



Conseil de sécurité

Syrie (humanitaire)

New York, le 21 décembre 2023
Joint Statement avec le Brésil

Mr. President,

I speak on behalf of Switzerland and Brazil, co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file. We thank Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen and OCHA Director for the Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division, Lisa Doughten for their briefings. We also acknowledge the presence of representatives from Syria, Türkiye, and Iran in today's meeting.

This is the last joint statement together with Brazil, before our esteemed co-penholder partner concludes its term on the Council. We would like to thank them for the excellent cooperation throughout and use this opportunity to both look back at this year and towards future developments.

As we are all aware, in 2023, the people of Syria have experienced severe hardship.

The earthquake, with its epicentre in Türkiye, has heavily affected Northern Syria. People lost their homes, families and community members in a matter of minutes. At least 6'000 people were killed with many more injured and thousands of buildings have been destroyed. This has led to further deteriorations of the already dire humanitarian situation.

The number of out of school children grew by at least 25%. Inadequate sanitary infrastructures in makeshift camps for internally displaced persons and the lasting extreme drought and water scarcity facilitated the spread of the cholera outbreak across most of Syria. The large-scale vaccination campaign by the UN has been helpful to transforming cholera cases into milder, more manageable infections. However, it still remains a concern.

At the same time, food insecurity keeps rising and cases of severe malnutrition are increasingly reported, especially with children. Yet, due to lack of funds, the World Food Programme had to reduce drastically rations since the summer, while in 2024, the number of beneficiaries will be significantly reduced. These reductions risk having consequences on access to other basic services, as people will have to prioritize, and leading to increased negative coping mechanisms such as child labour or early marriage.

The worrying increase in violence and attacks in the Northeast and Northwest of the country since October has caused internal displacement, cost lives and significantly damaged civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, repeated airstrikes on the two main airports of the country have disrupted UN humanitarian aid flights, hampering severely the transports of humanitarian goods and personnel. We recall that international humanitarian law must be respected by all parties and the protection of civilians must be ensured at all times.

Moreover, the crossborder mechanism of aid delivery went through a major shift this year. Following the devastations of the earthquake, Syria has agreed to open the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee border crossings in order to facilitate the emergency response. The time-bound authorization has been renewed until 13 February. In July, the authorization for the UN to operate the Bab al-Hawa crossborder aid mechanism from Türkiye to Northwest Syria transitioned from a Security Council mandate to a consent-based arrangement, which is set to expire on 13 January. In the middle of harsh winter conditions, we trust that all of the authorizations will be renewed without conditions and time limit, as the lifeline for millions of people depend on those. Parties must allow and facilitate humanitarian access to all people in need. This is an obligation under international humanitarian law.

All access modalities are necessary – including crossborder and crossline – to support people in need across Syria. We further hope that sufficient funding of the humanitarian response will be ensured, so that lifesaving assistance, as well as early recovery projects can be ensured.

In order to prevent that this grim retrospection transforms into an even bleaker outlook for 2024, the international community has a responsibility to act. A political solution in line with resolution 2254 is urgently needed. In the midst of the turmoil in Gaza with its regional implications, the Security Council must not forget the plight of the Syrian people.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude with expressing our appreciation to the United Nations as well as its partner organisations for their tireless work and efforts in serving the people in need in Syria. Along with cholera vaccination campaigns, delivery of humanitarian items, food rations, water, sanitation, health and protection services, cash and voucher assistance and so much more, these humanitarian actors help avert the humanitarian crisis to deepen even more and provide much needed hope to the people. We need to ensure the context for a safe and efficient implementation of their work. Building on our role on the Council with Brazil so far, Switzerland is committed to keep the Council's continued attention on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Thank you.