

Increasing humanitarian access in Syria

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Thank you, Mr President.

The situation for civilians in northwest Syria is devastating. Over 1,000 civilians have been killed, including over 500 women and children, and almost 630,000 people have been forced to leave their homes, since the beginning of May. I'd like to thank ASG Mueller for her briefing and for the work which her officials and colleagues are doing. And we commend your work and we commend the work of humanitarian agencies to address the humanitarian suffering of the people in Idlib. The United Kingdom has contributed over \$150 million for humanitarian assistance in Idlib over the past 18 months. And I took careful note of what Assistant-Secretary-General Mueller had to say about the importance of the cross-border resolution in that context. We, of course, support that resolution.

Colleagues, the Security Council must act to protect civilians in Idlib. That is why we fully support the humanitarian penholders, Belgium, Kuwait and Germany, on their proposed resolution. We will be voting in favour - in favour of protecting civilians, in favour of

ending indiscriminate attacks. This Council has a duty to protect those suffering on the ground. We need to send a message to the regime that the international community is resolute in condemning their actions and will not let them continue unabated. Only a vote in favour of the co-penholders' resolution will send the message that countries around this table, representing the international community, will not accept the wanton targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, regardless of the stated objective. Now is not a time to sit on the fence.

Mr President, we know the Syrian regime do not care how many of its civilians they kill, but Russia says it does. And if so, they should vote in favour of the co-penholders' text, and they and China should withdraw their text, which would permit continued attacks on civilians. We note Russian claims to the press recently that OCHA's information is not up to date, apparently, given their lack of presence on the ground. This only reinforces the need for Russia to press the Syrian authorities to approve OCHA's request for greater humanitarian access on the ground.

Mr President, on Monday, the Astana guarantors noted their commitment to sustainable peace in Syria, and that this can only be achieved through political and diplomatic methods. We have been waiting a very long time for political progress. We ask again for Russia to maintain pressure on the regime, to fully engage with the political process and, of course, to end the violence in Idlib, which threatens that political process.

Finally, Mr President, we welcome the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry, which will soon begin to investigate some of the recent appalling attacks in Idlib. We call for the findings of this inquiry to be released to the public. Some of the information underlying those founding findings may need to remain confidential, but it is crucial that this Board is transparent in its mandate and output. The international community – but more importantly, the Syrian people – deserve to be privy to its findings on events in Idlib.

Mr President, ASG Mueller said the world was watching this Council, but the Syrian people – men, women and children – are dying while they watch.

Thank you, Mr President.

Explanation of Vote by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council on the resolution on the humanitarian situation in Syria

There are two resolutions on the table today. The humanitarian penholders' resolution would have protected civilians. The Russian and Chinese resolution imperils them.

We thank the humanitarian penholders, Belgium, Germany and Kuwait, for their considerable efforts to incorporate the views of all Council members in drafting the text on which we have just voted. This was a balanced text which reflected the dire situation in Idlib and rightly called for a lasting ceasefire, protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and humanitarian access. This resolution was vitally needed. Since the Council's first emergency humanitarian session to discuss Idlib on the 10th of May, we

have focussed repeatedly on the indiscriminate violence against civilians there. Civilian deaths and displacement continue to increase. There is little time left to prevent a catastrophic worsening of the humanitarian situation.

As well as establishing an unequivocal ceasefire, the text, which Russia and China today vetoed, set out clearly the importance of adhering to international legal obligations. A vetoed resolution does not alter the fact that there can be no excuse for targeting civilians. Indeed, deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime.

By contrast, the Russian and Chinese text on which we will vote next pretends that the humanitarian situation in Idlib is caused solely by terrorists rather than the indiscriminate aerial bombardment, which is being carried out with scant regard for the principles of distinction and proportionality.

The exemption for counter-terrorism activity, which Russia proposes, seems designed to allow indiscriminate attacks to continue. We have heard Russia's explanation that they are striking at terrorists. But even if that were true, they still have legal obligations, including the proportionality of their actions.

I am afraid that over the years in Syria, we have seen the reality of the Assad regime's military action and that of their Russian ally - in particular, their use of air strikes. We all saw what happened after this Council passed Resolution 2401 and the deaths of civilians which followed.

Russia and China's text would be of no service to those on the ground who so desperately need the protection of the international community. The fight against terrorism cannot be an excuse for indiscriminate attacks – or worse, targeted attacks – on civilians. We cannot, in good conscience, support a text which would allow this. We appeal to all Council members to join us in voting against the Russian and Chinese text.

Thank you.

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