

Reiterating the call for an end to conflict in Syria

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Thank you, Mr President. And to start, our condolences to the families and friends of those Oxfam workers who were killed, who Mark mentioned. Thank you, Mr Pedersen and thank you to Mark Lowcock for the briefing.

I agree very much with my German and my American colleagues. I'm not going to rehearse the figures that Mark has so starkly set out. But I would like to echo High Commissioner Bachelet, who said how can anyone justify carrying out such indiscriminate and inhumane attacks? She also, said that 93 percent of the deaths since 1 January were caused by the Syrian government and its allies.

So I'd like to put the High Commissioner's question back to the Russians and the Syrians, their representatives here today:

How can you justify carrying out such indiscriminate and inhumane attacks?

What are you doing to uphold international humanitarian law?

What are you doing to protect the people who are fleeing?

Where do you expect those people to flee too?

What are you doing to protect medical facilities and ensure that the people Mark so vividly described get the help that they need?

And when does this start to end?

We've now heard that the Syrian government has said that it will continue its offensive. How can you do that in the face of the accounts that we have heard today, when the entire international community bar about three countries is condemning you for what you are doing to the people of Idlib?

I agree with the German and American representatives. Astana is not working. We have all given it a chance. We have waited enough in effect too long. We need to come off Astana and we need to work with the UN to get the political process underway and uphold 2254.

There is one area where I disagree with Mark, if I may. It's not that the Security Council is doing nothing; 13 – possibly 14 – members of the Security Council are ready to act. But what the Syrian government is doing on the ground is protected by a Russian veto. This was not the purpose of establishing the Security Council and it was not the purpose of giving the P-5 a veto so that these innocent people on the ground could suffer not just once, but multiple times under the cruelty and barbarity of the Syrian regime.

I would like to also echo what my German and American colleagues said about Turkey. We need the attacks on Turkey to stop. Turkey has made efforts to seek a peaceful solution in Idlib. And we are concerned that the impact of the escalation on Turkey, whose already borne the burden of hosting over 3.5 million refugees forced to flee from Syria. So I look forward to what the Turkish representative has to say later.

I join others in calling on Russia to end its support for this murderous campaign and the barbaric Syrian government. I join the Secretary-General in calling for an immediate, genuine and lasting ceasefire in Idlib and for a lasting solution to the situation there. We once more call on Syria and Russia and Iran to observe their obligations under international humanitarian law and to give us an answer on what they are doing to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Turning to what Mr Pedersen said about the Constitutional Committee and the political process, we remain deeply disappointed at the stalling of the Constitutional Committee. It is hard to believe that not only do we have a barbaric situation on the ground, but that the Syrian authorities are actually hindering the political process. They should come to the table. I want to place on record once more the United Kingdom's support for the UN Special Envoy in his efforts to restart the committee. And I want also to assure the UN that the United Kingdom stands ready to support any UN-backed agreement. And we continue to support the Special Envoy's work under 2254.

Thank you.

Right of Reply:

Thank you very much, Mr President. I know it was mentioned in the Russian intervention, so I'd like to respond. I listen very carefully to what the Russian military say, including in the briefings to this council. I'm waiting for one of the Russian military to answer the High Commissioner's question: how can anyone justify carrying out such indiscriminate and inhumane attacks?

But I also, Mr President, want to record again something I've said here before. Russian military and Syrian military who violate international humanitarian law and bomb or allow the bombing of hospitals and medical facilities and of civilians will one day be held personally accountable before the law for those actions. That is a very important point. They won't just be held collectively responsible. One day they will be held personally responsible.

The other thing I wanted to say, Mr President, about reconstruction is to support what the French representative said. As the United Kingdom, we have given some \$2 billion to Syria in aid since the conflict began. The reconstruction of Syria will be made infinitely harder by the destruction, the wanton destruction, that the Syrian and Russian governments are carrying out now. So it will be for Russian taxpayers, Mr President, possibly assisted by Chinese taxpayers, but it will be for Russian taxpayers to put Syria back together again.

Thank you.

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