



Security Council

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Letter dated 18 September 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, France, Indonesia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference on the situation in the Middle East (Syria), convened on Wednesday, 16 September 2020. A statement was also delivered by the representative of Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Abdou **Abarry**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

I will start by paying tribute to three humanitarian colleagues killed in northern Aleppo on Monday. A staff member of the Turkish Red Crescent was killed when his vehicle, which was reportedly clearly marked, was attacked north of Al-Bab town. On Monday evening, a doctor who worked for the Syrian organization Hand in Hand for Aid and Development was killed, along with a staff member of a local relief organization and at least 11 other civilians, when a car bomb detonated in Afrin city. Humanitarian workers across Syria are taking personal risks to deliver aid every day. They must be protected.

I will focus today on five areas: first, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak; secondly, the humanitarian impact of the economic downturn; thirdly, the protection of civilians; fourthly, humanitarian access; and, fifthly, the assistance that humanitarian agencies are delivering across Syria.

Reports from inside Syria continue to point to a much broader spread of COVID-19 than the number of confirmed cases — currently at 3,618 — conveys. We will not be able to grasp the extent of the outbreak until the laboratory testing capacity is increased across the country. We know that community transmission is widespread, as almost 90 per cent of newly confirmed cases cannot be traced to a known source. Infection rates among health workers have also been rising. Syria lacked the health workers it needed even before the pandemic. Supply shortages and temporary shutdowns add even more pressure to the decimated health system.

Analysis by my Office has shown that, in low-income countries, disruptions to health care caused by the pandemic could result in more, otherwise preventable, deaths than the pandemic itself. On 27 August, the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported among residents at the Al-Hol and Arishah internally displaced persons camps in the north-east. Five health-care workers at one of the field hospitals in Al-Hol had tested positive in the previous weeks.

My deputy briefed the Security Council last month on plans for an inter-agency mission to Al-Hol, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), following the deaths of eight children under five years of age in less than a week in early August (see S/2020/866, annex I). That mission has since taken place. It aimed to strengthen capacities for managing critical and urgent medical cases. The United Nations and other humanitarian organizations continue to provide a range of critical assistance in Al-Hol, including emergency, primary and reproductive health care.

The Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Imran Riza, made his third visit to Al-Hol last week. He was again struck by the number of children living in incredibly difficult conditions there. Let us recall that two thirds of the 65,000 residents in Al-Hol are children and that they come from more than 60 different countries. Their situation must be addressed in a much more serious way than it has been hitherto, and in a manner that treats them first and foremost as children who are victims.

I echo again High Commissioner Bachelet and others in urging States to immediately assume responsibility for all their nationals, in accordance with their obligations under international law. Many in Al-Hol, including orphans and unaccompanied children, have experienced severe psychological distress and trauma, in addition to physical harm. It is cruel and inhumane simply to leave them detained in their current bad conditions.

My second point is the humanitarian impact of the economic downturn. The value of the Syrian pound has remained relatively stable in recent weeks, trading in

informal markets at around 2,100 Syrian pounds to the dollar. But food prices remain at the highest level ever recorded. Monitoring by the World Food Programme shows that the price of a standard reference food basket has increased by more than 250 per cent on last year. Recent data also show the impact of COVID-19 on businesses, with 45 per cent temporarily shut down, 25 per cent operating at a reduced level and 15 per cent permanently closed. In the north-west, where an estimated 45 per cent of households draw their income from day labour, more than 70 per cent of households say their income does not cover their needs — an increase of 10 per cent since January.

My next point is on the protection of civilians and the critical infrastructure on which they rely. In the north-west, while the situation remains relatively stable, we continue to receive reports of ceasefire violations, with shelling close to front lines in the Idlib area and in areas south of the M4 highway. In August, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded at least four civilian deaths and nine civilian injuries as a result of shelling in the so-called de-escalation area.

In southern Syria, reports of kidnappings and targeted attacks continue on an almost daily basis. At least 26 civilians, including four children, were killed and five civilians, including a child, were injured in such incidents in Dar'a between 1 August and 13 September.

Explosive hazards also continue to claim lives across the country. At least 27 civilians were killed, 13 of them children, by explosive remnants across the country between 1 August and 13 September.

We are monitoring with concern the humanitarian impact of the increase in the activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in recent months. ISIL attacks displaced 200 households in eastern Hamah during July and August.

