is not right and we need to stop it.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is dire. The humanitarian needs are growing every day, and the pandemic has added a further layer of complexity.

That being said, the politicisation of the humanitarian situation has to come to an end. We must work together to find common ground and take tangible steps to ensure that we do not leave a single person without access to necessities in Syria.

This means that humanitarian access must be sustained, unimpeded and delivered in a timely manner. It also means that the existing access arrangements need to be preserved and scaled up where possible.

Optimization of the humanitarian access arrangements will require constructive engagement with the Syrian government, with respect for the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is especially important to improve the cross-line
modality by comprehensively addressing with the government the various obstacles which currently limit the number of aid deliveries.

As we quickly approach the mandate renewal deadline for the Cross-Border Mechanism, we reiterate that we remain in favour of the most optimal access arrangements to facilitate the delivery of vital humanitarian aid. We are aware that this is indeed an extraordinarily complex matter with competing interests. Indeed, there are no perfect solutions. Our continuing negotiations must be characterised by meaningful compromise to address all legitimate concerns. They should not be an exercise in achieving geo-political objectives.

The Syrian people ought to remain a priority. The international community must engage pragmatically. The impact of unilateral sanctions on the civilian population needs to be considered and the sanctions urgently re-evaluated, as well as the practicality of withholding reconstruction aid - *our positions on both matters are well-established*. Further, cooperation is needed to find a sustainable solution to the water crisis and to protect critical civilian infrastructure.

Ultimately, Syria’s peace, stability and prosperity will only be assured through the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to steadfastly support it.

Thank you.