

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA
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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
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Madam President, (Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield, US)

1. The Syrian people both inside and outside Syria continue to suffer acutely from the conflict in all its dimensions, and the absence of a genuine political process is deeply detrimental to their well-being.
2. One latest indicator of suffering is the further collapsing economy. A very bad economic situation has got even worse. In some three months, the Syrian pound has lost over 80 percent of its value. Last week, it hit an all-time low of 15,500 to the US dollar at the unofficial market rate – remember that in 2011 the Syrian pound was 47 to the dollar.
3. Prices are now spiraling out of control for essential goods such as food, medicine, fuel, basic commodities. Every part of Syria, every community, is affected. Many are struggling to provide meals to their families.
4. We take note of some of the steps taken to respond to this sudden deterioration, including doubling minimum state salaries to roughly 13 US dollars a month. And yet a monthly food basket in June cost at least 81 US dollars, according to the World Food Programme: a figure that has gone up by roughly 70 percent in just a year, and is no doubt higher now in late August. These trends speak for themselves.

Madam President,

5. The tragic reality is that, for as long as violent conflict continues, and the political process is blocked, the suffering of the Syrian people will simply get worse. Syria cannot fix its economy while it is in a state of conflict. And this applies to the many other crises that ravage Syria: the crisis of displacement, of the detained, abducted and missing, of human rights abuses, of terrorism, of hostilities and violent conflict, of the de facto division of Syria undermining its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Only with movement on Security Council resolution 2254, addressing the political crisis at the heart of the conflict, can we begin to address the *many* crises afflicting this country. Even starting with some incremental steps on resolution 2254 could create a floor beneath this unsustainable free-fall and instigate a process of trust-building and healing.

Madam President,

6. Let me echo the Secretary General in welcoming the understanding reached on the continued use, for the next six months, of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to millions of people in need in north-west Syria. I also welcome the extension of authorization for the UN to use the Bab al-Salam and Al-Ra'ee border crossings for an additional three months, as well as consent to cross the lines within Syria at Sarmada and Saraqib for the delivery of assistance for the next six months. It is indeed essential that the UN and its partners continue providing cross-border humanitarian assistance, at the necessary scale and in a principled manner that allows

engagement with all parties, for the purposes of seeking humanitarian access, and in a manner that safeguards the UN's operational independence.

7. We also need a redoubled effort to secure sufficient humanitarian resources, at a time when funding is more stretched than ever: this year's Humanitarian Response Plan is funded at 25 percent, and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan at roughly 10 percent. We need support for *all* pillars, including enhancing early recovery in the Humanitarian Response Plan and for refugees and host countries. It remains critical that any adverse effects of sanctions that could aggravate the predicament of ordinary Syrians be avoided and mitigated. The full use of existing humanitarian exemptions and active engagement by sanctioning states to counter overcompliance are essential.

Madam President,

8. We must not forget that, despite a broad military stalemate since March 2020, the violent conflict continues, causing civilian deaths and destruction on all sides in Syria. This last month saw:
 - airstrikes attributed to Israel near Damascus
 - reports of pro-Government airstrikes in northwest Syria, an area which also saw attacks, including attempted drone attacks, by listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham on Syrian Government positions, as well as front-line clashes and exchanges of artillery;
 - attacks claimed by ISIL during Ashura commemoration near the Sayida Zeynab shrine, and later on a bus carrying Syrian Government forces near al Mayadin;
 - reports of strikes on a US military base in Deir-ez-Zor;
 - reports of Turkish drone strikes in north and northeast Syria;
 - an SDF attack on a Turkish military base in Azaz;
 - reports of clashes between factions in areas under the control of the SDF;
 - reports of clashes and tensions in the South in Daraa, Tafas and Sweida;
 - and a strike by the International Coalition on radical group Hurras al-Din in al-Bab.

Madam President,

I continue to call for a genuine and sustained calm that all key Syrian and international players work to support, so as to build a nationwide ceasefire; a cooperative approach to addressing the real threat posed by proscribed terrorist groups; and full respect for international humanitarian law. The central importance of protecting civilians and upholding international law was brought home again by the dark commemoration this past week of 10 years since the shocking chemical weapons attacks in the suburbs of Damascus.