Let me now turn to the supply of water essential for civilians' survival and the protection of critical water infrastructure in north-eastern Syria. We have seen disruptions at the Allouk water station for almost a year now. Every time operations stop, the water supply is cut off for at least 460,000 people in Al-Hasakah city, Tal Tamer and surrounding areas, including in Al-Hol and Arishah camps. The health consequences are serious. During the most recent disruption, which lasted two weeks, more than 1,000 cases of diarrhoea were reported in health centres in the area, as many families were forced to use water from alternative and unsafe sources. Following the constructive and welcome engagement of a number of Member States, water from Allouk reached several neighbourhoods of Al-Hasakah city in the evening of 27 August. I hope that reflects a shared recognition that it is ultimately in everyone's interests to keep the water flowing.

Also on the issue of humanitarian access, the United Nations is adjusting its cross-border operations into north-west Syria to meet the needs of millions who rely on those operations for life-saving assistance. All United Nations humanitarian deliveries into the north-west, including to northern Aleppo, are now dispatched via the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, in line with resolution 2533 (2020). With the United Nations expanding its loading facility at the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, we believe that sufficient capacity can be established to manage increased traffic at the border crossing, while still maintaining COVID-19 safety measures.

The initial humanitarian convoys from Bab Al-Hawa to those areas previously covered from Bab Al-Salaam faced significant challenges on the Syrian side of the border. Some were substantially delayed and one had to turn back completely. Since then, agreements have been reached with parties for simplified bureaucratic

procedures to support the unimpeded passage of humanitarian deliveries across lines of control.

The United Nations, working with others, also continues to engage with relevant parties to move forward with plans for cross-line assistance to the north-west. Unfortunately, agreement has not yet been reached on the operational details of the mission. I call on all parties to redouble their efforts to find a solution to allow that mission to go forward.

Turning to the north-east, in addition to the existing constraints in delivering cross-line assistance, in recent weeks several cross-line humanitarian deliveries dispatched to Qamishli were delayed at Al-Tabqa crossing point as a result of the new bureaucratic procedures imposed by local authorities. Those procedures affected more than 100 aid trucks in total. The trucks were able to cross at Al-Tabqa this morning. It is crucial that all parties facilitate the passage of humanitarian supplies into the north-east, in particular as we continue to work to narrow the gap in medical assistance coverage since the removal of Al-Yarubiyah as an authorized crossing point for United Nations cross-border assistance.

Dozens of primary health centres and mobile medical units that are key to the front-line health response have yet to receive cross-line supplies. Local supply chains for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies have also been disrupted by the economic situation. Key medicines, such as insulin, have been in short supply for months as a result. One non-governmental organization partner that supports 38 health facilities has reported a complete stock-out of insulin, as well as shortages of critical medicines for non-communicable diseases.

The distribution of medical supplies from the most recent WHO overland shipment to reach the north-east in July is still ongoing. Recipient facilities so far include 17 hospitals, of which 12 were previously supported by the United Nations through cross-border operations. We hope that the ongoing distribution will further expand the previous reach of such cross-line deliveries.

Turning now to Rukban, it has been a year since the humanitarian operation accessed the camp. The situation for the 12,000 remaining civilians is deteriorating and unsustainable. I reiterate my call for humanitarian actors to be granted access to Rukban to deliver life-saving assistance to the civilians remaining there.

Allow me to close with a few words on the assistance that humanitarian agencies continue to provide across Syria. The majority of assistance continues to be provided from within Syria, reaching more than 4 million people each month. In July, humanitarian operations from within Syria reached 4.6 million people. That includes food assistance delivered to 3.8 million people, more than 900,000 medical procedures and more than 1 million treatment courses.

All efforts are being made to continue routine immunizations, which have been disrupted in Syria — as in some other parts of the world — as a result of the pandemic. Over a five-day campaign in August, a UNICEF-supported programme administered polio vaccines to 23,000 children aged under five years in rural Damascus. However, the need for much larger campaigns is increasingly acute and, in their absence, the number of avoidable infant and child deaths will grow.

Annex II**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Philippe Kridelka**

I will make this statement on behalf of Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders. We would like to thank Under-Secretary General Lowcock for his briefing. We would also like to thank the humanitarian workers in the country for their lasting engagement. They are at the forefront of every humanitarian disaster and this is no different in the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis. Their protection should be, and is, our constant concern. I will make three points.

First, some claim that the situation in Syria has stabilized. Indeed, we are relieved to see that the situation in the north-west remains relatively calm despite the ongoing violence, and we — Germany and Belgium — call for the continued implementation of the Turkish-Russian ceasefire agreement. However, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains alarming. Eleven million Syrians remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Moreover, the economic crisis and COVID-19 have added an additional burden to an already very dire situation, and the winter is right ahead of us. The war, mismanagement, corruption and oppression have resulted in an unprecedented economic crisis, sharply limiting the purchasing power of Syrians throughout the country. That has led to an additional 1.4 million people having become food insecure over the past six months.

