



# Security Council

Seventieth year

## 7592<sup>nd</sup> meeting

Monday, 21 December 2015, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*


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*President:* Ms. Power . . . . . (United States of America)

*Members:*

Angola . . . . .	Mr. Gimolieca
Chad . . . . .	Mr. Mahamat Zene
Chile . . . . .	Mr. Barros Melet
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Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Safronkov
Spain . . . . .	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Rycroft
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) . . . . .	Mr. Suárez Moreno

## Agenda

### The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/962)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/962)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. António Guterres, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

On behalf of the Security Council, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Guterres. He presided over the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during a very difficult period and made heroic efforts on behalf of people who often cannot speak for themselves but have had in him a tremendous spokesperson. This is his last briefing in that capacity to the Council. We will not be sorry not to hear more bad news from him, but no one has been more creative and agile in mobilizing resources around the world to care for these people, and we could not be more grateful for how much he has put into his tenure at UNHCR, body and soul. We want to wish him every success in the future and hope he will stay involved in caring for the people who have benefited so much from his leadership.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/962, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

I now give the floor to Ms. Kang.

**Ms. Kyung-wha Kang:** On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, I would like to thank the Security Council for this opportunity to brief it on the latest developments in Syria.

Month after month, since the adoption of resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), in February and July 2014, respectively, the Council has been briefed on the suffering of the Syrian people. We have repeatedly described in detail the countless and blatant violations of the basic tenets of international humanitarian and human rights law. For nearly five years, we have watched as Syria has sunk deeper and deeper into violence and brutality, and yet no words can do justice to the despair and devastation that millions of Syrians experience every day.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, visited Syria from 12 to 14 December to find ways to improve the ongoing response efforts. I myself recently visited the cross-border hubs in Jordan and Turkey. During his mission, Mr. O'Brien visited the Al-Waer neighbourhood of Homs city, where a cessation of hostilities was reached. That agreement has allowed the humanitarian community to deliver assistance to all 60,000 people in Al-Waer, whom the United Nations had not been able to reach since January. That is a welcome development that demonstrates what can be done when an agreement is reached between the parties. We are encouraged by that, but reiterate that humanitarian access should be unhindered and sustained at all times, and not be made conditional on negotiated agreements.

The case of Al-Waer highlights the severe needs of many of the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, of whom nearly 400,000 are besieged. From September to November, because of imposed access restrictions and insecurity, the United Nations and its partners reached only 32 per cent of the hard-to-reach locations. Similarly, during the same period, parties to the conflict continued to heavily restrict access to besieged areas. As a result, only some 1 per cent of the besieged population received food assistance, and less than 1 per cent health assistance. That is simply unacceptable. I once again call upon the Syrian authorities to approve the 47 pending inter-agency convoy requests and to allow convoys previously agreed in principle to proceed. I also call on non-State armed groups, as well as listed terrorist groups, to allow the deliveries they are preventing from proceeding.

Cross-border operations authorized by the Council have had a significant impact on improving humanitarian access, bringing life-saving assistance to millions of people in desperate need. As of 30 November, that included food assistance for over 2.4 million people, medical supplies for 4.1 million

treatments and non-food items for 1.6 million people. We are very grateful for the cooperation and support of the Jordanian and Turkish authorities who have made that possible.

However, we are deeply concerned at the escalation of fighting on the ground and airstrikes, reportedly by Syrian and allied forces, in the northern part of the country and their impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Several hospitals, markets and bakeries have been hit, and scores of civilian deaths and injuries are reported almost on a daily basis. The doctors who work to save them have become a target, and they fear that the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems are no longer the shield of protection that they must be. The violence has also disrupted the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Just yesterday, six airstrikes hit a busy marketplace, several public buildings and residential areas in the Idlib city centre. Rescue workers reported that 43 people had been confirmed dead, and approximately 30 more bodies are yet to be identified. According to preliminary reports, at least five aid workers were killed in the attack while performing their duties in Idlib. One White Helmet staff was killed while driving an ambulance carrying injured people to a nearby medical facility. That loss of innocent lives and wanton indiscriminate destruction of populated areas is an outrage, and those responsible must be held accountable. One non-governmental organization (NGO) suspended all activities as of today, as its water, sanitation and hygiene programme manager was killed during the airstrikes on Idlib city. Since late September, at least five international NGOs have suspended operations.

Since the start of this crisis, Physicians for Human Rights have documented 336 attacks on at least 240 medical facilities, and the death of 697 medical personnel. Such attacks are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and an affront to the core of our shared humanity, which must be guarded — caring for the wounded and the sick. I plead with the parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of health facilities, workers and patients under international humanitarian law. Similarly the removal of surgical supplies and trauma kits from convoys by the Syrian Government must end.

