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**United Nations Special Envoy for Syria**  
**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**  
**30 September 2019**

Mr President,

1. In one month, on 30 October 2019, I intend to convene 150 Syrian men and women for the launch of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva.
2. I believe this should be a sign of hope for the long-suffering Syrian people. It comes after the agreement of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Negotiations Commission to a package deal of the nominees to the committee and a Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure to guide its work.
3. I believe we should stop for a minute and take stock of the significance of this agreement. This is indeed the first concrete political agreement between the Government and the Opposition to begin to implement a key aspect of Security Council resolution 2254 – to set a schedule and process for a new constitution. It implies a clear acceptance of the other as an interlocutor. It commits their nominees to sit together in face-to-face dialogue and negotiation, while at the same time opening the space for civil society at the table. And it is also a shared promise to the Syrian people to try to agree under the auspices of the United Nations on new constitutional arrangements for Syria – a new social contract to help repair a broken country. This can be a door opener to a wider political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.
4. Seizing this opportunity will not be easy. Syria remains in the gravest crisis, with violence and terrorism continuing, five international armies operating on its territory, appalling suffering and abuses, a deeply divided society, and a sense of despair among its people inside and outside the country. Trust and confidence is almost non-existent. The Constitutional Committee will really matter if it becomes a step along the difficult path out of this conflict and to a new Syria, and if its launch and work is accompanied by other steps to build trust and confidence among Syrians and between Syria and the international community.

Mr President,

5. The Secretary-General formally announced the agreement on 23 September. Allow me to join the Secretary-General in welcoming the progress made by the Government and the opposition. I particularly thank Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Moallem, and Syrian Negotiations Commission leader Hariri, for their engagement with me in a sustained dialogue to help bring this agreement about.
6. Like the Secretary-General, I am grateful to the wide range of Syrian women and men – including the Women’s Advisory Board, participants in the Civil Society Support Room, and Syrians from all parts of the country – who have offered their counsel and insight.
7. I join the Secretary-General in expressing my particular appreciation to the governments of Russia, Turkey and Iran for their support in the conclusion of this agreement.
8. I also join the Secretary-General in expressing my thanks for the support of the members of this Council including all five permanent members. And I join him in expressing appreciation to the Small Group for their support.

Mr President,

9. The Secretary-General transmitted the agreed Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Committee via you to the Security Council – you all now have it as document S/2019/775.
10. The agreement is framed by key principles that must underpin any process and any settlement. These include respect for the United Nations charter, Security Council resolutions, Syria’s sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, and the Syrian-led and owned nature of the process. The principles also include the objective of UN supervised elections envisaged in resolution 2254 based on a new constitution. They also recognize the need for a broader political process to implement resolution 2254.
11. The Constitutional Committee has a clear mandate: it shall, within the context of the UN-facilitated Geneva process, prepare and draft for popular approval a constitutional reform as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254. The constitutional reform shall, *inter alia*, embody in the constitution and constitutional practices of the country the letter and spirit of the 12 living intra-Syrian essential principles that emerged in the Geneva process and were affirmed in Sochi. The Committee may review the 2012 constitution including in the context of other Syrian constitutional experiences and amend the current constitution or draft a new constitution.
12. The constitutional reform adopted by the Constitutional Committee must be popularly approved and transposed into the national legal order -- by a means that will need to be agreed.

13. There is a clear, balanced and I believe workable structure. There will be two equal co-chairs from the government and opposition who proceed in consensus and exert the prerogatives necessary to ensure the Committee's smooth functioning. There is small body of 45 – 15 government nominees, 15 opposition nominees, 15 from civil society – to prepare and draft proposals. And there is a large body of 150 – 50 government nominees, 50 opposition nominees, 50 from civil society – to discuss and adopt proposals.
14. The agreement promotes consensus within the committee where possible, but also specifies a decision-making threshold of 75%. All main components need to be on board for proposals to move forward. No one bloc can dictate the outcomes. And the incentive exists to reach out to the middle ground and across the divide.
15. The parties have agreed and committed to work expeditiously and continuously to produce results and continued progress, without foreign interference or external deadlines – and also without preconditions or insisting on agreement on one point before discussion can begin on another.
16. The parties have welcomed and embodied in the agreement the facilitation role of the United Nations – including using good offices, and reporting to this Council on progress. Both parties have told me that they have confidence in the United Nations and want to work with us in a sustained and constructive manner. We will do everything we can to meet their expectations.

Mr President,

17. The names of the 150 members will be released by the United Nations once all nominees have formally confirmed their participation. But let me say a word about them.
18. Beyond the government and opposition nominees, the middle third comprises 50 civil society actors. They hail from different religious, ethnic and geographical backgrounds, hold a range of political leanings, and include respected experts. Some live inside Syria; others are based outside Syria. Facilitating agreement on this list has been the most complex part of the deal. Ensuring sufficient credibility, balance and inclusivity -- in a manner that keeps all on board -- has been a key priority for us. The result is a negotiated compromise, and like all compromises, no one is completely satisfied.
19. We are proud that nearly half the civil society list are women, and that we have around 30% women in the overall 150. Any viable and sustainable peace process needs to have women, of all political persuasions, at the table – who represent over half its population and who, throughout the course of the conflict, have taken on an ever-more prominent role in their communities.