COVID-19 is claiming victims across the country. The number of cases has grown exponentially. That is alarming. Statistics are unreliable. The identified cases are only the tip of the iceberg. The testing capacity remains far too low everywhere in the country, including in the north-east and the north-west. Prevention therefore falls short. Treatment options are inadequate, as this crisis is also, once again, so acutely showing the limitations of the Syrian health-care system. Health-care facilities that were deliberately bombed and destroyed during years of war are unable to cope with the current crisis. The shortage of health workers further endangers any appropriate response.

Wintertime adds to the challenging humanitarian circumstances, and that will especially be the case for the 2.7 million internally displaced persons, among them 1 million children, in the north-west. We remember the deeply dehumanizing circumstances under which many of those people fled their areas of origin in large numbers and arrived in camps last year. We — Germany and Belgium — encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its humanitarian partners to undertake all efforts to prepare for winterization. We know that, with limited access, that will not be an easy exercise.

That brings me to my second point. Humanitarian access remains limited, which is intolerable and defies humanitarian logic. We, the co-penholders, call upon all parties to allow neutral and non-political access to all parts of the country without limitations and fully in line with humanitarian principles. Administrative hurdles are not acceptable. Throughout this year, Secretary-General Guterres and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock have consistently called for that, with more cross-line and more cross-border access to all Syrians in need.

While the majority of the Security Council was in favour of supporting this request in the interest of the Syrian people, some have chosen to deny it. They have blocked draft Security Council resolutions seeking adequate access to the north-east, via Al-Yarubiyah, and the north-west, via Bab Al-Salam. They claim that cross-line deliveries from Damascus and deliveries passing conflict lines from Bab Al-Hawa would compensate for the closure of cross-border posts.

However, the sad reality is that the non-renewal of Bab Al-Salam has so far resulted in a more costly and more risky humanitarian operation in the north-west. So far, no cross-line deliveries have taken place and it remains to be seen whether the current planning becomes reality. At the same time, access from Damascus to the north-east seems to have become further complicated recently, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock mentioned, and gaps in medical access to that region are still far from being filled. What else is clear is that we cannot accept Damascus deciding who is to receive aid and who is not. Humanitarian action has to be neutral, independent and impartial.

Thirdly, humanitarian access is not limited to the delivery of food or shelter. Access should also be facilitated, by all parties, to those who need protection — for instance, those in arbitrary detention. It should be guaranteed to those located in hard-to reach locations, such as the camp of Rukban. It should be urgently and unconditionally guaranteed in order to keep civilian infrastructure — such as the Allouk water station, which provides the essential water supply to over half a million people, including to the camp of Al-Hol — fully functioning.

Each of these points illustrates the immeasurable human suffering that Syrian children, women and men are undergoing on a day to day basis. Therefore, we — Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders — once again call for sustainable, durable and unconditional solutions.

Finally, to change the situation for the Syrian people for the better, action will be needed, and we to reiterate our call for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and for accountability. We fully support the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry, and the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and the Commission of Inquiry, as well as justice initiatives at the national and international levels.

Annex III**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

[Original: Chinese]

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for the briefing. China appreciates the efforts of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. Regarding the humanitarian issue in Syria, I would like to emphasize three points.

First, there is a need to take a comprehensive and integrated approach to revitalizing the Syrian economy and improving the humanitarian situation on the ground. The current economic situation in Syria is extremely fragile. The Syrian Government has launched many initiatives to alleviate the difficult situation, which deserve recognition. The international community should take concrete actions to increase financial and material assistance to Syria to support its economic development, improve people's livelihoods and rebuild infrastructure. The international community should also fulfil its promise of humanitarian assistance to Syria as soon as possible, without attaching preconditions, and not use such assistance as a tool to pressure the Syrian Government.

The top priority is to immediately lift unilateral sanctions. Unilateral sanctions are severely undermining the ability of countries such as Syria to mobilize resources, rehabilitate their economies and respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Secretary-General Guterres and his Special Envoy have repeatedly appealed for a waiver of unilateral sanctions. China strongly urges relevant countries to earnestly respond to these appeals by immediately lifting unilateral sanctions against Syria and other countries.

China welcomes the recent positive progress in cross-line humanitarian operations. We note that the United Nations plans to cooperate with the Syrian Government to deliver two batches of supplies to the north-west, and the World Health Organization continues to deliver medical supplies to the north-east. It is hoped that all parties will continue to improve the efficiency of cross-line humanitarian operations, simplify the procedures for cross-border delivery to meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. China is paying close attention to the issue of Allouk water station and Rukban camp and hopes that the relevant parties can find a lasting solution through dialogue.

