

Statement on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait at the UN Security Council Briefing on the situation in the Middle East, Syria

Statement delivered by Ambassador Olof Skoog on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait, at the United Nations Security Council Briefing on the situation in the Middle East, Syria, 18 September 2018, New York.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I want to also express my condolences to Russia for the recent loss of lives which adds to the list of the measurable losses of lives in Syria and highlights the need for urgent political solution.

Mr. President,

I speak on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait, and I would like to thank first Under-Secretary Mark Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation and the humanitarian assistance provided by the UN in very difficult circumstances. We reiterate our call for safe, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need across Syria, including to areas that have recently changed control. The reports of the Secretary-General continue to be clear, that all methods of delivery, including cross-border aid, are essential to the effective provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring a needs-based response. We also reiterate our calls on all donors to contribute generously to the under-funded Syria appeals.

Mr. President,

We would like to focus our remarks yet again on Idlib, and thank Staffan and Mark for keeping us up to date of the different aspects of the extremely serious situation there, and of the intensive work of the UN to prevent what we have been warned could be the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of this century.

We received reports that there were days without airstrikes last week. This shows that when there is political will, a cessation of hostilities can be achieved. We are encouraged by the statements from the meeting in Sochi yesterday, and we hope that cessation of hostilities in Idlib will now ensue, and be respected by all, and that dialogue rather than military escalation will prevail.

This is also required in order to succeed with efforts to separate terrorist groups as designated by the Council from armed opposition groups. We appreciate receiving more information on the agreement made in Sochi today, including on the implementation of a de-militarized zone to be established by October 15, and reassurances of immediate cessation of hostilities. We also welcome Special Envoy de Mistura's work in this regard, and we encourage coordination between ongoing efforts where relevant.

Counter-terrorism measures in no way relieves the parties of their very clear obligations under international law, and these are applicable throughout Idlib and Syria. The Secretary-General last week called on the Astana guarantors to, and I quote, "find a way to isolate terrorist groups and create a situation in which civilians will not be the price paid to solve the problem of Idlib", end of quotation. This is as true for Idlib as it is true across Syria.

Mr. President,

Over the last few weeks, in meeting after meeting, Sweden and Kuwait, together with the vast majority of Council members, have consistently called on the Astana guarantors to implement their own de-escalation agreement in Idlib. We will continue this preventative diplomacy, and we repeat our calls today that Syria and its allies must refrain from escalating violence in Idlib, ensure humanitarian access, full freedom of movement for all persons and abide by all their obligations under international law. Civilians and civilian objects must be protected and all parties are obliged to apply the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. All these obligations apply across Idlib, and in all of Syria, inside and outside any de-militarized zone. The very clear demands on the parties to the conflict in resolution 2401 likewise remain.

We also express our grave concern over new reports of attacks on medical facilities despite deconfliction; for example the case of the September 6 bombing of the medical facility in Kafar Zita. Such attacks may amount to war crimes. There can be no impunity for violations and abuses of international law, and we reaffirm our strong support for the IIM and the Commission of Inquiry in this regard. We also support the call by Under-Secretary Mark Lowcock to all parties to abide by deconfliction protocols.

Mr. President,

We also appreciate the update by Special Envoy de Mistura on the UN-led political process and his tireless efforts in this regard. We agree with him on how resolution 2254 is intrinsically linked to how to solve the situation in Idlib.

Incentives are needed for the day after separation, both for armed groups and for the civilian population. Such incentives can only come from a genuine diplomatic effort on the implementation of 2254.

It is therefore urgent to make progress on the political process in parallel. We lend our full support to the UN's mandate to establish the constitutional committee and prerogative to ensure its credibility and international legitimacy. Women's full and effective participation in the work of the Committee must be ensured. We call on all involved to respect the UN's independent middle list and we encourage the Special Envoy to convene the Committee as soon as possible, as he indicated.

Let's all be clear, a full-scale military operation in Idlib would risk any remaining hope for a sustainable and peaceful settlement in Syria. Only once a credible political transition is firmly under way and when conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and IDPs are in place, will the international donor community be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria.

Mr. President,

The responsibility and ability to avoid a catastrophe and to allow time for dialogue, still lies with Syria and the Astana Guarantors.

As penholders for the Syria humanitarian file, Kuwait and Sweden will continue to ensure that the Council follows developments in Idlib very closely. We have been and we continue to be actively exploring all options for this Council. We stand ready to work with all Council members and

relevant actors on the best way forward. Enough blood has been shed, all efforts should now be political and diplomatic.

I thank you very much, Mr. President.