In Al-Waer, the Emergency Relief Coordinator visited one of the hundreds of hospitals in Syria that have been either damaged or entirely destroyed during

the conflict. The hospital lacked all basic supplies. Without any blood bags, transfusions were made directly from a donor to a patient, placing patients at a considerable risk of contracting infectious diseases.

Over the past month, violence continued to escalate and intensify across Syria. Indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict resulted in the loss of life, the destruction of infrastructure and the denial of access to basic service of thousands of people. On 13 December, eight students and four staff were killed when an elementary school was reportedly hit in Duma, in eastern Ghouta. A month earlier, on 12 November, eight civilians, including six children, were reportedly injured when a mortar struck a school in the Bab Touma neighbourhood of Damascus.

We again remind all parties to the conflict on their responsibility to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. In particular, as the Syrian skies become more crowded, we urge all forces carrying out airstrikes to comply with this basic principle, which is enshrined in international humanitarian law.

Contamination due to explosive remnants of war is also a major challenge in many parts of the country, and there is a critical need clearing explosive hazards in Syria. That is an immediate, life-saving priority, and the humanitarian partners courageously undertaking that work need our urgent support.

Civilian displacement, which is a defining characteristic of the crisis in Syria, continued at a relentless pace over the past month. More than 121,000 people had to flee their homes in nine governorates, many of them for the second or the third time. Over half of the total population in Syria has been displaced since the beginning of this crisis, with some 6.5 million people displaced internally. Nearly 4.3 million people have fled the country, with neighbouring countries in the region bearing an enormous burden.

Under extremely challenging circumstances, humanitarian partners continue to reach millions of people every month with life-saving assistance. But much more is needed. The humanitarian community recently finalized a humanitarian response plan for 2016, asking for nearly \$3.2 billion to provide life-saving assistance to the 13.5 million people in need inside the country. The plan sets out a joint framework for the response efforts based on prioritized needs across the different sectors. As 2015 draws to an end, the response inside the country is only 42 per cent funded. I call on

all partners to contribute generously to those plans, in preparation for the upcoming conference on the theme “Supporting Syria and the Region, London 2016”. Only with the help of partners can we assist those in need inside the country and in the neighbouring countries.

In a rehabilitation centre at the Turkish border, I saw the deep trauma in the eyes of Syrian girls and boys who had lost arms and legs in violent attacks. One young man had only one arm left. I also saw the commitment and courage of the doctors and nurses who were earnestly trying to help them back to life, physically and mentally. Together, they were emblematic of their country and people — broken in so many ways but still desperately and defiantly struggling to hold on to life.

As we enter a new year, we must do our utmost to bring hope back to Syrians, who have suffered so much. The conflict must be brought to an end through a comprehensive political solution that addresses its underlying causes. We pin our hopes on the efforts of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), and are encouraged by resolution 2254 (2015), which the Security Council adopted on 18 December.

May I reiterate the call made by the Secretary-General to the ISSG while welcoming that Council resolution to apply the necessary pressure on the Syrian parties to immediately implement the following confidence-building measures: to stop the use of indiscriminate weapons against civilians, including barrel bombs; to allow unconditional and unimpeded access for aid convoys; to halt attacks on medical and educational facilities, and lift all restrictions on medical and surgical supplies from humanitarian convoys; and to release all detainees.

It is our earnest hope that the Council, in support of the ISSG, has started to pave the way to peace in Syria.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Kang for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Guterres.

**Mr. Guterres:** I thank you very much, Madam President, for your kind words. Indeed, I have had the enormous privilege in the United Nations to serve the most vulnerable of the vulnerable people in the world.

Nearly 1 million people have arrived by boat in Europe this year, more than 50 per cent of them Syrians. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) just published a survey of over 1,200 of them, and the findings confirmed something

we have long suspected. Syria is experiencing a massive brain drain; 86 per cent of those we interviewed have a secondary education. Almost half have gone to university. One can only imagine the disastrous consequences of such an exodus on the future post-conflict reconstruction of Syria.

The enormous suffering and displacement inside the country continue and the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator just spoke about the humanitarian situation generating them. But the fact that two-thirds of the Syrians we interviewed in Greece had left the country in 2015 — with 37 per cent coming directly from Syria after just a few days in transit — shows how unbearable things have become. That is why it is so urgent to achieve the ceasefire foreseen in the Vienna talks and in the recently adopted resolution 2254 (2015).

It is also obvious that Syrian refugees in the region are descending deeper and deeper into poverty. A recent joint study by UNHCR and the World Bank found that nine in ten Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon live below the respective national poverty lines. Not having been allowed to work legally, refugees are increasingly vulnerable, dependent on scarce humanitarian assistance and forced to go into debt to feed their families. That has a particularly devastating impact on children; they drop out of school, go to work or get married early. Only half of all refugee children are in school. We are also worried that increasing numbers of people have no documentation, which puts them even more at risk, as many new refugee arrivals are not registering due to obstacles and safety concerns. In addition, thousands of children being born to Syrian parents in exile face a potential risk of statelessness. They are not stateless, but they face that risk for lack of registration.