Secondly, we should attach great importance to the threat of COVID-19 and support the efforts of Syria and the United Nations to combat the pandemic and save lives. The pandemic situation in Syria is worrying. The number of confirmed cases has increased rapidly, detection capabilities are insufficient, many medical workers have been infected, and women, children and refugee camp populations face additional risks. China encourages the Syrian Government to continue to take active response measures, and appreciates and supports the work of the World Health Organization in leading and coordinating countrywide COVID-19 response efforts.

China calls on the international community to increase multilateral and bilateral support for the Syrian Government and people in their fight against the pandemic. China will continue to provide assistance to Syria through the bilateral channel to help the Syrian people prevail over the scourge as soon as possible.

Thirdly, there is a need to respond positively to the Secretary-General's global ceasefire initiative, strengthen political dialogue and maintain regional peace and stability. The political and security situation directly affects the humanitarian situation. Since March this year, the overall situation on the ground in Syria has

been relatively calm, creating better conditions for the protection of civilians. We appreciate the efforts of all parties to maintain the ceasefire arrangements and encourage the Astana process to continue playing its constructive role. All parties in Syria should seize the opportunity to strengthen political dialogue and advance the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. China welcomes the recent successful convening of the third round of meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva.

Many countries, including China, are deeply concerned about terrorist activities in Syria. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/813), more than 10,000 Islamic State terrorists are active in Syria and Iraq, threatening the security and stability of Syria and the entire region. The ceasefire arrangement does not and must not mean give free rein to terrorists. The international community should adopt uniform standards and strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions.

Annex IV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing. His conclusions are indisputable — the coronavirus disease pandemic continues to spread, particularly in the regime-held areas, but also in the north-west and north-east. We cannot rely on the Syrian regime's official figures, which are well below reality. The rate of contamination of medical and humanitarian personnel is alarming. And, while testing capacities are gradually being strengthened, they remain largely insufficient.

The indirect impacts of this pandemic are also very worrying. Food insecurity is deteriorating by the day, further increasing the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations. In this context, every effort must be made to put in place an immediate, lasting and verifiable cessation of hostilities at the national level and a humanitarian pause, in accordance with resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2254 (2015) and the appeal of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy.

The continued air strikes in the Idlib region are a worrisome signal, as is the significant instability in the south-west and north-east. We cannot repeat it often enough — the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as civilian infrastructure, must be a top priority.

Rising humanitarian and medical needs make it more essential than ever to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need. We call on all parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. The shortcomings in the delivery of medical aid in the north-east, in particular, are alarming. We regret the lack of consensus in the Security Council to reopen Al-Yarubiyah crossing point, as well as the closure of the Bab Al-Salam crossing point, which has resulted in a dramatic lengthening of the routes of humanitarian convoys.

The politicization and instrumentalization of humanitarian aid in Syria is unacceptable. The European Union and its member States, which represent 70 per cent of the commitments made at the fourth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, will continue to ensure full respect for the guarantees of impartiality and transparency in the delivery of aid, and the implementation of the principles and parameters document in Syria.

Finally, until a credible political process consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) is firmly under way, France and the European Union will not finance reconstruction. Our positions on the lifting of sanctions and normalization also remain unchanged. The instrumentalization of the sanctions issue to mask the responsibility of the Syrian regime in this humanitarian tragedy fools no one. I would like to recall that European sanctions are targeted; they are aimed at individuals and entities that participate in the repression and profit from the fallout of the conflict. They include strong measures to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid. We must stop instrumentalizing the issue of sanctions.

Annex V**Statement by the Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations, Rolliansyah Soemirat**

My delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing.

As reported, the humanitarian needs in Syria remain substantial, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the economic downturn continue to affect millions of people in the country. My delegation welcomes the ongoing humanitarian response by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners as well as the increased deliveries of aid during this difficult period. These humanitarian actors are working in a challenging environment, where they are risking their lives to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people; some have even paid the ultimate price. And we are certain that expressing our gratitude will never suffice in the face of the enormity of this sacrifice. In this regard, allow me to convey my delegation's deepest condolences to the families of the three humanitarian workers who were killed in northern Aleppo a few days ago.

Today I wish to stress the following points.

First, my delegation welcomes the continued cross-border operations and efforts to scale up deliveries through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. We are fully aware that, after the 10 July decision (resolution 2533 (2020)), the cross-border deliveries have met with various challenges.

Indonesia therefore encourages all relevant parties to enhance coordination and redouble their efforts aimed at finding ways to close the gaps created by the closure of the Bab Al-Salam border crossing. After hearing Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's briefing earlier, we strongly believe that we should give appropriate focus to closing these existing gaps.

Genuine and active coordination is also needed for the cross-line convoys to the north-west of Syria. We note that, in this regard, there is an ongoing discussion to complement the cross-border operations. My delegation looks forward to the immediate deployment of these cross-line convoys.