20. We have worked hard to secure guarantees -- and here I quote from the agreement -- that “members of the Constitutional Committee and their relatives or political and civil society organizations and entities of which they are part are not subject to threat or harassment or actions against person or property directly related to their work in the Constitutional Committee and to addressing and resolving any incidents and concerns should they arise.” These guarantees have been solemnly given and must be respected.
21. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Syrian experts and activists, men and women, on all sides, have done outstanding work, throughout the years of this conflict, developing ideas and proposals as basis for lasting peace. In doing this, they helped create a “public space” for democratic and civic debates – and we have actively supported and facilitated this, as have others. Not all of them could be on this Committee. But I am confident that they will continue to make their voices heard. I am equally confident that committee members understand their responsibilities towards all Syrians and their obligation to listen to and take on board the ideas of others. I will continue to consult widely and closely among Syrian civil society, including through the Civil Society Support Room and with the Women’s Advisory Board, and with all components of the Syrian society – including in the North-East of the country.
22. Above all let me stress: the future constitution of Syria belongs to the Syrian people and them alone. The United Nations will jealously guard the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led nature of the process. Syrians, not outsiders, will draft the constitution, and the Syrian people must popularly approve it. We will be there to facilitate the process in a manner that ensures its continuing credibility, balance and inclusivity, and to help when needed.

Mr President,

23. Let me assure all of you and the Syrian people that I am fully aware that the constitutional committee alone cannot resolve the conflict. We must look squarely at the facts, and address the crisis more comprehensively in line with resolution 2254.
24. A humanitarian crisis continues in Idlib especially and in many other parts of Syria. Idlib is calmer today than it was last month. But violence continues. And there is an ever-present threat of Idlib, or other parts of Syria, being engulfed in all out conflict.
25. Meanwhile, terrorist groups, listed by this Council, continue to metastasize touching all Syrian communities. A solution is essential that does not endanger civilians – a solution to HTS and other extremist groups in Idlib, and to a resurgent ISIL elsewhere.
26. Violent confrontations between international players remain frequent – inside Syria and across its international borders. The specter of a broader regional conflagration still looms over the country. The country’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence is not respected.
27. Steps on de-escalation, towards a nationwide ceasefire, are absolutely essential - because the violence and killing must stop, because there is no military solution, and because

resolution 2254 tells us so. A ceasefire – with a shared international understanding of how to combat terrorism in a manner that protects civilians and upholds international law – is vital in its own right, and would help animate the political process.

28. Tens of thousands remain detained, abducted and missing; their families suffering from untold pain and daily challenges. I appeal for action on detainees, abductees and the missing – particularly the release of women and children. This would be a vital step. Now is the time, Mr. President. Now is the time for action on this.
29. Millions remain displaced, inside and outside Syria, many mired in hopelessness and fear. Meaningful steps will be required to create an environment for refugees and IDPs to return in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner.
30. Millions live in poverty, facing widespread commodity shortages and an economy that lies in tatters. Lawlessness and fragmentation abound, weakening the social fabric and prospects to build the rule of law and a culture of respect for human rights. This too must be our concern.
31. That is why, as we look towards the first meeting of the Committee, I urge all stakeholders – the Syrian parties and their backers – to think more broadly, more inclusively and with the ultimate objective of a country at peace. I appeal for them to seize upon the momentum that the Committee offers and take *concrete* actions, to build trust and confidence.
32. Language matters too. I hope that the Syrian parties and the international community can find the right words to clearly signal their good intentions - to each other and to the Syrian people - to open a new chapter and create new and better realities on the ground.
33. Ultimately, I hope that we can begin to build a positive dynamic. Step by step – by the Syrian parties, and also by international parties too -- we need to build the kind of safe, calm and neutral environment that could make Syrians feel that the political process can restore their country and respond to their aspirations.
34. This requires genuine international dialogue and cooperation in support of the Geneva process. Any concrete steps could be reciprocal, building trust between Syrians – and between Syria and the international community too. I know this will not be easy, but I sense among my key partners an honest understanding that it is indeed necessary. I will keep working on this.
35. Ultimately, the Syrian people must be able to participate in “free and fair elections under United Nations supervision” in line with resolution 2254, in which all Syrians, including those in the diaspora, are eligible to participate. Elections, held to the highest international standards, take a long time to prepare, and that is why I have already begun to think about how the United Nations could plan for this task, in dialogue, of course, with all Syrian parties.

Mr President,

36. Let me conclude with a simple request to this Council. I have greatly appreciated the excellent dialogue I have had with members of the Council, and I will need your support in the difficult work ahead.
37. I appeal to you to unite behind a revitalized effort by the United Nations with the parties to move forward the Geneva political process. I believe this moment is an opportunity for the Council to publicly support the process you have mandated in resolution 2254.
38. The road ahead will be long and difficult, but if the Council can unite, and keep united, behind the Syrian-led and owned process that the United Nations will seek to facilitate, I believe we can begin to make a real difference for the people of Syria, for the region, and for international peace and security.

Thank you, Mr President.