

Humanitarian Access, Refugee Return, and Security in Syria

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Speech

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Statement by Ambassador Karen Pierce, UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council Briefing on Syria

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Thank you very much Mr President. Thank you Mark once again for a clear and stark briefing and to all your team on the ground.

I'd like to start by joining Kuwait in expressing our deepest condolences to the people and government of Indonesia for the plane crash. But I also wanted to say I thought the joint statement from Kuwait and Sweden was very powerful.

I wanted to start if I may not immediately with the humanitarian, but with the Istanbul Summit commitments, as briefed by the French representative - and thank you very much for that briefing. I completely agree with what the French Ambassador said about the political process. The Small Group is going on now in London. As we all noted last week, we hope that this combination of commitments and meetings will indeed Mr President see some real, concrete progress on both political and humanitarian tracks. But I think on the political side and on Idlib, I would very much like to receive confirmation today that the Idlib agreement between Russia and Turkey will indeed hold, that those 3 million civilians will indeed be kept safe. I'd like to see confirmation today that the Constitutional Committee will indeed be set up by the end of the year, and I'd like to know if that is something that both Syria and Russia agree should happen. I also agree with what my US colleagues said about CW.

Turning to the humanitarian side Mr President, which is the main purpose of the meeting today, I wanted to underscore what the Under-Secretary-General said about humanitarian principles and the aid needing to go to people in the most need. It's very worrying that we don't have full independent needs assessments; proper refugee return really can't happen without this so I'd be grateful to know from the Syrian Representative but also from the Russians; what is being done to address the UN's concerns on the independent needs assessment?

On Rukban, I take the point that there may be a security risk. I think it would be very good if the Council could have more detail on what that security risk is and how it might be overcome. I want to recall Mr President that UN Member States are obliged to ensure safe and sustained humanitarian access. So the Council needs to hear this assurance today, and it also needs to hear that something will be done about the security and that the UN convoys will then be able to get through to these desperate people. I think we keep ducking this issue in the Council, Mr President. We keep raising it but we keep not getting a satisfactory answer, so it would be very good to get clarity on it today.

I also wanted to note that on humanitarian access, refugee return, we do need to include the issue of security - freedom from political persecution and from arbitrary arrest - if communities are to feel safe and secure about returning to their homes.

Finally Mr President, I wanted to endorse the five asks that the Under-Secretary-General set out today. I want to echo the call for unity on renewing SCR 2165. I think that would be a very powerful signal of progress on the ground.

I want to speak again about the importance of movement forward on the political process. Mark mentioned the need for more generosity from donors in terms of funding some of the UN plan. I'd like to say that in response to the crisis, the British government has committed \$3.47 billion to Syria since 2012, and this includes \$1.25 billion actually spent inside Syria itself.

Notwithstanding that Mr President, I'd like to echo what the French Ambassador said about reconstruction. There's a difference between humanitarian assistance and reconstruction money. Reconstruction money will only be available from Western governments in the context of a credible, sustainable political process that redresses and addresses of the underlying concerns in Syrian politics today.

Thank you Mr President.

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