Secondly, there should be no interference in the process of humanitarian aid deliveries. We urge all parties to refrain from impeding the delivery process of basic and life-saving assistance. It is critical that safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access be assured to all areas in Syria and to all civilians in need. This also includes ensuring the availability of such basic services as access to safe drinking water. We are pleased to note that the water supply from the Allouk water station has reached people in Al-Hasakah since the end of August. A long-term solution is key to preventing future disruption of this vital infrastructure.

On access to the north-east, my delegation is pleased that, despite some gaps, aid deliveries are continuing to the area, both by air and land convoys. We urge immediate approval for the remaining humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, it is urgent that any kind of tension or escalation be avoided. The Syrian people need sustained calm, and they need it now more than ever. Humanitarian and medical workers also need a safe environment so that they can execute their tasks effectively.

Indonesia reaffirms that all parties to the conflict must not avoid their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, pursuant international humanitarian law. Supporting and maintaining relative calm and creating new conditions for peace must be our priority. And we must continue to pursue peace

through diplomacy. Some might say that it is very difficult for Syria, but it is indeed possible. We must therefore work to make it happen for the Syrian people in the hopes of achieving a better future.

Annex VI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: French]

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing.

The year 2020 has been no ordinary year, with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that has shaken the world. For many children, autumn marks the end of summer fun and the beginning of the new school year. The start of the new school year is a particular challenge for pupils and students in various countries living in conflict zones, who have to return to school in the era of COVID-19.

My delegation welcomes the continued cooperation of the Syrian authorities with the World Health Organization and national organizations in their efforts to prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19, but also remains concerned about the deterioration of the Syrian health infrastructure as a result of years of conflict. A large number of vulnerable people, including internally displaced persons and refugees, are at a high risk of contracting the virus. This is a major risk factor for a larger crisis, as social distancing is virtually impossible in overcrowded camps.

The Niger reiterates its support for the daily efforts of humanitarian agencies aimed at assisting people in need. It also calls for an optimization of the level of humanitarian assistance, in view of the situation on the ground. Our thanks go to those countries that are already making enormous efforts. As Mr. Lowcock communicated to us in his briefing — in which, with great eloquence and deep emotion, he described the realities of life for Syrians — if we are to improve humanitarian assistance, we must listen to the messages of humanitarian organizations working in the field in order to respond in the most adequate way to the appeals for help of thousands of women and children in destitution and distress.

As I have said before on several occasions, the strength of the Security Council lies in its unity. It is a pity that it is taking so long to find such unity on the Syrian dossier. However, the gravity of the humanitarian situation and the hope that many people place in the Security Council for a permanent and secure solution — and one that will allow the displaced to return to their homes — must be found. The Council simply must do better.

That is why my delegation calls on all stakeholders to echo the appeal launched by the Secretary-General last March for the removal or easing, on humanitarian grounds, of sanctions imposed on countries in crisis, in order to guarantee access to food and essential medical supplies to combat the pandemic. On this issue, too, I know that the Council is divided, and it is time that we overcome this other divergence. Of course, no positive progress on this issue, which has been taken up several times by the Council, will be possible without a ceasefire, which is the only way for dialogue to continue within the Constitutional Committee, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

My delegation reiterates its appeal to all parties to uphold their obligations in terms of protecting civilians and allowing rapid, safe and unimpeded access to all humanitarian workers and assistance to people in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian assistance must be free from political considerations.

In conclusion, my delegation also remains concerned about the deterioration of the Syrian economy. The continued decline in the exchange rate of the Syrian pound and the shortage of certain basic necessities are early warning signs that must be addressed in order to prevent the economic crisis from further complicating the current situation, which is already so difficult for the Syrian people.

Annex VII**Statement by the Counsellor of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Diani Jamesha Prince**

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing.

Unfortunately, in Syria the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is now a nationwide issue, with cases steadily rising throughout the country. With limited testing capacity the true magnitude of the outbreak has not yet been realized. Syria's health-care system has been debilitated by conflict, and an acute shortage of personal protective equipment and other essential medical supplies impairs efforts to combat the virus. It is evident that significant gaps remain, and the scaling-up of timely, safe, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian support, utilizing all available modalities, therefore remains imperative.

The dreadful complications associated with economic decline — food insecurity, hyperinflation and diminished access to basic necessities — are well documented and have regrettably become commonplace in the lives of millions of Syrians. We appeal to the international community to assist with the resuscitation of the economy by lifting all unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria. These measures will serve only as the basis for further economic deterioration, increasing the burden on the Syrian people, and could significantly impede the country's COVID-19 response.

