Statement

By

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

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

The crisis in Syria continues to be of profound concern. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating and is exacerbated and fueled by economic downturn and the perpetuation of hostilities across the country. Unquestionably, a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process is the only solution to restore peace, stability and prosperity to the country.

We continue to support the Special Envoy’s unwavering efforts to facilitate the political process. We encourage the parties to engage constructively on all issues which will assist in advancing the process, including on critical matters such as missing persons and detainees and the important work of the Constitutional Committee.

We have noted with concern the increase in violence resulting in injury and death to civilians and damage to and destruction of civilian objects, in particular health and educational facilities. It bears repeating that the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is paramount. Further, all military objectives, including those aimed at eradicating the scourge of terrorism, must comply fully with the enduring principles of international law. Distinction, proportionality and precaution ought to guide all actions. Moreover, an immediate nationwide ceasefire, as called for by the Special Envoy, is necessary. This nationwide cessation of hostilities is not only imperative for civilian protection but is also required to create an environment conducive to the advancement of the political process.

On the point of civilian protection, we remain troubled by the growing insecurity in Al-Hol camp. Those residing and working in displacement camps must be afforded protection. The security situation must therefore be given urgent attention.

The ongoing economic crisis has compounded the myriad of challenges facing the Syrian people, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. Millions of Syrians are still heavily dependent on humanitarian aid and the recently re-authorised cross-border mechanism is a lifeline. However, it must be effectively complemented by the cross-line modality to reach all Syrians in
need – and we are pleased to note the increase in cross-line deliveries. We strongly urge parties to continue working together to increase the humanitarian response and to assist in facilitating the efficient distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. On this point, we note the delivery of the second tranche of these vaccines from the all-important COVAX facility and we commend those countries who have provided additional vaccines to Syria. The fight against COVID-19 requires international cooperation and global solidarity.

The water crisis is also a cause for deep concern. Critically low water levels in the Euphrates have disastrous consequences for the country’s overall socio-economic condition. Lives and livelihoods are threatened, as the generation of electricity, the availability of clean drinking water and the irrigation of crops are all dependent on its vital supply. The situation must continue to be monitored closely. Further, a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Alouk water station must also be prioritized.

Mr. President,

We urge the international community to engage pragmatically on Syria. In this regard, we appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures which have been imposed on Syria to assist the country in facing the seemingly insurmountable challenges. We further encourage support for Syria’s overall socio-economic recovery through reconstruction aid to enhance the resilience of the Syrian people and to bolster the country’s own national efforts.

The Syrian people must remain at the forefront of all deliberations and decisions. Our words and actions must always be guided by humanitarian considerations rather than by what is geopolitically expedient. We have a responsibility to support Syria and its people in a meaningful way and we must not fail in fulfilling it.

I thank you.