

Concern for Syria's civilians amid escalation of violence

Thank you Madam President and thank you to Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and to Amany Qaddour for your briefings.

Firstly, Madam President, we reiterate our serious concerns about the continuing escalation of violence in north-west Syria.

Airstrikes and artillery bombardment, which violate the ceasefire agreement, have become the new normal in Southern Idlib, with around 10-20 airstrikes currently recorded every day, directly affecting civilians and humanitarian workers, as Ms Qaddour set out for us. In recent weeks, eight civilians, including two women and one child, have been killed, including in heavy artillery shelling on residential areas of Idlib city by the regime and its allies.

And since March 2021, 19 humanitarian workers have been killed and 36 injured in the violence. We urge all parties to respect the ceasefire agreement and comply with their obligations to protect civilians and humanitarian workers.

Secondly, turning to the situation in Dara'a, we welcome the recent ceasefire agreement, which we hope will provide a lasting reprieve from violence for civilians living there.

But brutal shelling by the regime military, backed by Iranian-affiliated militias, along with fierce street fighting between regime forces and opposition fighters, has resulted in the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. The estimated 20,000 people who remain in the area still have limited access to food, water, and medication. With approximately 45,000 people displaced, it is more vital that humanitarian agencies are granted unhindered access to Dara'a al Balad.

Thirdly, we note with concern the water crisis in north-east Syria. We welcome the UN's consolidated whole-of-Syria response plan to this and look forward to updates on efforts to address this situation.

Fourth, we commend the ongoing efforts of the UN and its partners to scale up humanitarian shipments cross-border into north-west Syria, in order to meet the vast needs of the 3.4 million people there. And we welcome the recent cross-line World Food Programme delivery to Sarmada, as part of the effort to address those needs.

Finally, Madam President, we wish to express our condolences for all who have lost their lives – for those who have lost their lives to maintain ceasefires and humanitarian operations, including an attack in north-west Syria where Turkish soldiers were killed at the weekend. We welcome Turkey's efforts to uphold the ceasefire agreement and protect civilians from a further regime offensive.

Thank you Madam President.