

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA GEIR O. PEDERSEN
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
25 April 2025**

Thank you so much, Mr President (France, Amb. Jérôme Bonnafont),

1. I am very pleased to brief the Security Council for the first time in your presence, my dear friend Minister Shaibani. Welcome to New York. Your participation today reflects the significant developments that Syria has undergone in recent months. I appreciate your commitment to fostering regional stability and engaging constructively at the international level.

Mr President,

2. Equally I welcome the Security Council's unity on Syria as demonstrated in its statements of December and March, and its continued support for a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, UN-facilitated political transition in line with key principles of Security Council resolution 2254.

Mr President,

3. It is only four and a half months since the fall of the former regime and the opening of a new chapter in Syria's history. I salute the Syrian people who, amidst continued suffering, and many uncertainties and dangers, show overwhelmingly that they want this political transition to succeed. The legacy of misrule, conflict, abuses and poverty from which Syria is trying to emerge is one of the heaviest that any state or people anywhere has had to face in modern times. This means that the situation is inherently still extremely fragile. The vital ingredients to address this fragility are clear: we need genuine political inclusion so that all Syrians can participate meaningfully in shaping their country's political future, along with countering extremism and terrorism; *and* real support from the international community to give this transition a chance to succeed against great odds.
4. That political transition is now at a critical juncture. The legal vacuum that existed before the Constitutional Declaration was issued has been partly filled by it. Syria has moved beyond a caretaker government to a new, expanded and more diverse cabinet. This is indeed an improvement from what went before. Yet it is still not a fully inclusive framework for a political transition. And, Mr President, this leaves many Syrians unsure of their place in the emerging new Syria. There is obviously a concentration of power. And plans for establishing the rule of law, a new social contract, and ultimately free and fair elections remain to be seen. Many women are telling us that they are worried about societal and political trends – and there is only one woman among the 22 in cabinet. And many among Syria's components are still reeling from the violence on the coast in March, which took a toll on confidence and trust.
5. The March events were of course sparked by a violent challenge to state authority. And with state authority far from being established, with a range of armed groups still operating, and with unprecedented levels of poverty in a country that is still heavily under sanctions, there are serious underlying tensions on several fronts.

Mr. President,

6. I appreciated the open and substantive discussions on these challenges with Interim President Al-Sharaa in Damascus two weeks ago, building on several meetings with him and with you, Minister.
7. A crucial next step in the political transition are the plans to establish the interim People's Assembly. Mr. Al-Sharaa explained his thinking on this in quite some detail. I on my behalf stressed the need for substantive efforts towards inclusivity, transparency and openness, given that this body will have an urgent legislative reform agenda on many areas that affect all Syrians, and the need to ensure that this body is seen by Syrians as representing both the unity and the diversity of the nation. I had the pleasure of meeting the Minister this morning, and we have shared ideas, options, and best practices with the interim authorities on these issues. And, Minister, I welcome your readiness to deepen the dialogue on this important matter.
8. We also discussed in Damascus the need for future constitutional process that is not framed as a technical or expert exercise alone – but is rather one that involves all of Syria's societal and political components in shaping together Syria's new social contract, laying the basis for free and fair elections thereafter.
9. An urgent challenge remains the situation on the coast. In Damascus, I met with members of the Alawite community, who conveyed their deep concerns and presented harrowing accounts of violence. I talked with President Sharaa at length about this, along with a member of his Civil Peace High Commission, who detailed their efforts to address this issue. Under-Secretary-General Di Carlo and Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi met with the independent National Investigative and Fact-Finding Committee, whose mandate has now been extended for three months. I appeal to Syrians with allegations of violence to engage with the Committee, which is examining all incidents since March 6 and until the time it ends its mission. And I appeal to the interim authorities to make the Committee's findings public in line with international standards, and to take the necessary steps to bring perpetrators of violence against civilians to justice as called for by the Security Council.
10. But, Mr President, a sense of grievance still exists on both sides – a deep feeling of exclusion from the political process and the public sector on one side; but also profound grievances towards persons associated with the former regime on the other. The interim authority needs to ensure that all segments of Syrian society are not only protected, but also feel that they will be full participants in political life and state structures, including in terms of security. Meanwhile, every step towards establishing the rule of law – and moving on transitional justice – will help reassure all components of the Syrian society. It will help reduce the likelihood of individuals or groups taking justice in their own hands or committing revenge-driven attacks, sporadic incidents of which worryingly continue.
11. We are also receiving reports of women and girls being abducted. I have raised this with the Minister this morning, and he agreed anything of this kind is of course unacceptable and invited me to share any information we have on this, which of course we will do. It is important to reassure the impacted communities on this.

