

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA
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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON SYRIA
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Madam President (Amb. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US)

1. The Syrian conflict has now raged for ten years – roughly the length of World War 1 and World War 2 combined.
2. Ten years ago, peaceful popular demonstrations were violently suppressed. Syria was sent into a spiral of armed conflict. In time many countries, and fighters from across the whole world, came to Syria to fight in one form or another. It must sometimes feel to ordinary Syrians that they are all trapped in an endless and global conflict.
3. The Syrian tragedy will go down as one of the darkest chapters in recent history – the Syrian people are among the greatest victims of this century.
4. On this grim anniversary, I want to commemorate Syrian victims and remember Syrian suffering and resilience in the face of unimaginable violence and indignities that *all* Syrians – men and women, from *all* areas and *all* backgrounds – have faced over ten long years.
5. They have been injured, maimed and killed in every way imaginable – their corpses even desecrated.
6. They have been snatched from the streets, thrown into prisons or abducted, disappeared, mistreated, tortured, paraded in cages, and ransomed or exchanged in prisoner swap deals.
7. They have witnessed their homes, markets, hospitals, schools and utilities being destroyed by airstrikes, barrel bombs, rocket and mortar fire and IEDs.
8. They have endured the unspeakable horrors of chemical weapons.
9. They have been denied humanitarian assistance, sometimes under sieges in which perpetrators deliberately starved the population.
10. They have faced human rights violations on an enormous and systematic scale and endured countless violations of international humanitarian law.
11. They have seen the largest Security Council-listed terrorist organisation in recent memory take over a third of their country – a group so violent and extreme that it enslaved women and girls and sold them in markets.
12. They have seen foreign fighters flooding into their country.

13. They have seen front-lines and fault lines emerge across their country, as five foreign armies jostle in the theatre.
14. They have been displaced into city-sized camps, or to sleep in the open in olive groves and abandoned houses, only to be displaced again and again, in baking heat and freezing snow.
15. They have fled Syria, often only to face further poverty and discrimination, or worse, perishing at sea in search of refuge.
16. They have been dispossessed of their lands and homes.
17. They have watched their middle-income country dragged back into de-development and destitution on such a scale that it will take generations to rebuild.
18. They have experienced corruption, mismanagement, sanctions and economic meltdown. Nine in ten Syrians now live in poverty. Their currency has collapsed, with savings and livelihoods evaporating overnight, and their money worth a miniscule fraction of what it was before the war.
19. They have waited for hours queueing for bread and fuel, searched the pharmacies for medicines that were not on the shelves, or found their hospitals lacking essential medical equipment.
20. They have faced the COVID-19 pandemic with a depleted and devastated health system.
21. Syrian women have faced conflict-related sexual violence – from all parties - and the rise in early and forced marriages.
22. Most Syrian children have never lived a day without war. Many have gone without food, medicine or education, or been detained, recruited for battle, injured or killed. And every Syrian parent must feel anguish that the legacy of this conflict will last for the lifetime of every treasured newborn child.

Madam President,

23. Syrians meanwhile observe that those responsible for actions that may amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes enjoy near-total impunity.
24. Ordinary Syrians have also seen no compromise between incompatible political visions, and no real progress in talks between the government and opposition to reconcile those visions.
25. And all Syrians have seen that the international community has been divided, trapped in geopolitical competition, caught in their own competing narratives, and often focussed on supporting one side [or other] in the conflict. The world has not succeeded in helping deliver the Syrians as one people from what the Secretary-General has called “a living nightmare”.

26. I express the profound regret of the United Nations that we have yet not been able to mediate an end to this tragic conflict.

Madam President,

27. Amidst this tragedy, one silver lining is that a relative calm now exists, at least in terms of front lines not shifting for a year now. But the calmest year of the Syrian conflict has still been tremendously violent by any other measure. There is still frequent mutual shelling and rocket fire along contact lines, and violent unrest. Airstrikes from Syrian and foreign parties have continued. And listed terrorist groups remain active and present in Syria.

28. Thus the lightning flashes of war still crack daily in Syria. And dark clouds gather. The greatest danger of all is that the fragile calm unravels, leading to a new storm of all-out conflict and all that it would mean for Syrians, the region and beyond.

29. This is why I will always stress, first and foremost, the importance of consolidating this fragile calm into a true nationwide ceasefire according to resolution 2254, together with a common approach to addressing the continuing challenge of listed terrorist groups in Syria.

Madam President,

30. The other danger facing Syria is that, even if calm does not collapse, prolonged stasis sets in - and the Syrian people endure a new decade of desperation, despondency and despair. That is a grave danger, especially if Syria does not receive high-level and creative international diplomatic attention.

31. Yes, the Syrian parties must negotiate a settlement in a Syrian-led process convened by the UN to implement Security Council resolution 2254 – and they need to show the political will to do so. But I am absolutely convinced that they will not progress far if a Syrian-led process is not supported by a constructive international diplomacy on Syria. After all, this is among the most deeply internationalized conflicts of a generation, with many of the issues that matter most to the Syrians not even in Syrian hands.

