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Statement

By

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

United Nations Security Council

27 October 2021

New York

Please check against delivery

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

We remain extremely concerned by the security situation in Syria. The latest reports of hostilities are alarming, and they continue to compound an already dire humanitarian crisis. We firmly condemn all acts of violence, in particular recent attacks in Damascus and Idlib. We implore parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint and to fully commit to a nationwide ceasefire. The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is paramount, and we remind parties of their obligation to wholly comply with the principles enshrined in international law, including through the conduct of all military and counter-terrorism operations. Failure to do so constitutes a gross violation for which impunity should never be tolerated. The protection of civilians extends to those residing in displacement camps, such as Al Hol where insecurity persists. We reiterate that camp residents and humanitarian workers must be afforded safety and access to basic services.

The economic and water crises confine the Syrian people to a very perilous position as they have compounded food insecurity, shortages of other commodities and generated potential long-term humanitarian consequences. Record low water levels in the Euphrates, precipitated by the existential threat of climate change, in combination with other troubling factors such as the reduced operations of the Alouk water station, therefore demand immediate and sustained attention. Further, we cannot ignore the adverse impact of unilateral coercive measures on the civilian population, the work of humanitarian actors and the country's COVID-19 response. We echo our unyielding appeal for the lifting of these measures for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Practical steps must be taken to assist Syria and Syrians in need. Vulnerabilities are high and early recovery projects and activities, including the rehabilitation and reconstruction of civilian infrastructure are critical and must be tangibly supported by the international community and other partners. This is necessary to enhance the resilience of the Syrian people and to bolster the country's own national efforts to achieve its long-term development goals. We ought to be reminded that these projects are also an essential factor that will encourage the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

Millions continue to be dependent on lifesaving aid in Syria and needs are growing rapidly and daily. Timely, safe and unhindered humanitarian access facilitated by the Cross-Border Mechanism remains critical to the response. However, the Mechanism in isolation cannot effectively and adequately meet the needs of all Syrians. The cross-line modality is therefore required to complement the Mechanism and it must be optimized and scaled up to enable greater access. We therefore urge parties to continue working together to expand this modality.

Mr. President,

We note with concern and regret the outcome of the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee, despite the best efforts of the Special Envoy. The Constitutional Committee is unquestionably vital to the progress of the wider political process and an important component of Security Council Resolution 2254. We strongly urge all parties to remain committed to working together and to engage constructively in a spirit of mutual respect and compromise. Commonalties have been found before and must be found again to reach consensus and move forward.

We continue to support the Special Envoy as he works assiduously to support the Constitutional Committee and the wider political process, including through efforts on the unsettled issues of detainees and missing persons. Confidence building measures must be prioritized in the process to foster goodwill and encourage national reconciliation.

Lasting peace and stability in Syria cannot be won through military means. A political resolution remains the only path to finally put an end to a decade of conflict and suffering. Syria and its people require pragmatic support that is Syria-focused and is not directed by geo-political interests. This dictates constructive actions, such as the withdrawal of all unauthorized foreign forces present on Syria's sovereign territory.

Ten years of conflict have stripped away dignity, protection and prosperity from the Syrian people. A decade has been lost to turmoil and anguish. It is past time for Syria to be supported with practical actions rather than with mere verbal expressions of solidarity. We have a duty to the Syrian people, and we must not fail to discharge it.

Thank you.