

Speech: Ending the Syrian Conflict

Thank you very much Mr President, and welcome back to New York.

Thank you to our two briefers, the Special Representative and the Under Secretary-General. And can I repeat the thanks of colleagues for everything your teams do on the ground to help the people of Syria. They need you more than ever, but we are very conscious that this is a very difficult job for them to do.

The conflict is seven and a half years old. It's longer than the Second World War. Over half a million people have died in Syria. Millions have been displaced and chemical weapons have been used, including by the Syrian regime. I think we're running out of superlatives, Mr President, to describe the horrors of this conflict. We meet every month on Syria in this chamber, but this time does feel particularly important. The Turkish plan which they have discussed with the Russians for Idlib, is the crux. It needs to be developed and it needs to be implemented. And as other speakers have said Mr President, Russia in particular needs to uphold it, and we look to Russia to do this because Russia is a P5 member with particular responsibilities for international peace and security and Russia needs to exert her influence on the Syrian authorities. Otherwise, the crimes that are committed against the Syrian people are committed in Russia's name.

We heard earlier, Mr President, about the voices of Idlib. There are 3 million voices in Idlib who will want to know why the Idlib plan cannot be implemented. There are 18 million voices in Syria who want the Council to act to protect them.

A lot has been said today Mr President, some of it very familiar. Some of it common to those Council members who have spoken. I will not rehearse some of the assessments, but I would just like to go on record as saying that the United Kingdom agrees with our American, our Dutch, our Swedish, our Polish and other partners in their assessments. We wholly agree with them.

I want to highlight in particular four points. First of all, I want to agree with what the Representative of France said about the situation on the ground but also what he said about the French, Americans and British taking our responsibilities if chemical weapons are ever used again.

I want to talk about the political process. We want to see the constitutional committee convened. We look to the Special Representative to do this. We believe you have all the authority you need to pick those names. We trust you to do the best you can in the interests of the people of Syria and in the interests of peace. We look for a date to be set and we ask you to report back to this Council by 31 October. We look to the Small Group and the Astana Group to make progress on coming together in support of the United Nations. And I repeat what my Dutch and Swedish colleagues had said about reconstruction money. There are 3 million voices in Idlib and 18 million voices in Syria as a whole who will want to know why progress can't be made

on the political track.

Turning to humanitarian: we would like to hear from the Syrian representative why there are still problems with access and why there are still problems with safe passage that the Under Secretary-General referred to.

I noted what the Representative of Equatorial Guinea said about scorched earth. This is a truly terrible situation, but he is right to draw attention to that and we would like to know what the Syrian regime is doing to put that right.

A large number of speakers, Mr President, talked about IHL and the principles of precaution, discrimination and proportionality. We absolutely uphold those as the United Kingdom. It is unbelievable that hospitals are being attacked. It's even more unbelievable when those hospitals are part of a de-conflicted area.

Last week Mr President, the United Kingdom announced some \$40 million for Idlib. We hope that will help, but I just wanted to go back to what the Under Secretary-General said about is it a reprieve or a stay of execution. This is a dreadful choice, but it has to be a reprieve. There are 3 million voices in Idlib and 18 million voices in Syria who will want to know why this can't happen.

Turning to the wider issues Mr President, awful and horrific as Syrian conflict is, the prospect of a wider interstate war is waiting in the wings. The Syrian people are not only attacked by their own government, they risk being drawn in and the victims of a wider conflict. It is not legitimate to use the territory of Syria to fire missiles at Israel. The risk of miscalculation, a misunderstanding that led to the downing of a Russian aircraft encapsulates on a small scale the much bigger and even more frightening risk of a wider miscalculation. And I would like to, at this point, echo the colleagues who have sent their condolences to our Russian colleagues for the loss of their air crew. But I repeat, the risk of miscalculation is incredibly high. It was a Syrian air force that shot down that Russian plane and the proximate cause was the actions of Iran and Hezbollah on the ground. This ought to serve as a very powerful warning not just to the Syrian authorities but also to the Russians and the Iranians of the prospect of something much wider and even more horrible than we have yet seen in Syria.

Lastly Mr President, the Special Representative referred to Kofi Annan and we will have a tribute to Kofi Annan in the United Nations later this week. This morning, a wreath was laid to Dag Hammerskjöld, who is also one of the iconic Secretaries-General that the UN has been fortunate enough to have lead it. I think we do them no credit, Mr. President, if we allow this conflict to continue. The best legacy we could hand Kofi Annan in response to all his work in 2012 – I was present for that Geneva meeting – the best legacy we could offer is to bring the Syrian conflict to an end and help the Syrian people.

Thank you Mr President.