

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA GEIR O. PEDERSEN**  
**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**  
27 April 2023

Mr President (Amb. Vassily Nebenzia, Russian Federation),

1. We are at a potentially important juncture in efforts to move forward a political process on Syria. In the tragic aftermath of the earthquakes, we have seen renewed diplomatic attention on Syria. Diplomacy is continuing involving the Astana players and the Syrian Government. And there have been new openings of engagement between Arab countries and the Syrian Government.
2. This renewed attention to Syria is very important if it can act as a circuit breaker and unlock long-stalled efforts to move the political process forward. I thank the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan in particular for their continued engagement with me. I look forward to continuing to stay in close touch with regional players and with the full range of stakeholders to maximize coordination and common messaging – and appreciated in this regard the engagement I had recently in Athens with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece and with representatives of European Union members. I continue to stress that a political solution is the only way out of the suffering of the Syrian people, towards stability, security and peace. Such a solution requires realism from all sides, and agreements and actions on key issues in Security Council resolution 2254.
3. I continue to seek to facilitate a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process. Equally, I have always said that the UN cannot do this alone. We need the support of *all* key actors, and we will continue to work with all. No existing groups of players – not the Syrian parties, not the Astana players, not the Western players, not the Arab players – can alone bring about a political solution. If we are to make progress on any issue – even incrementally in a step-for-step manner – we must see a wider group of players work together. Ultimately, all will have to make contributions, in a coordinated, multilateral effort.
4. You may ask why? Because no existing group of actors can fundamentally shift the military stalemate or restore Syria's sovereignty, independence or territorial integrity. No one group of players can address structural issues, fix the economy and reconstruct Syria. No one group of actors can resolve the threat of terrorism, stabilize Syria, stem the sources of regional instability and safeguard legitimate security concerns, including on Syria's borders. No one group of actors can realize our collective responsibility to protect Syrian civilians, address the issue of the detained, abducted, disappeared and missing, and ensure conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns. And Mr. President, no single group of actors can realize our collective responsibility to help the Syrian people to chart their own future – the only way that Syria will ever be truly stable and prosperous again. In short, unlocking each of Syria's myriad problems requires several keys – each held by a different stakeholder, who cannot be overlooked, and who can block if excluded.

Mr. President,

5. The recent diplomatic moves mean we are now in a period of renewed probing and testing, in a new context, with an enhanced regional engagement, and with many ideas that have long been on the table. I am continuing to use my good offices and to develop the collective thinking on these ideas. I am ready to help facilitate the way forward, step-for-step and step-by-step, in a reciprocal and verifiable manner, consistent with my mandate in Security Council resolution 2254. I will continue my direct engagement with the Government of Syria and with the Syrian Negotiations Commission, and I appeal anew for genuine engagement and readiness to move forward on substance. I am ready to work very closely with others who are seeking to play a facilitative role as well.
6. When I briefed you last time, I mentioned the kinds of areas where moves could be made on both sides. It is clear that actions by the Syrian Government, matched then with actions from the outside, on some of these issues could arrest negative trends and build positive ones. This would have a new potency with a stronger regional role.. Substantive moves could build some trust and confidence, including among civilians inside Syria and those who have fled. On the other hand, if this opportunity is not seized, we will not see real change on the ground, leading to new frustration and despair.
7. Let me in this context also reiterate my readiness to facilitate Syrian-Syrian dialogue, including to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. It is surely past time for us to move beyond the non-Syrian issues that have been stalling the process. The Committee should resume its work in Geneva in a spirit of compromise, with substance and at pace.
8. Meanwhile, I continue to convene a broader spectrum of Syrians in Geneva and the region, including through the Women's Advisory Board and Civil Society Support Room. These meetings show that Syrians still have much that they can agree upon, across many divides. We saw this earlier this month in a meeting that Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi convened in Geneva, bringing a group of Syrians from all quarters of the country and its diaspora too, to discuss post-earthquake political challenges.

Mr. President,

9. Let me register my concern that the brief calm after the earthquakes has been further eroded.
  - Violent incidents have been increasing in the north-west, with ever-more regular shelling and rocket fire across front-lines involving pro-Government forces, armed opposition forces as well as listed terrorist group HTS who have announced further cross-line raids on Government positions.
  - The relative calm in the north-east has been punctuated by Turkish and armed opposition groups targeting of SDF positions, in what they say was a response to SDF shelling and rocket attacks, including on Turkish soldiers.
  - Israeli strikes are becoming ever more frequent.
  - The south-west remains turbulent.

- And, in some areas, sporadic ISIL attacks appear to be on the uptick, especially in the central desert, with increasing Syrian Government, Russian and US-led coalition strikes against them.

I urge all to work to rein in violence and bring about sustained calm – an appeal I will continue to make to all key stakeholders, including in the Ceasefire Task Force in Geneva. Ultimately, we need a nationwide ceasefire and a coordinated approach to countering listed terrorist groups, in line with international law.

10. Finally, I remind you that, after the earthquakes, and more than twelve years of war and conflict, Syria remains a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. Syrians still need immense resources from all of you, to meet emergency humanitarian needs including early recovery and livelihoods. Humanitarian access remains essential via all modalities, whether cross-line or cross-border.

Mr President,

11. To summarize my key message: we are at a potentially important juncture, with renewed attention on Syria – particularly from the region – that could assist our efforts in advancing a political solution to this conflict, in line with the Security Council resolution 2254. But for this renewed attention to help unlock progress, many actors will need to take concrete steps – not just one set of actors. I will continue to engage directly with the Syrian parties and to remind them, and in particular at this juncture the Government of Syria, that they should seize the opportunity with a readiness to move forward on substantive issues. I will also continue to work closely with all and to emphasize the importance of close coordination with *all* key actors. Even modest and specific steps will require give-and-take from a broad range of different players and genuine verification too.
12. And I hope that if we build some trust and confidence with substantive moves, this can then serve in time as a basis for a more comprehensive effort to resolve this conflict via a political settlement. There is no shortcut to stability without addressing the fundamental drivers of the conflict. We must constantly remind ourselves that even if we start small and move in stages, Syria still needs a comprehensive solution as called for in resolution 2254, that restores Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Thank you, Mr. President.