

**UNITED NATIONS DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA NAJAT ROCHDI
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
25 June 2024**

Mr. President (Ambassador Hwang Joon-kook, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea)

1. It is an honour to brief the Security Council again. Over the past months I have met hundreds of Syrians – men and women of all backgrounds, who differ on many things, but who share a common concern for the future of their country. Their suffering is increasing, not decreasing. They fear Syria is in danger of being forgotten. And so today, on behalf of Special Envoy Pedersen, my message to you is simple: Syria is in grave crisis and none of its myriad problems can be sustainably addressed without a political solution. The voices of Syrians inside and outside need not only to be heard but heeded.
2. Many Syrians are living in a climate of fear because of the security situation which continues to be tense and violent. We saw many serious escalatory incidents and dynamics this past month, including:
 - Further airstrikes attributed to Israel in Aleppo and in southern Syria, killing Syrian Government soldiers and what Iranian state media said was a military advisor from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.
 - Missile strikes attributed to pro-Government forces in the northwest, where there were also regular exchanges of missile and drone strikes across front lines—and where Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham continues to face significant protest movements in Idlib against their de facto rule.
 - Drone strikes attributed to Türkiye in northeast Syria, alongside multiple exchanges of frontline fire between armed opposition groups, the Syrian Democratic Forces and Government forces too.
 - Three Russian airstrikes near al-Tanf , with the Russian Reconciliation Center claiming that the strikes targeted “terrorist” bases in the vicinity.
 - Significant security instability in Deraa, with multiple assassinations by unknown elements.
 - Violent clashes in Sweida between Government forces and local militias, which saw several injured, as well as rocket attacks on Government security installations. This comes against a backdrop of an almost year-long protest movement and fresh deployments of Government security personnel at new checkpoints.
 - And increasing attacks by Security Council listed terrorist group ISIL across central and northern Syria.
3. Humanitarian conditions remain in sharp decline, compounded by the profound economic crisis. My colleague Ramesh will brief you on this in more details of course. As I stressed to the Humanitarian Task Force last week in Geneva, we need the generous pledges made last month in Brussels to translate into urgent disbursement, including for early recovery. Syrians need unimpeded aid access through all modalities – cross-border and cross-line. We are seeing repeated denials for cross-line convoys by parties across all Syria – depriving communities from life-saving aid, including in Rukban camp where the situation is particularly dire. Let me also stress that any adverse effects of sanctions on ordinary Syrians must be mitigated and avoided, in particular by the active engagement of sanctioning states to counter overcompliance.

4. At the Task Force meeting, I again urged Member States and relevant authorities to significantly step up efforts to repatriate, in safety and dignity, all citizens who wish to return from Al Hol and other places of detention in northeast Syria, in line with international law. We are alarmed by the inhumane conditions and the serious ongoing insecurity and violence, impacting first and foremost thousands of women and children. Children must be treated as victims and in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Let me note that many Syrian women and groups are also at the forefront of efforts to reintegrate members of their communities returning from Al Hol, through volunteerism, advocacy and networking.
5. As tomorrow marks the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, let us remember the thousands who perished under torture whilst in detention, and remind ourselves that too many are suffering torture still today, across all of Syria. The sheer scale of the file of missing persons, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances in Syria is a reminder that no sustainable political solution can move forward without the engagement of all conflict actors to start substantively addressing this tragedy. And no lasting reconciliation is possible without addressing the frozen grief of the families of the missing.
6. According to UNHCR, a further 174,000 Syrians were displaced within Syria during the past year. 7.2 million are now internally displaced, alongside 6.4 million refugees. We must recognize the scale and seriousness of the predicament of host countries in the region and support them, while also emphasising the need for the protection of the Syrian refugees and the end of anti-refugee rhetoric and actions. We must also redouble efforts to assist those who wish to return. But ultimately, we need to intensify our efforts to find a sustainable and durable solution. This means tackling the issues that inhibit safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns.
7. Meanwhile, Syrian women are facing perilous conditions. Women activists report more and more threats to their personal security, particularly towards those who are publicly critical. Rates of violence against women and girls are increasing enormously, including early and forced marriage. Women are bearing the brunt of the economic crisis and resorting to other negative coping mechanisms, that leave them exposed and exploited.

Mr. President,

8. None of these challenges can be sustainably addressed without a meaningful United Nations-facilitated political process to implement resolution 2254 that realizes the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and restores the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria – a process led and owned by the Syrians, and supported by key international actors too.
9. The Special Envoy and I have continued our engagements this month to advance such a political process. We met with the Syrian Negotiations Commission in Geneva and I look forward to meeting Syrian Government officials in Damascus next week. And we have continued our engagement with senior interlocutors from key international stakeholders to support a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process with cooperative international diplomacy.

10. As a first step on this path, we need sustained de-escalation and the maintenance of calm, towards a nationwide ceasefire, as well as a cooperative approach to countering terrorism in line with international law.
11. Second, we continue to press to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. Regretfully, I have nothing new to report on this since last month. The Special Envoy continues to work on resolving the venue issue. In the meantime, we continue to appeal to all parties as a bridging option to reconvene in Geneva and prepare substantive proposals.
12. Third, proposals for confidence-building measures are on the table – including those that could make a marked difference toward creating the kind of safe, calm and neutral environment needed for a political process to unfold and for informed, safe, dignified and voluntary refugee and IDP returns.
13. Fourth, the Special Envoy continues to prepare the ground for a new comprehensive approach. We continue to explore ideas in this regard and seek the constructive engagement of the Syrian parties and key stakeholders. This is a tall task, given the complexity of the file and the challenging international environment. But it is a necessary one if legitimate Syrian aspirations are to be realized and the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria are to be restored – and if relevant concerns in the region and beyond are to be addressed.
14. Fifth, we will continue to engage the Syrian people. Without them, a political process is not possible. We remain continuously impressed by their resilience and their commitment. I look forward to upcoming Civil Society Support Room engagements, including in Geneva, where I hope to hear the vital perspectives of the Syrians.
15. Likewise, I will continue my engagement with Syrian women from all backgrounds, including through the Women’s Advisory Board. Women’s inclusion matters. The conflict creates unique burdens on women, who are sustaining households and communities in the absence of men. Syrian women are also a rich and energetic source of expert insight. I continue to receive multiple studies, ideas and proposals from Syrian individual and networks of Syrian women, on critical topics such as education, de-centralization, economic recovery, violence against women and girls, and peacebuilding.

Mr. President,

16. Let me finish by echoing the voices of the hundreds of Syrian men, women and youth with whom I have met these last months. Yes, they differ in many things, but they are united by their love of country, by a shared sense that Syrians themselves must determine their own future, and by a pragmatic realization that compromise and accommodation is a moral and political necessity. They agree on the urgent need to preserve and restore Syria’s sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, especially as divisions are entrenched and Syria risks drifting apart. They share concrete and immediate priorities too, including the need for protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure and civic space, for addressing the detainee file, for fostering conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary returns, for providing opportunities of education to children and youth, for reducing war economies and promoting an inclusive economy. They want to break through lines of separation and reconnect the country and in so doing, reconnect the Syrian people. They are also united by a shared sense that all of this requires a credible

political process to implement resolution 2254. I hope, Mr President, I can get back to them and tell them that not only that you listened to them but that you heard them indeed. Rest assured, Mr. President, Excellencies, that the United Nations will leave no stone unturned to facilitate such a process and to building a better future for all Syrians.

Thank you, Mr. President.