

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA  
GEIR O. PEDERSEN  
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL  
27 October 2020**

Thank you, Mr. President,

Today, I am briefing you from Beirut.

1. As we mark this month twenty years since the passage of Security Council resolution 1325, let me recall the central role that Syrian women must play and are indeed playing in the political process mandated by resolution 2254 – as members of the Constitutional Committee, as advisors to me and my office, as members of technical bodies, and within wider civil society.
2. Syrian women’s rights leaders have said to me that further efforts for the full, direct and meaningful participation of Syrian women are essential, and reminded me that the process and its outcomes must serve the interests, priorities and aspirations of Syrian women in their diversity of needs and experiences.
3. I have heard from the Women’s Advisory Board and other women leaders that what is needed above all is a credible and inclusive political process that ends the conflict and the deep suffering of the Syrian people, and that brings about a sustainable peace with the meaningful participation of Syrian women, and that has women’s safety, basic needs, dignity, rights and equality at its core. I will continue to do everything I can to help facilitate this.

Mr. President,

4. I have said from the outset of my mandate, nearly two years ago, that the conflict cannot be resolved solely by constitutional reform or a new constitution. But progress in the Constitutional Committee could be a door opener to a deeper and wider process, if two things happen:
  - first, if the Committee work continuously and credibly in accordance with its mandate;
  - and second, if that work is accompanied by other steps by the Syrian parties and international players to build trust and confidence, step by step, and gradually develop a wider political process to implement resolution 2254.
5. It is particularly important for the Constitutional Committee to proceed in accordance with the agreement that established it, which was circulated, and let me remind you, by the Secretary-General to the Security Council as document S/2019/775 and that guides the Committee. In particular, the Co-Chairs should in consensus proceed with agendas and workplans in a way that enable all issues to be considered, without making consideration of issues dependent on agreement on other issues and without preconditions. And the Committee should work expeditiously and continuously to produce results and continued progress without foreign interference, including externally imposed timelines; and focus exclusively on its mandate: to prepare and draft for popular approval a constitutional reform.

6. As you know, we were not able to convene a Fourth session of the Small Body in October as we had hoped, and as you know, there was no agreed agenda for it. The Co-Chair nominated by the Syrian government took the position that the Third Session agenda – focusing on national foundations and principles – should remain the agenda for a Fourth Session. The Co-Chair nominated by the opposition SNC took the position that the agenda for the Fourth Session should focus on the preamble, constitutional principles, rights and freedoms, the rule of law, or the structure of the constitution.
7. As facilitator, I proposed over a month ago a bridging compromise, which the Co-Chair nominated by the SNC accepted but the Co-Chair nominated by the Government did not. However, in my discussions in recent days in Damascus there was some valuable narrowing of the differences, with a variant explored that, if properly clarified, could provide a way out and enable consensus between the Co-Chairs on the agenda for the next two meetings. I have been in communication with both Co-Chair Kuzbari and Co-Chair Al-Bahra today as finer points are clarified. We have no agreement yet and of course nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. But if we are able to find an agreement within the next two days, it should be possible to meet in Geneva sometime during the month of November this year.

Mr President

8. Beyond the Constitutional Committee, there are positive elements on which we could build a wider process. Some key stakeholders have signaled that they see the military phase of the conflict as ending, renewing attention and focus on the political process. Front-lines have not shifted in around 8 months. And the number of civilians killed in recent months has, according to monitoring groups, been at lowest levels since 2011.
9. A political deal to implement 2254 is indeed the way to restore Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and meet the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians. Without that, dangers will only accrue – and the last month reminds us of this.
10. Monday saw a targeted airstrike on a training camp of Failaq al-Sham in the north-west - an armed opposition group represented in the SNC, the Constitutional Committee, and the Astana meetings, who are reported to have suffered a very large number of casualties. Today, Mr. President, armed opposition groups and listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham have retaliated with shelling and rocket fire into Syrian Government-controlled areas, claiming to have inflicted casualties. These dynamics can unravel the precious calm achieved through positive Russian-Turkish cooperation - cooperation which already faces challenges, given that joint patrols have remain stalled for over a month. I appeal to both Russia and Turkey to work to contain the situation.

11. Incidents in Northern Rural Aleppo continue, including a truck bomb in al-Bab that reportedly killed more than a dozen civilians and injured more than 60 civilians, as well as an attack on a fuel market in Jerablus that some media attributed to a missile attack, causing civilian casualties.
12. We have also seen recurring kidnappings and assassinations in the southwest, targeting a broad spectrum of political, military and civic actors and underscoring the ongoing fragility of the reconciliation agreements brokered over two years ago.
13. Tensions have continued among the five foreign militaries active in Syria, that have regularly resulted in confrontations, including further airstrikes attributed to Israel this month.
14. Security Council-listed terrorist groups remain a significant danger across Syria and have stepped up their attacks of late - in particular in the central desert region where fighting between ISIL and Syrian Government forces resulted in multiple casualties on both sides.
15. This month saw the mufti of Damascus killed by an explosive device on 22 October – an attack that remains unclaimed.
16. Yet despite all these incidents, front lines are not changing, and it ought to be possible to work towards a nationwide ceasefire while ensuring that the significant continuing dangers posed by proscribed terrorist groups are addressed cooperatively and effectively, and in line with international humanitarian law.
17. Syrians remained displaced in their millions. A serious and cooperative effort is needed involving all key players to create the conditions that UNHCR has indicated are important for safe, dignified, informed and voluntary return – and indeed, an effort to create a safer, calmer, more neutral environment in Syria
18. And, frankly, now is precisely the time when one of my key priorities – addressing the fate of tens of thousands of detained, abducted or missing Syrians -- should be energetically acted upon.
19. USG Lowcock will brief you on the dire humanitarian situation. But let me also note that ordinary Syrians are paying a bitter and unprecedented price given the economic devastation resulting from a decade-long conflict and its repercussions – internal and external. A recent spate of agricultural fires and fuel price hikes have only added to the many factors causing

suffering, and to unprecedented food insecurity. The backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imminent winter will no doubt augment these challenges. At a time of severe economic stress, it remains important to continue to avoid and mitigate effects on ordinary Syrians of targeted sanctions measures.

20. And let us recall – as 2254 does, and as the agreement to launch the Constitutional Committee explicitly affirmed – that the culmination of a political process would be free and fair elections, pursuant to a new constitution, administered under UN supervision, to the highest international standards, with all Syrians including in the diaspora eligible to participate.

Mr President,

21. In short, a wider and more credible and effective process is plainly needed. Relative progress in establishing the building blocks of a ceasefire came about because of the concerted efforts of some key international stakeholders, demonstrating that reaching compromises is indeed possible. We need a process that extends this cooperation and is inclusive of all issues, and all players a process that can address the *range* of elements contained in 2254. This needs to be underpinned by mutual and reciprocal measures, pursued and supported meaningfully by all.
22. I had substantial and wide-ranging discussions on all of these issues when I met with Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Walid Moallem in Damascus. We discussed the need to take stock of where we are in the implementation of resolution 2254 and explore whether new and different approaches can be taken. I have also discussed this with opposition SNC President Al-Abdeh today. I will seek to deepen my dialogue with the Syria parties and key players in the months ahead in reviewing where we stand on resolution 2254, seeking to identify how best to develop a wider process.

Thank you, Mr. President.