



Security Council Briefing on Syria (Political/Humanitarian), 28 February 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Her Excellency Ambassador Vanessa Frazier
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

[I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Representative of Malta]

Let me begin by thanking our briefers, Under Secretary Griffiths, Special Envoy Pedersen, and Syria Response Director for Save the Children, Rasha Muhrez, for their remarks to the Council today.

Malta is grateful for your briefings and collective calls to action as we face this new emergency in Syria.

As we have heard this morning, the acute impact of the earthquake is still being felt throughout Syria. Right across the country, and nowhere more than in the northwest, the scale of the crisis exceeds what was unimaginable less than one month ago.

Water and sanitation, shelter, fuel, food, and protection are now amongst the most immediate needs of the population. Prior to this last catastrophe, some 15.3m Syrians were already in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. Now more than ever, we must work collectively to address this dual humanitarian crisis.

Council members, the impact of the disaster on children has been devastating. We have heard of 1,300 schools or temporary learning facilities



in Syria damaged or destroyed, with educational supported needed for some 6.4m children.

Unaccompanied and separated children are in urgent need of protection and appropriate care arrangements while family tracing and case management can take place.

Families require emergency psychosocial support to help them recover from the horror they have lived through. Women and girls deserve protection, and a gender sensitive humanitarian response. Nothing less than immediate, sustained, humanitarian assistance is what is needed now to save lives and avoid the worst of the secondary impacts of this earthquake.

We remain supportive of the principled delivery of humanitarian aid to all those most in need, and through the most effective and direct modalities.

In this regard, Malta welcomes the opening of the border crossings at Bab Al Salam and Al Ra'ee. We call for greater support to these operations and for member states to assist in unlocking the supply chain challenges the UN is facing; allowing the aid operation to scale up in size and speed up to rapidly meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

Malta expresses our hope that crossline operations can also be scaled up in the days ahead. However, we underscore the continued importance of Security Council Resolution 2672 and the additional border crossings. The



scale and scope of which cannot be matched by crossline operations at this time.

Council members, this crisis is yet another devastating blow to the population of Syria. This earthquake has magnified and exacerbated the humanitarian suffering in Syria, yet we must not forget it is far from the cause of it.

12 years of conflict, and countless crimes committed by the Syrian government and parties to this conflict, have inflicted untold pain and suffering upon millions. Malta reiterates that, even in the face of the latest tragedy, we must remain steadfast in our calls for progress on the political track, in line with Security Council resolution 2254.

Malta was dismayed to hear reports of government shelling in the northwest in the aftermath of the earthquake and again calls for a nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria.

We urge the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva and express our support for this Syrian owned and Syrian led process under the auspices of the UN.

We reiterate that returns of Syrian refugees, and those internally displaced, must be safe, legal, and voluntary in accordance with the criteria set by UNHCR.



We again call again for the transparent and verifiable release of all those detained arbitrarily in Syria, and for the provision of information on the whereabouts, and fate, of the thousands still missing.

In conclusion, Malta fully supports the work of Special Envoy Pedersen and his *Step-for-Step* initiative, and we call on Damascus to engage faithfully with his good offices.

The 6 February Turkiye-Syria earthquake is now a tragic opportunity to refocus and redouble our efforts on ensuring a just and lasting peace for the people of Syria.