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Item 2

Oral Update by the High Commissioner for human rights / Item 2 General Debate

Geneva, 27 February 2020

Joint Statement by Austria, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland on the humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria

Madam President,

I have the honor to make this statement on behalf of Austria, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and my own country, Switzerland.

We share the High Commissioner's deep concern about the current military escalation in the Northwest of Syria. The situation in Syria has mobilized this Council for almost a decade. Since the end of last year, renewed hostilities have dramatically aggravated an already unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in and around the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo.

The humanitarian situation is appalling: around one million people, mostly women and children, have been displaced since December 2019. Many of those affected have already been subject to forced displacement and multiple violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. They are now once again seeking shelter -- in the most dire conditions and sub-zero temperatures, and only to find their escape routes blocked. We call on all parties to the conflict to ensure that those who are fleeing can do so in safety and to ensure that those displaced find decent refuge. They must facilitate rapid, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access.

In addition to mass displacement, we are extremely concerned by repeated reports regarding the disregard for the life and safety of civilians, persons hors de combat and protected civilian objects, such as hospitals. All parties to the armed conflict must protect the civilian population and civilian objects, including aid workers and hospitals, and take all feasible precautionary measures.

Madam President,

After almost ten years there is still no peace in sight in Syria. On the contrary, the continuation of military hostilities leads once again to mass displacement and humanitarian mayhem in Syria. We call upon all parties to the conflict to stop the violence. It is clear that only a political solution can lead to a lasting peace that guarantees the rights of all Syrians. We therefore call on all States to lend full support to the Geneva peace process under the auspices of the United Nations in order to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people and return to the respect of human dignity.