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Joint Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and Karen Smith, United Nations Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, on the situation in northeast Syrian Arab Republic

(New York, 15 October 2019) United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and the United Nations Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Karen Smith, expressed their alarm over the current situation in northeast Syria following the launch of a military operation by Turkey on 09 October.

The Special Advisers stated that “the civilians of Syria continue to live through one of the worst conflicts of our time, with repeated violations of their basic rights and protections guaranteed under international law. This latest escalation of the conflict again puts civilians at grave risk. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported on several civilian casualties, including allegations of summary executions, and humanitarian actors report that at least 160,000 civilians have been displaced in the six days since the start of the military operation.”

The Special Advisers stressed that Turkish authorities and all parties to the conflict in Syria need to ensure strict adherence to the legal obligation to protect civilians. This is the responsibility of all State and non-State actors. No civilian should be forced to leave their home against their will. In addition, any return of refugees needs to be voluntary and when conditions are safe for them to do so sustainably. The Special Advisers also urged the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to do more to uphold the responsibility to protect civilians in the Syrian conflict. The repeated failure of the Security Council to speak with a united voice and to take action to protect civilian populations at risk of serious violations goes against the responsibility to protect principle, a commitment made by all Member States.

The Special Advisers reiterated calls for de-escalation and for a political solution to the Syria crisis stating that “far too many civilians have already been victims of atrocity crimes in Syria since the start of the conflict in 2011 and millions of Syrians remain at risk of these crimes. Until there is a sustainable political solution to the crisis, one in which all communities in the country have a voice and their rights can be protected, the risk of atrocity crimes remains a reality”.

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