We welcome the resumption of the operations of the Allouk water station, albeit at only 30 per cent capacity. Further disruptions threaten the survival of nearly half a million people and could precipitate an increase in COVID-19 cases in the north-east. We remind all parties of their obligations and urge them to pursue a sustainable solution to ensure its full and uninterrupted functioning.

We are concerned by the fires that have engulfed forests and agricultural land in recent days. A combination of factors, including rising temperatures in the region owing to the climate crisis, have contributed to the recurrence of these incidents, which undoubtedly have a harmful environmental impact and exacerbate the current humanitarian challenges. It is our hope that these fires will be swiftly subdued to protect vital land and prevent further displacement.

The stabilization of Syria's security situation is necessary for the preservation of a robust humanitarian response. The prolongation of hostilities substantially hinders humanitarian actors from coordinating and carrying out life-saving work. Furthermore, it deters the cultivation of conditions necessary for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. In this context, we emphasize the importance of preserving the ceasefire in the north-west and we echo the call for a complete nationwide cessation of hostilities.

There remains no military solution to the conflict in Syria and we continue to support a political settlement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The Syrian people have endured and continue to endure immeasurable suffering. Let us not lose sight of our responsibility to them.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

As we have heard today, the lingering effects of nine years of conflict on the health and social sectors in Syria, the deteriorating economic situation, the impact of sanctions and complications due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, have had a cumulative and detrimental impact on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

That impact continues to severely affect the most vulnerable sectors of society. Women and children, in particular, endure the most devastating effects of the humanitarian situation.

In the past six months, the number of food-insecure people has reached the highest level ever recorded in Syria, at 9.3 million. South Africa is deeply concerned that, due to the inability of many households to meet their most basic requirements, negative coping mechanisms are increasingly being adopted.

In that regard, South Africa appreciates and commends the efforts of the United Nations and its personnel, implementing partners and agencies for their sterling efforts to provide the necessary aid and assistance in particularly challenging circumstances in one of the most insecure countries for aid workers.

We therefore reiterate the importance of ensuring the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to all those who require it, in line with the provisions of international humanitarian law and the need to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

Reports indicate that the delivery of this essential aid in the north-west of Syria has been further impacted by the closure of the Bab Al-Salam border crossing in July. Additionally, while efforts have been made to scale up operations at the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point, challenges still remain to providing effective and efficient cross-border aid. In that regard, it is important for the authorities to work with the United Nations to streamline the approval processes for both cross-border and cross-line assistance throughout Syria, which should continue to be scaled up to meet the increasing demand.

We welcome the recent interventions and developments that have led to the restoration of the water supply from the Allouk water station to Al-Hasakah. However, a long-term, sustainable solution to ensure the regular supply of water from the Allouk water station must be found and maintained.

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's call to waive all economic measures imposed on Syria, particularly in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we call on the Secretary-General to include, in his reports to the Council, an overview of the effects and impact of unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The situation in Syria can be resolved only through negotiations and mediation. South Africa calls on all parties to make every effort to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

With regard to the comments of the Permanent Representative of Germany on the sanctions imposed by the European Union on the then apartheid regime in South Africa, we fail to see the correlation between the situation in apartheid South Africa and Syria, which are entirely different situations. Broad generalizations

like these are disingenuous and try to mask the harm that sanctions do under the current situation, where the COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on humanitarian situations across the world.

We will continue to support the appeal made by the Secretary-General for the lifting of unilateral coercive measures and sanctions that impact the ability of States to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Annex IX**Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, James Roscoe**

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to compound the humanitarian crisis across Syria. As I mentioned before, we are doing what we can to support the Syrian people and we provided \$30 million to tackle the threat of COVID-19 in Syria. That is in addition to almost \$400 million this year in humanitarian support.

That support is a clear demonstration of our unwavering commitment to the Syrian people and to the aid community. I want to join others in expressing our steadfast support, in particular, to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization, both of which play a critical role in the coordination of the humanitarian and health responses in Syria.

That support is all the more important as aid workers continue to work in incredibly challenging circumstances, having to deal on a daily basis with obstructions to their vital work and threats to their health and safety.

In particular, I want to condemn the attack against the Turkish Red Crescent Society in Al-Bab on Monday, which resulted in the death of an aid worker and the wounding of another. The deliberate targeting of aid workers is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, and such attacks are abhorrent. We call on all parties in Syria to uphold their obligations.

We also remain concerned about the lack of adequate personal protective equipment and medical equipment, as well as the continued rise in cases of COVID-19 among United Nations staff and aid workers. This increased pressure on aid workers comes against the backdrop of devastating reports of avoidable civilian deaths, which further add to the humanitarian caseload. As we heard from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, the combination of the devastated health system and the challenges of COVID-19 can result in many more unnecessary deaths and illness. We were also deeply saddened to hear of the 11 deaths caused by a car bomb in Afrin. It is unacceptable that pro-regime forces continue to launch indiscriminate attacks that result in the death of civilians.

