

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA GEIR O. PEDERSEN
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON SYRIA
24 August 2021**

Thank you so much, Mr. President (India, Amb. Tirumurti),

1. Over the past seventeen months, I have been informing you that, as compared with past phases of the conflict, there was a relative calm in Syria across largely frozen front lines of conflict. I have however been highlighting the constant incidents and the danger they bear on civilians, and the fragility of the situation. I have urged all to work towards a nationwide ceasefire.
2. We have very regrettably seen an escalation in many parts of Syria recently, and Martin will provide details on the humanitarian situation, and of course a warm welcome to you Martin in your new capacity.
3. Let me turn to the situation in the southwest first and especially in Daraa governorate. We have seen significant deployments of troops, heavy shelling, and ground clashes. We have seen civilian casualties and displacement - including a significant number of women and children - and damage to civilian infrastructure. We have contacted all sides and engaged a wide range of Syrians, including on the ground, as well as key international players. There has been an intensification of Russian mediation efforts in recent days. We repeat our calls on all parties to end the violence immediately and to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is needed to all affected areas and communities, including Daraa al-Balad.

Mr. President,

4. I have requested access for my team to the area, and the UN family has requested the same to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid. And we are urging a sustainable agreement that paves the way to restoring a safe and secure environment, alleviating the fears and grievances of the local population, addressing social, humanitarian and economic needs, averting any displacement and allowing the residents of Daraa to return to their homes in safety and dignity.
5. But there is also troubles in other places of Syria, let me now turn to the situation in northwest Syria, and I am including here areas of: Idlib, northern Latakia, and Aleppo, as well as western Hama. The last months have witnessed an intensification in airstrikes and shelling - leading to dozens of civilian casualties, including women and children, and the largest displacement recorded since March 2020.
6. And in the northeastern areas of Raqqa and Hassakeh we have seen further violence involving non-state armed groups. This has resulted in casualties, including among civilians. Meanwhile, humanitarian concerns over repeated water cuts in the northeast remain critical

affecting vital infrastructure, including hospitals, irrigation networks and water stations. I am sure Martin will return to this in greater detail.

Mr. President,

7. A deadly blast targeted a military bus in Damascus on 4 August. Syria has also been subjected to attacks by Security Council-listed terrorist groups elsewhere in past month. These unacceptable attacks remind us that efforts to counter terrorism are essential, and to be effective require cooperation and coordination, and actions strictly within the bounds of international law. This must prioritize the protection of civilians and not lead to new waves of displacements and destruction.
8. There have been reports of significant airstrikes attributed to Israel in recent weeks, including a notable incident in Damascus on 20 August and indeed the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria continues to be compromised.

Mr. President,

9. These developments remind us that the conflict in Syria is far from over, and that we need a credible political process as well as more sustained international cooperation.
10. I continue my efforts to facilitate convening a sixth session of the Small Body of the Constitutional Committee. I have met twice virtually in recent weeks with the Co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission, Mr. al-Bahra. Meanwhile, my Head of Office in Damascus has met with the Co-Chair nominated by the Government, Dr. Kuzbari, and I have requested to visit Damascus. We are continuing our efforts to engage to find a way forward. But it is not easy. I strongly appeal for flexibility on the basis of my bridging proposal to overcome the impasse and convene a new session as soon as possible.

Mr. President,

11. The impasse of course highlights issues of lack of trust, and also of political will, which have paralyzed efforts to advance a political solution. As you know I have long urged that we work on a wider set of issues to try to unlock modest steps and gestures that could build some trust. For instance, action on the crucial files of detainees, abductees and missing persons remain essential.
12. Let us also remember that the economic crisis continues to present great hardships on Syrians in their daily lives, from serious energy shortages, to decreased food supply. I reiterate my concern about Syrian livelihoods against the backdrop of conflict, the various challenges associated with it and the crisis emanating from Lebanon.
13. Let me also repeat that it is vital that any humanitarian effects of sanctions that could exacerbate the plight of ordinary Syrians be avoided, in particular in terms of over-compliance.

Mr. President,

14. The issues facing Syrians are indeed far from solely in the hands of the Syrians. A constructive international diplomacy is plainly needed. The Security Council's adoption of Resolution 2585 in July was an important humanitarian measure. For its part, the United Nations will do all they can to facilitate implementation of all aspects of the resolution and Martin will mention more on this. But the resolution also sent a message that key states – in particular the Russian Federation and the United States – could cooperate on Syria beyond the humanitarian track. There is a need to follow up and build on the adoption of Resolution 2585, in other areas of common interest and common concern. That will be essential if we are to make modest progress step by step. I discussed this in depth with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov when I visited Moscow in July. I have had further contacts with the United States as well – and with many other governments. And this will of course continue.
15. I am asking key states to work with me on exploratory discussions on a package of concrete, mutual and reciprocal steps that are defined with realism and precision, and that are implemented in parallel and are verifiable. Such steps are needed, above all, to help save Syrian lives, ease suffering, promote regional stability and further the implementation of resolution 2254. These are all interests around which members of this Council and other key international players see eye to eye. But I believe that more buy-in is needed in the form of relevant players being ready not only to identify what they seek but also what they can deliver on. I have today touched upon several issues that could be considered as part of such a broader package of reciprocity. I am ready to use the convening power of the United Nations in Geneva if this can help create prospects for accommodations. I will continue my consultations.

Mr. President,

16. My thinking is continuously shaped by my interactions with Syrians inside and outside the country - women and men from all walks of life, through the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, and elsewhere. A very common sentiment I hear from them - beyond the urgent needs on the ground today - is a real fear that the Syrian people are being forgotten.
17. I therefore appeal to all of you , who were able to come together on Resolution 2585 in July, to keep working in that same direction: to help facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the women and men of Syria, and restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, as envisaged in resolution 2254.

Thank you.