Mr. President,

Since the passage of resolution 2401, the Secretary-General has on many occasions called for its full implementation.

However, rather than implement the resolution of this Council, we have seen parties to the conflict sustain intense military activity at an enormous human cost.

Today, we have been asked to provide an update on the humanitarian situation in Raqqa and Rukban. We have also been asked to cover humanitarian issues in Syria at large, in particular in Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin.

Let me start with Raqqa city and Rukban. The population of those two places total only about 1 percent of the number of Syrians in need of humanitarian help, but their needs are no less important than those of the 99 percent of their compatriots needing assistance in other parts of the country.

Mr. President,

On 1 April the United Nations undertook an assessment mission to Raqqa. Since ISIL was forced out of Raqqa in October, nearly 100,000 people have returned to Raqqa city. However, conditions are not conducive for returns, due to the high levels of unexploded
ordnance and improvised explosive device contamination, widespread and severe infrastructural damage, and a lack of basic services. Every week, there have been over 50 casualties reported due to remnants of war. With the onset of spring there is concern that children, playing outside, are particularly vulnerable. An estimated 70-80 percent of all buildings inside Raqqa city are destroyed or damaged.

While public services are slowly resuming, with at least 37 bakeries operational, the city lacks electricity and mobile communications, and water is only pumped at a very limited capacity to the outskirts of the city. Up to 95 percent of households who have returned to Raqqa are food insecure. Health services are lacking or severely limited. Some schools have reopened, though they are lacking school materials and other supplies. Following the 1 April assessment, United Nations agencies are planning deliveries of humanitarian assistance and programmatic interventions. This response will support the ongoing activities of humanitarian organisations already active inside Raqqa, who are providing food, health and other basic services. It will also complement the ongoing response for those displaced and in need across north-east Syria where nearly 900,000 people receive assistance each month.

Mr. President,

In Rukban, some 50,000 people continue to be in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. Water and basic health care are provided from Jordan, but there is a pressing need for better service provision and in some cases referrals elsewhere for medical help. People in this area last received assistance, delivered from Jordan, in early January.

Government of Syria approval for a UN inter-agency convoy from Damascus to Rukban was received on 18 March. Humanitarian agencies are working closely with the United States, the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to make this delivery possible, noting the importance of finalizing arrangements for the safety of the operation, as current security guarantees only permit movement to area some 10 kilometers outside
of Rukban. Discussions continue on how aid can be best delivered, providing safe delivery of life-saving help to those in need.

Mr. President,

The town of Duma and other areas in eastern Ghouta are now under the control of the Government of Syria. After years of deprivation, under siege, those who remain in this area continue to require urgent assistance that we, as the humanitarian community, have yet to be able to provide. Access to reach the people throughout eastern Ghouta is critical.

The UN and partners are responding to the mounting humanitarian needs of the 155,000 people displaced from eastern Ghouta with food, shelter, health and other assistance and protection services. However, for both those in overcrowded IDP sites around eastern Ghouta, as well as those who left on buses for Idlib and Aleppo governorates, their situation is precarious.

Of the 155,000 who have been displaced, approximately 63,000 have moved north to Idlib and Aleppo. They join the nearly 400,000 people who were displaced from southern Idlib since 15 December. As a result, there has been a 25 percent increase in Idlib’s displaced population, with 1.2 million of the 2 million people in the governorate now displaced, many of them multiple times. This extreme situation places incredible pressure on the host communities and the humanitarian actors working cross-border to provide assistance and services. Fighting among non-State armed opposition groups in Idlib further complicates the situation for those in need in the area.

Those remaining in Afrin, as well as the 137,000 people who were displaced to government-controlled Tel Refaat and the surrounding areas, are also in dire need of humanitarian aid and must be granted freedom of movement. This includes those who need medical evacuations from Tel Refaat to nearby Aleppo.
Between 2 and 4 April, several Turkish-facilitated UN cross-border shipments consisting of food supplies, health and other relief items were sent to assist people in need in Afrin district. On 25 March, the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) delivered assistance to 50,000 people in need in Tal Refaat. While these are positive developments, overall, humanitarian partners are still struggling to gain sustained access to Afrin, and freedom of movement for internally displaced persons (IDPs) remains severely limited.

On 25 March, the United Nations submitted a request to the Syrian authorities for the deployment of an inter-agency surge team to scale-up the UN’s operational capacity in Syria. Response to the request for 17 additional UN staff to be deployed for a four-week period was received on 11 April – authorizing the deployment of 12 UN staff.

As we approach the conference in Brussels on 24-25 April, we have an immediate opportunity to progress on easing the humanitarian suffering by fully funding humanitarian operations. With an appeal that is currently less than 15 percent funded, I cannot overstate the importance of sustaining and scaling up the international response.

Thank you.