As the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry again makes clear this week in its latest report (A/HRC/45/31), these attacks may amount to war crimes. Indeed, the report further shines a light on the brutal crimes against humanity that the regime continues to commit through enforced disappearances, murder, torture and imprisonment. If we ever needed evidence that the regime does not have the best interests of its people at heart, then this is it.

As we also heard today, access problems persist in north-eastern Syria, with a continued lack of cross-line access into the regions where vulnerable people need it most. It was striking to hear Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's example of Al-Tabqa. It is especially galling to hear of 100 aid trucks being delayed from crossing into north-east Syria because of bureaucratic procedures. That is another sign that despite the assurances of the allies of the Syrian regime in the Council that we could make cross-line access work, obstruction continues. Let us be clear — the obstruction is calculated. It is also unacceptable. The United Nations must be given unfettered access and must be allowed to deliver aid to those who need it most.

Like others, we remain concerned about persistent water and electricity shortages and disruptions to the Allouk water station. We urge all parties to take

steps to swiftly resolve water supply disruptions and to deconflict and minimize further conflict-related damage to civilian infrastructure.

At the last Council meeting on this issue (see S/2020/758), we talked about the 9.3 million people who are currently food insecure. Fires have since then ripped through north-western Syria. Given that October and November are the sowing seasons for wheat and barley, and with the fires destroying large swaths of arable land, there is a risk now of devastating famine and further impacts on people's livelihoods. So, the picture is bleak.

It is vital that the Council come together to prevent a worsening of the humanitarian disaster as we approach the winter months in Syria. As a priority, civilians and aid workers urgently need to be given the access and tools they need to alleviate suffering while there is still time to prepare for the coming months ahead.

Finally, I am glad that Ambassador Heusgen raised the ongoing trial in Germany. The reality is that the testimony there represents the tip of the iceberg. The Syrian regime, as we know, is willing to indiscriminately bomb innocent civilians in schools and hospitals. One can only imagine what they are capable of in Al-Assad's dungeons.

Before supporters of this regime raise the question of sanctions and the lifting of sanctions, let us again reiterate that the path to the removal of sanctions is clear. Rather than interfering with aid, bombing schools and hospitals, detaining and torturing people, the Syrian regime must heed the calls of its population and engage seriously with Special Envoy Pedersen and the United Nations-led political process to achieve a peaceful end to the conflict.

Annex X**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Pham Hai Anh**

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his informative briefing today.

The gravity of the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be a great cause for concern. This concern also grows week after week with the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Given the dire conditions of health care, the number confirmed cases may not reflect the actual situation and the risks faced by the people and health workers. Contact tracing may well be a crucial method of containing COVID-19. However, around 89 per cent of cases in Syria are untraceable. Testing and quarantine capacity is also very limited. We are also troubled by the worsening impact of the pandemic on the condition of health workers, humanitarian workers and United Nations staff on the ground. If infected, they cannot perform their crucial tasks of helping people and peace. On top of that, social and economic strains, food insecurity and the lack of development continue to be great challenges to sustainable peace and stability.

While a relatively calm situation on the ground has largely been maintained during the past period, it is not sustainable. The protection of civilians continues to be a source of concern, with reported loss of lives and injuries caused by explosive devices and unrest in several parts of Syria.

In order to facilitate the humanitarian response and best support the Syrian people, my delegation would like to stress the importance of two key aspects: access and support.

First, full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access is of the utmost importance to assisting millions of people throughout Syria. We urge all parties to preserve the relative calm on the ground and fulfil their obligations under international law, including humanitarian law, in order to maximize the impact of humanitarian efforts in Syria. We fully support the call made by the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy for a nationwide ceasefire in order to facilitate the pandemic preparedness and response in Syria.

We take note of the increase in aid delivery to the north-east, which includes health items provided by the World Health Organization. We also welcome the continuation of humanitarian assistance throughout north-western Syria. However, there are still shortages in the north-east and access challenges in the north-west, even after the adoption of resolution 2533 (2020). We therefore urge all parties in Syria to fully cooperate with the United Nations and other humanitarian partners to maintain the provision of assistance to all people in need.

Attention should also be paid to improving access for the people living in various camps, such as Rukban and Al-Hol, and to finding a sustained solution to the water security issue concerning the Allouk water station.

Regarding support for the Syrian people, we would like take this opportunity to commend the tireless efforts of humanitarian and health workers as well as the international community. We salute the dedication of all humanitarian and health workers on the ground.

