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 also thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

For over a decade, the Syrian people have endured the perils of war and the resulting effect of living through one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has witnessed. The country’s dire situation is further exacerbated by a combination of factors, including severe socio-economic decline, which has precipitated commodity shortages and food insecurity.

The perpetuation of hostilities intensifies the humanitarian crisis. It is therefore crucial that parties to the conflict immediately end the violence to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, prevent further displacement and allow humanitarian actors to carry out their work. It is past time for a nationwide ceasefire to be implemented and fully respected by all.

We recognize that counter-terrorism operations are required for the protection of Syria’s people and its territorial integrity. However, we remind parties of their obligation to comply with international law. Military activities should never take precedence over the protection of civilians and the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be respected.

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 crisis compounds the myriad challenges facing the Syrian people, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. Millions are heavily dependent on humanitarian aid and the Cross-Border Mechanism is a lifeline. However, other indispensable modalities such as crossline deliveries are necessary to complement the Mechanism and ensure timely, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access. We urge the parties to continue working together to expand this modality to ensure regular and predictable crossline operations. We further appeal for the preservation and scaling up of existing access arrangements to reach all persons in need. This is especially important to assist in the effective and efficient distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.
Beyond humanitarian aid, further practical steps must be taken to assist Syria. This demands the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on the country, which have deepened the socio-economic crisis and are incompatible with international law. It further necessitates support for early recovery and livelihood projects to reduce vulnerabilities, enhance resilience and enable the achievement of long-term development goals.

Critically low water levels in the Euphrates, due partly to the existential threat of climate change in combination with other troubling factors, has generated a water crisis that threatens lives and livelihoods. The situation is at a critical stage and it calls for immediate attention. Further, a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Alouk water station must also be prioritized.

Mr. President,

The political and humanitarian situations are undoubtedly interwoven and to resolve the conflict and protracted humanitarian crisis there must be full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254. We reaffirm our support for the Special Envoy as he works assiduously to assist the political process. We note particularly his efforts to support the Constitutional Committee and to resolve the unsettled issues of detainees, abductees and missing persons. We implore all parties to remain committed to working together on the political track and to engage constructively. We also reiterate that the full participation of women is imperative to ensure fair and balanced outcomes for all.

The Syrian people must remain at the forefront of all deliberations and decisions. Our words and actions must be guided by humanitarian considerations rather than by what is geopolitically expedient. This calls for pragmatic steps to be taken, such as the removal of all foreign forces present in Syria in violation of its sovereignty. The politicization of the grave humanitarian situation must immediately come to an end. This being our final statement in the Security Council on this issue, it is incumbent upon us to reiterate that we have a responsibility to support Syria and its people in a meaningful way and we must not fail in fulfilling it.

Thank you.