Mr President,

12. Another key task is to pursue a peaceful reintegration of northeast Syria. I reiterated to Mr. Al-Sharaa my welcome of his 10 March agreement with Mr. Mazloum Abdi. I have conveyed the same message to Mr Mazloum. There have been a number of encouraging steps and signals: the formation of committees and reciprocal visits; the development in the Northeast of a common negotiating approach involving a range of Kurdish parties; a deal on mutual security arrangements in Kurdish-majority areas of Aleppo city; agreed withdrawals from Tishreen Dam which need to be implemented; efforts to forge common ground on education; and, importantly, a marked military de-escalation by all Syrian and international actors.

Mr President,

13. It is critical that these and other steps, many of a confidence-building nature, feed into the broader political process in line with the key principles of Security Council resolution 2254 – in which all Syrian sides and segments must participate. The question of the northeast presents major challenges and risks: the presence of ISIL, inside and outside of camps, as international funding is dwindling; a sizeable military force still operating outside of Damascus' command structures; a complex demographic and political mix; and key political demands regarding Kurdish rights and issues of decentralization and identity. Both sides will need the political will to compromise so that northeast Syria can be integrated through a Syrian-Syrian process in a way that maintains stability in the country and the region, and restores Syria's sovereignty and unity. We are deepening engagement in support of this process: its success is crucial for the viability of any Syrian political transition.

Mr President,

14. As I discussed with President Al-Sharaa, there is a positive intention to ensure that no weapons can be held outside state control – whether in the north, south, east or west of the country – coupled with ideas on how to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate different factions. This process is complex and it will take time. An enabling political environment of inclusive governance structures, which receive timely and adequate international support, would help the integration of the remaining armed factions into a national army and their disarmament.

15. I had a detailed discussion with the President on the concerns of Council members related to foreign terrorist fighters. The issue remains a very serious one, and there is a need to see more progress on this front. I note the fact that exchanges are continuing on this issue with several relevant states.

Mr President,

16. Ongoing Israeli violations of Syria's territorial integrity are undermining the transition. A violent confrontation in early April in Deraa governorate between Israeli forces well beyond the 1974 lines and armed locals resulted in nine civilian casualties on the Syrian side, according to the Syrian Arab Republic. A week later, there was a wave of Israeli airstrikes on Damascus, Hama and Homs, including airbases, reportedly causing casualties including civilians. These attacks must cease. I also reiterate my appeal for full respect for the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and for this Council to hold

Israel to its commitment that it does not seek territorial gains in Syria. Israel must withdraw and respect Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence.

17. This highly confrontational approach is not warranted, particularly given that there is plainly scope for diplomacy. This was clear from my meetings in Damascus. I welcome regional talks that have taken place, including talks between Türkiye and Israel in Azerbaijan, which I hope can contribute to de-escalation.

Mr President,

18. The economic situation in Syria is truly disastrous, and levels of humanitarian assistance are dwindling – a huge danger, which OCHA will no doubt be addressing. Beyond the humanitarian, there can be no successful political stability and transition without genuine economic recovery and stability.
19. I commend the support of the region that is enabling Syria to see debts to the World Bank re-paid. And I note the meetings that Syrian financial officials have had in recent days with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington.
20. I appreciate the sanctions relief measures to date, and I welcome the fact that discussions are continuing regarding civilian public sector salaries. I also note yesterday's action by the United Kingdom with further designations lifted and sectoral sanctions revoked.

Mr President,

21. Almost all Syrians in and out of the country echo the call for sanctions easing to be at a larger scale and a quicker pace. This is essential to reactivate Syria's economy, to realize concrete support from the region, and to enable many to actively participate in a national effort to rebuild their country.
22. The reality is that the complex intersection of sanctions on Syria hampers peace dividends that we should be seeing from the suspensions already granted. And the chilling effect of sanctions is long-lasting. I therefore call on governments to engage with the private sector to ensure that sanctions suspensions granted so far in critical sectors such as energy and banking are indeed materialized. I also urge the further relaxation of sanctions on investments, exports and services, all of which impact the delivery of essential services including health and education. And a crucial part of this is enabling those states that want to help to be reassured that they can do so, without fear from secondary sanctions.

Mr. President,

23. In conclusion: a lot has been achieved, and there is much to commend and support, but the challenges are huge, and the situation is extremely fragile. There is a need for much more political inclusion – and for much more economic action. With a sea-change on both these elements, the political transition in Syria *can* succeed. Without both, it likely will not – and the consequences should not be acceptable and we cannot accept that that happens. That is why the United Nations is working to facilitate and assist a Syrian-led and owned process working in accordance with our mandate in resolution 2254. I hope the Security Council can continue to support this work.

Thank you.