

Syria: Briefing on the Humanitarian Situation after Demand to Cease Hostilities

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What's In Blue

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Tomorrow (28 February), the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock on the humanitarian situation in Syria. This is the third time he will address Council members on this issue in February, in a context shaped by heavy fighting, a marked deterioration of the humanitarian situation, and the recent adoption of [resolution 2401](#) demanding a cessation of hostilities. In addition to briefing the Council on recent developments, Lowcock is expected to present the 20 February report of the Secretary-General ([S/2018/138](#)).

On 24 February, after intense negotiations on a draft resolution, spearheaded by Kuwait and Sweden, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401. The resolution demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay and engage immediately to ensure full and comprehensive implementation of this demand for a durable humanitarian pause of at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria. The resolution also demands that, immediately after the start of the cessation of hostilities, all parties allow safe, unimpeded and sustained access each week to the humanitarian convoys of the UN and its implementing partners, including to hard-to-reach and besieged locations. At the same time, the UN and its implementing partners are to be allowed to undertake safe, unconditional medical evacuations, based on medical need and urgency. The cessation of hostilities does not include military operations against the Council-designated terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Qaeda and Al-Nusra Front.

After a draft resolution was [put in blue](#) by Kuwait and Sweden on 21 February, Russia called for a briefing by Lowcock on the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta. At the meeting, which took place on 22 February, Russia announced that it had circulated its amendments to the draft in blue. The penholders incorporated some of the amendments into subsequent revised drafts that were negotiated over the next 48 hours. Although an adoption was originally scheduled for the morning of 23 February, it eventually took place in the afternoon of 24 February, after several postponements that gave Council members time to agree on the role of the Council regarding the cessation of hostilities and some of the details of its implementation, including timing.

At tomorrow's briefing, Lowcock will most likely welcome the adoption of resolution 2401, after having urged Council members on 22 February to take meaningful action to save lives of civilians in Eastern Ghouta and the rest of Syria. He is expected to convey the readiness of the UN and its partners to deploy humanitarian convoys and undertake safe

and unconditional medical evacuations. Lowcock is further expected to share with Council members his assessment of the ongoing violence in Syria, including indiscriminate attacks in Eastern Ghouta and the reported use of chemical weapons. He may emphasise the need for the parties to fulfill their obligations under the resolution and international law, in keeping with recent remarks by Secretary-General António Guterres. In a speech to the Human Rights Council yesterday, Guterres stressed that “Security Council resolutions are only meaningful if they are effectively implemented”. He also reminded all parties of their absolute obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure at all times, specifying that “efforts to combat terrorism do not supersede these obligations”.

Council members are expected to put forward their perspectives regarding the implementation of resolution 2401. While most Council members are likely to stress the need to see immediate results in terms of delivery of humanitarian aid, medical evacuations, and alleviation of the suffering of the Syrian people, other Council members may decide to take a more incremental approach, stressing the need for actors on the ground to agree to the cessation of hostilities, as reflected in the negotiations on the resolution. A call by Russia to establish a 5-hour humanitarian pause in Eastern Ghouta earlier today did not stop violence and fell short of addressing urgent humanitarian needs.

Council members are likely to discuss the need to separate the forces in Eastern Ghouta that are covered by the cessation of hostilities from Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, the latest iteration of Al-Nusra Front, in order to spare more civilian casualties. The main armed opposition groups inside Eastern Ghouta (Jaish al-Islam, Faylaq al-Rahman and Ahrar al-Sham) have reportedly expressed commitment to abide by resolution 2401. Although these groups have been covered by the de-escalation agreements and participated in several rounds of the Astana meetings, at a press conference yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused two of them of cooperating with Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, an interpretation which would prevent them from being protected by the cessation of hostilities.

Council members are also expected to discuss how they will follow up on the adoption of the resolution, particularly with regard to receiving information on the monitoring of the cessation of hostilities. Resolution 2401 called upon all relevant member states to coordinate efforts to monitor the cessation of hostilities, building on existing arrangements. A report on the implementation of the resolution from the Secretary-General is due in early March.

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