Against the current backdrop, we believe that special focus needs to be placed on controlling the spread of COVID-19 and mitigating its grave impacts on the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. Providing needed technical assistance and medical supplies is now becoming more and more urgent as the danger of undermining peace

and humanitarian efforts looms large. It is also important to make sure that the COVID-19 response capacity of Syria is not impacted by sanctions.

The humanitarian situation in Syria needs a sustained solution. The most viable path is a comprehensive political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and in full accordance with international law.

Annex XI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Hadi Sinirliöglu**

Let me start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing and commend the devoted efforts of humanitarian workers in Syria.

As one of the largest humanitarian organizations worldwide, the Turkish Red Crescent Society has been among the first to respond to the emerging needs of Syrian people.

This week, terrorists targeted a Turkish Red Crescent convoy in Al-Bab, killing one and injuring another. We strongly condemn that heinous terrorist attack, which is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and constitutes a crime, according to the Geneva Conventions. We will hold the perpetrators accountable.

Syria is one of the most dangerous places on Earth, not only for Syrian civilians but also for all humanitarian aid workers. Last week, the Council discussed the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on peace and security (see S/2020/897). A serious outbreak could happen at any time in Syria.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicates that during the past two months, the pandemic across Syria has rapidly evolved. Given the limited testing in the country, it is likely that the majority of the cases are undetected and that the actual number of cases may far exceed official figures.

Syria is a country with a highly vulnerable population and a devastated health system. There is also a shortage of personal protective equipment. Under the pressure of a regime that kills its own people, it is not surprising that these front-line workers are being exposed to the pandemic without any means of protection. The high number of confirmed cases among doctors and nurses indicates the gravity of the situation. In the north-west, COVID-19 continues to have a multiplier effect vis-à-vis the already dire humanitarian situation.

Together with the United Nations, we strive to channel medical aid via the cross-border mechanism to the more than 4 million people living in the area. Since the adoption of the resolution 2533 (2020), we have ensured the safe passage of 718 trucks full of humanitarian assistance through the Bab Al-Hawa border gate.

Around 3 million people in the north-west are highly vulnerable and rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs, such as shelter, food and water. The failure of the Security Council to re-authorize the Bab Al-Salam crossing point in July continues to create various challenges and has put millions of lives at risk.

It is obvious that the limited cross-border delivery will have grave repercussions on the health situation, which is already deteriorating at a large scale. We call on the Security Council to uphold its responsibility and immediately consider re-authorizing the Bab Al-Salam gate for cross-border humanitarian operations.

As to the disruption challenges regarding the Allouk water station in the north-east, we continue our efforts, in cooperation with the United Nations and relevant countries, to find a durable solution. Let me repeat once again that the sustainability of the water system and the provision of water to Al-Hasakah at full capacity depends on the uninterrupted supply of electrical power to the station. The Kurdish Workers Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units has regularly and deliberately disrupted electricity to the water station for almost a year. As of today, electric supply to the region corresponds only to 29 per cent of the actual needs. Those with influence on the disrupters should take necessary actions.

The Al-Assad regime started 2020 with an indiscriminate military campaign that targeted densely populated areas in Idlib, such as homes, hospitals and schools. We saw the worst humanitarian disaster that Syria has seen in nine years of conflict.

Now the regime is trying, at each and every single meeting of the Security Council, to divert attention from the enormous destruction, suffering and displacement it has inflicted on its own people. We should not forget about the innocent victims who are still waiting for justice to be served. We should not forget about the brave Syrian people who risked their lives in not surrendering to Al-Assad. Last week, after months, the Council was finally able to meet in an open format to shed light on the appalling crimes committed by the regime with chemical weapons (see S/2020/902). We should not forget the devastating humanitarian consequences of the use of chemical weapons and how the courageous Syrian doctors saved countless lives in underground hospitals. Let us also not forget the millions of Syrians who escaped the mass murderer in Damascus by taking refuge in neighbouring countries. My country is hosting one fifth of the pre-war population of Syria and is strictly implementing the principle of non-refoulement. We continue to mobilize all our resources for the well-being of these people.

It is with deep regret that we are witnessing the use of the COVID-19 pandemic in our neighbourhood as a pretext for abandoning or pushing back hundreds of migrants at sea. We continue to conduct rescue operations in order to save these people from death. Let me remind Council members that, under these precarious circumstances, the situation of refugees and migrants requires our close attention more than ever. We all have to abide by our international obligations.

Turkey will continue to stand by the Syrian people and seek accountability for the blatant violations of international law and international humanitarian law by the Syrian regime.

As to the statement of the previous speaker, he does not represent the Syrian people and does not deserve a reply from me.
