

Addressing the lingering humanitarian situation in Syria: UK at the UN Security Council

Thank you, Madam President.

I thank Special Envoy Pederson, USG Griffiths and ASG Zaki for their briefings.

Madam President, last week marked the 11th anniversary of the Syrian conflict. We commend the Syrian people, who courageously and peacefully took to the streets to demand freedom, political reform, and a government that respects and upholds human rights. The Asad regime met those demands with a brutal assault against them that continues today.

This year's anniversary coincides with the appalling Russian aggression against Ukraine. Russia's inhumane and destructive behavior in both conflicts is deplorable.

As we have said many times, there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. We continue to support the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led, political process outlined in resolution 2254. We urge Council members to continue to call for a nationwide ceasefire, unhindered aid access and conditions for safe refugee return.

We commend Geir Pedersen for his continued efforts to facilitate a sustainable resolution to the conflict. He has our full support.

After more than a decade of conflict, the Syrian humanitarian situation remains bleak. 14.6 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance, more than 80% of the population. 6.6 million Syrians are registered as refugees, and 6.7 million are displaced within their own country.

Our hope is that Syrian refugees will eventually be able to return to their homes, but we agree with the UN judgement – conditions do not currently allow this. It is essential that international law is respected, and that any refugee returns are voluntary, safe and dignified.

It is a sad fact that as long as the conflict continues, humanitarian aid will continue to be vital for millions of vulnerable Syrians. And this is why the UK is clear in its position and commitment to the cross-border mandate under resolution 2585.

Madam President, the Council must be prepared to act and support the renewal of this resolution in July. In the meantime, we call on all parties to fulfil their international obligations and ensure access to humanitarian aid.

The United Kingdom continues to oppose engagement with the Asad regime in the absence of behavioural change. Ceding legitimacy to Asad's unreformed,

unrepentant and unreliable regime, for nothing in return, will undermine efforts to end the conflict and prolong the suffering in Syria.

Finally, on the Constitutional Committee talks taking place in Geneva this week, we encourage all parties, especially the Syrian regime, to meaningfully participate. Urgent progress is needed, and we urge the regime's backers to redouble their efforts to find a way forward.

I thank you, Madam President.