The refugee crisis has had an enormous impact on host countries and communities, affecting all aspects of daily life, from housing and unemployment to general price levels and public sanitation. The economies of Lebanon and Jordan have lost billions and billions of dollars as a result of the Syria conflict. We know Syrians will go on trying to reach Europe until there is a fundamental change in the factors that are pushing them to leave.

There must be more international support to refugees and their hosts, and humanitarian assistance has to match the level of the needs. Even with the recent surge in funding triggered by the refugee influx into

Europe, our Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) was only 52 per cent funded, with dire consequences for many families. Massive investments are required in support of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey to prevent refugees from slipping further into destitution and to help Governments cope with the increased pressure on health and education, water, electricity and other public infrastructure.

Of course such longer-term strategies need a stronger link between development and humanitarian efforts than is currently the case. The 3RP was a first step in this direction, but what is really needed is a change in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation policies and rules that would enable middle-income countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to benefit from several development instruments from which they are currently excluded. I hope that the upcoming London conference will mobilize support not only for the vast humanitarian needs in the region, but also for longer-term approaches that combine self-reliance for refugees with effective international solidarity and responsibility-sharing with the host countries and communities.

We need a new deal between the international community — Europe in particular — and Syria's neighbours. It is clear that without education for their children, access to the labour market and protection against poverty, more and more Syrians will see themselves left with only one option — moving on. After having seen their homes destroyed, their neighbours killed and their loved ones disappear; after having fled multiple times within Syria, faced poverty and lacked basic services in exile, they try to get to Europe to rebuild their future. It breaks my heart to see these families, who have already suffered so much, forced to put their lives into the hands of criminal smugglers and traffickers who exploit them, rob them of their last savings, violate their most basic human rights, and often outright leave them to drown in overcrowded, unseaworthy boats.

That is why I strongly support the idea of a vast programme for resettlement and other forms of admission to European countries and further afield — one that is large enough to help put an end to the tragedies of the Aegean Sea and the chaotic movement through the Balkans. Because if things continue as they are right now, I fear not only for the lives of refugees, but for the future of European asylum, as restrictive measures

are already spreading like a virus that also threatens to contaminate other parts of the world.

Ultimately, the fact that so many of the Syrians arriving in Europe are now coming straight from Syria demonstrates that the violence and human rights abuses inside the country are only getting worse and that the true solution for this humanitarian tragedy must be found inside Syria.

As High Commissioner for Refugees, it is clear that my focus is on the people who have had to flee this war. But in this last meeting, allow me to say a few words as a citizen of the world because we face much more than a refugee emergency. The Syria-Iraq crisis — because that is what it has become — also has an enormous impact on regional stability and global peace and security. While the restoration of the caliphate may have been an aspiration for several groups since its abolishment by Atatürk, we now have, for the first time, a terrorist organization that has the political objective of building a State and that effectively controls a large territory from which it can plan strikes anywhere in the world. This is a radical change even when compared to the worst of the international terrorism we have seen so far.

The link to regional, European and global security is clear. Tens of thousands of young foreign fighters from around the world are in Syria or Iraq today. We know that many of them will travel back home, and we know the risks that entails. But as legitimate as these concerns are, we must not forget that despite the rhetoric we are hearing these days, refugees are the first victims of such terror, not its source. They cannot be blamed for a threat which they are risking their lives to escape.

Yes, of course, there is a possibility that terrorists could try to infiltrate refugee movements, but that possibility exists for all communities and homegrown radicalism is, by far, the biggest threat, as all the recent incidents have shown. Those who reject Syrian refugees, especially if they are Muslim, are the best allies of the propaganda and recruitment efforts of the extremist groups. The war has to end, and quickly. The longer it drags on, the more difficult it will be to keep paying for its consequences.

The European Union just decided to give €3 billion to Turkey for a plan of action to limit the onward movements of refugees — €3 billion to the country with the strongest economy in the region. The total cost exceeds that by far and will continue to rise, as will the price of the future reconstruction of Syria. But more

importantly, if the conflict does not end quickly, it may be the end of Syria as we know it — and the same is true for Iraq. We are all aware of the complexities of the situation which the end of the First World War created in the Middle East — in the words of David Fromkin, that was “a peace to end all peace”.

But we must not allow today’s sectarian divide to escalate to the level of the wars of religion that flattened large parts of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Let us not forget that religious wars are always, essentially, political wars. Peace cannot wait.

The world needs a surge in diplomacy for peace, and I strongly hope that Vienna will be a key step for peace to be re-established as the number one priority on the international agenda.

**The President:** I thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights for his statement and for his tremendous years of service. We are grateful to him.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.*