32. I know progress will not be easy. There is very little trust and confidence among the Syrians, and between regional and international actors. The divisions are deep, and they are everywhere we look. But we need to find a way around the “you first” syndrome that characterizes much diplomacy on Syria. Right now, there are demands on all sides – but little movement on any side.

Madam President,

33. What should be plain to each side is that progress on particular objectives is unlikely without matching progress on objectives of concern to the other side. Thus, what is needed is to identify with realism and precision - and to implement in parallel - mutual, and reciprocal steps-for-steps, step-by-step, from Syrian and international players.

34. For this to succeed, the Syrian government and opposition, and key international players, would need to be ready to identify not only what they realistically hope to achieve, but what they can put on the table in the context of advancing resolution 2254. We would

need to break issues into their component parts and move in lockstep to make steady progress.

35. There are of course many ways this could be done. But what is needed are good steps for good steps. We all have to work in this direction, for the sake of the Syrian people.

Madam President,

36. I discussed my thinking on all aspects of the political process recently in a first meeting in Damascus with Faisal Mekdad in his capacity as the new Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, and with the President of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, Anas Al-Abdah, in Istanbul, and in a range of international travels and virtual contacts. I will continue to explore possibilities.
37. I believe we need to continue quiet diplomacy in this regard. I am working on this. In time, we may need to try to put in place a new means of international discussion, a new international format for the necessary diplomacy and cooperation.

Madam President,

38. Allow me to stress the importance of unblocking progress on the issue of detainees, abductees, and missing persons. Neither my efforts nor those of the working group on this issue have produced the kind of progress needed. Yet I am absolutely convinced that if we could make inroads here, it would be an important humanitarian gesture, a vital confidence-builder, a signal to all Syrians, and a circuit-breaker in the context of international diplomacy.
39. I take this opportunity also to strongly underline the need for full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all parts of Syria. Intensified cross-line and cross-border deliveries are essential to reach everyone in need, everywhere. I reiterate the appeal of the Secretary-General to the Security Council to achieve consensus on this crucial matter.
40. Let me also reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal regarding the importance of avoiding and mitigating any effects of sanctions measures on the capacity of Syria to access food, essential health supplies and COVID-19 medical support, and on the plight of civilians across Syria.

Madam President,

41. Let me finally turn to the work of the Syrian-led and owned Constitutional Committee. As I have often said, it cannot on its own solve the conflict. But it could be a building block of intra-Syrian cooperation in implementing resolution 2254's call for drafting a new constitution. It could also be a door opener to a broader process that could create safe, calm and neutral conditions for constitutional reform to take hold in Syria, and for the conduct of free and fair elections, administered under UN supervision with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, to participate. And, of course, the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees. All in the context of progress in a steps-for-steps manner as I have indicated.

42. A sixth session of the small drafting body of the Constitutional Committee needs to be carefully prepared, and assurances should be in place to ensure that it implements the Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure, restores and builds some trust and confidence, and makes progress on the Committee's mandate. A sixth session needs to be different from what has gone before – with some clear goals, credible working methods, enhanced Co-Chair cooperation, and a future workplan.
43. I will continue to engage the Syrian parties, the Syrian co-chairs and the Middle Third as we seek to advance the Constitutional Committee. The Co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Government, Ahmad al-Kuzbari, shared a proposal with me in Damascus on 23 February. I conveyed that to the Co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission, Hadi al-Bahra, who reverted with an amended proposal on 11 March. I have conveyed that to the Co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Government. I spoke to both Co-Chairs in recent days.
44. I appreciate that both Co-Chairs have committed procedural proposals to writing and that they are both engaging, and I continue to facilitate their exchanges in the hope of concluding an agreement. The United Nations will be ready to convene a sixth session as soon as agreement is in place.

Madam President,

45. I was able to brief you last week on International Women's Day, on the ways in which we are seeking, as facilitators, to ensure that the determination of Syrian women to play their full part in the political process is made real. And I will continue to engage the Women's Advisory Board for their insights and advice on all aspects of the process.
46. Let me also stress that I will continue to engage the participants in the Civil Society Support Room – women and men. I pay tribute today to all those Syrians who continue to work day and night for peace. They have never given up hope, and neither will the United Nations.
47. I hope that the Members of this Council will not give up either. At a time when there are so many pressing challenges, do not lose sight of the fundamental importance of a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict. A political solution is the only way out – and I am convinced that it is possible. In some ways, it is more possible now than before. But to turn those possibilities into realities, creative and high-level engagement from key international players with a stake in this conflict will be needed. Now is surely the time to advance a genuine political process that restores the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and enables the Syrian people to independently chart their own future. With that goal in mind, let us ensure that Syria receives top level and sustained attention, and that we work together to implement Security Council resolution 2254.

Thank you so much, Madam President.