Madam President,

9. As you know, at present it is difficult to see that conditions are in place to bring about a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. But, and I emphasize this, I strongly believe that the status quo is untenable and that there are things that can be done to advance the implementation of Security Council resolution 2254.
10. I welcome the fact that reconvening the Constitutional Committee is a clear point of consensus among many key actors. It is important that the Committee resume, continue,

deepen, and gradually build some trust, and move forward on substance – a first move of many. I and my team are fully engaged in the effort to unblock the impasse and find a way forward on substance and working methods.

11. During the reporting period, the Arab Contact Group met in Cairo with the Syrian Foreign Minister, and they expressed their aspiration to see the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee in the Sultanate of Oman with UN facilitation before the end of the year. This is one of a number of alternative venues that has been suggested for the Constitutional Committee. Let me stress that I continue to seek to facilitate consensus to overcome the issues that have prevented the Constitutional Committee from meeting in Geneva, and to ensure that it resumes and makes credible progress. Earlier today, I spoke with the Syrian Foreign Minister as well as with the head of the Syrian Negotiations Commission and I look forward to continue these discussions. I also look forward to briefing the Middle Third Civil Society participants on any consensus that may emerge.
12. Let me just add that I continue to welcome enhanced attention from the region on Syria. In the last few days, I have spoken with the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and had contact with senior Turkish officials. I will of course continue to work with Arab players, the Astana players and the Western players too – all of whom have contributions to make towards supporting a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process. It is a simple fact of Syria that no-one actor or group of actors can determine the outcome of the conflict or bring about the kind of steps needed for a political solution to emerge. A political solution will only be possible with steps from a broad range of different players and genuine verification too.

Madam President,

13. The political process must be much more than just the Constitutional Committee, as you all well know. I have long sought to bring about movement incrementally towards a safe, calm, and neutral environment in Syria – something that obviously overlaps heavily with the question of refugees and the internally displaced. This was also an issue highlighted when the Arab Contact Group met last week. It remains to be seen whether the Syrian Government is ready to do more to address the very real and continuing protection concerns. And for their part, donors could do more to address the concerns all Syrians have about basic services and livelihoods. A step-for-step dynamic here could begin to change realities on the ground for all Syrians – including the displaced – and also build confidence, and political space for a broader set of issues related to resolution 2254. The close coordination of the Syrian authorities with the United Nations would be a cornerstone in this regard.

Madam President,

14. Earlier this month, I had an in-depth exchange with the Truth and Justice Charter representatives, who have been among the key drivers towards the UN General's Assembly's decision to create the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. For these families and victims, the decision is a bitter-sweet milestone. It underlines the momentous scale of the problem: tens of thousands of men, women and children are detained or missing, with ongoing abductions, and arbitrary detentions still happening across the country. They told me how families continue to learn about their loved ones'

deaths in custody only when civil registry records are updated, after having waited years with hopes of seeing their loved ones return. On previous occasions, they also relayed the risks of persecution and harassment, and extortion, that they face in their struggle to seek information about their loved ones. Syrians have the right to be provided full and transparent information about the fate and whereabouts of the detained and missing.

Madam President,

15. We will continue to consult widely on this and other issues with Syrian civil society and Syrian women, including through the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, to ensure that their legitimate aspirations are understood and ultimately met. I am also pleased to report that the process of seeking new members for the Syrian Women's Advisory Board through a process of rotation has begun, and we look forward to concluding this process in the coming months. Existing members of the WAB have provided sound advice and I remain extremely grateful for their efforts.

Madam President,

16. It is deeply troubling that, for over a year, the intra-Syrian political process has been in deep-freeze. A political process is the *right* of the Syrian people – they are entitled to chart their own destiny. And a political process is a *necessity*. Syria as a country and people that remain divided. There is no military victory on the horizon for any one actor. And the terrible effects of conflict continue to cascade across the region. We are all paying a heavy price for this conflict – but first and foremost the Syrian people, most of whom have lost close to everything in this last decade, but also the region and the international community at large. As international attention and funding for Syria wane, the situation will become ever more unsustainable. The only path out of this is a political process that involves the Syrian parties themselves, in line with resolution 2254.

Thank you, Madam President.