

Statement by the Federal Foreign Office on the situation in northwest Syria

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A Federal Foreign Office Spokesperson issued the following statement at the governmental press conference today (8 May) on the situation in northwest Syria:

The increase in violence in northwest Syria and Idlib since late April is extremely worrying. We condemn the multiple air strikes on humanitarian infrastructure, such as medical facilities and Syrian civil defence centres, including facilities financed by us, that have occurred as part of the current offensive by the regime and its allies. It is alleged that the regime deployed its infamous barrel bombs once again in these strikes.

There is no doubt that the presence of the terrorist group HTS, and the attacks it has carried out, have made the situation more difficult since the start of the year. However, it remains crucial that all military actions be carried out in line with the rules of international humanitarian law and, most importantly of all, that civilians be protected. Action against HTS cannot be used to justify indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure and on the civilian population, and must not be used to pave the way for a wide-scale offensive by the regime.

All sides are called on to prevent further escalation. Russia and Turkey hold particular responsibility here. In the Sochi Agreement of September 2018, they undertook to curb the influence of radical forces in order to prevent a military conflict that would once again mainly claim civilian lives.

The civilian population is particularly badly affected by the situation, as access to medical care was only available in Idlib under the most difficult circumstances even before the current escalation. We are endeavouring under the most challenging conditions to continue providing support, for example by funding an early warning system for air strikes in order to protect the civilian population and particularly the healthcare sector. However, a hospital that receives humanitarian funding from the Federal Foreign Office was hit by several missiles in recent days, and people were killed. According to the United Nations, at least ten schools have been destroyed so far, as have twelve clinics that provided medical care to over 110,000 people.

So far this year, the German Government has provided funding of around 30 million euros for humanitarian aid measures in northwest Syria. Further measures are being organised, with the aim of enabling us to react at short notice to a further deterioration in the humanitarian situation where necessary.

During our membership of the Security Council, we have also made the protection of humanitarian aid workers and the strengthening of international humanitarian law a priority. We are thus liaising closely on this matter and on these air strikes with Kuwait and Belgium, our two co penholders in the Syria humanitarian file in the Security Council. A meeting on the humanitarian situation is already scheduled for the end of the month. In view of the recent developments, however, we will call for an emergency session to be held this week.

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