

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

22 October 2025

Mr President (Russia, Amb. Vasily Nebenzya),

1. It is an honour to brief the Security Council from Damascus. This month marks the 25th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325, a milestone that reasserts the central role of women in peacemaking, demands their equal participation, and insists on their protection from gender-based violence in conflict. These fundamentals resonate deeply for the entire future of Syria.
2. Syrian women have the right to participate fully and meaningfully in determining the future of the country. They led and sacrificed for survival, justice and equality through more than a decade of conflict. President Sharaa himself recognized this in January, when he said Syria was, and I quote, “liberated by virtue of the martyrs, the male and female detainees, the tortured men and women, the missing men and women, and all their bereaved mothers and grieving families, because of their sacrifices and the sacrifices of all of you”.
3. Last December, Syrian women joined the celebrations of a new era, with expectations of relief from hardship, and demands for a durable journey to the rule of law and true equality – a political future which Syrian women would help shape and lead, with real decision-making power. Many rejoiced when they heard President Sharaa say in January that he would work to “form a comprehensive transitional government that expresses the diversity of Syria with its men, women and youth, and will undertake the work of building Syria’s new institutions until we reach a stage of free and fair elections”.
4. In the ten months since, we have continued to engage Syrian women from all walks of life, regions and persuasions. They obviously do not comprise one entity and their views are diverse. But an overwhelming sentiment for many Syrian women is that the processes and initial outcomes of transition have not matched their expectations and the commitments made.
5. This month, six women were elected to the People’s Assembly out of 119 seats contested, reflecting a voting process where women were consistently under-represented from the outset, which could have been avoided. Women were 2 of the 11 members of the Supreme Committee for Elections, 10 percent of the 180 election administrators, 13% of the 1,400 candidates, and 18% of the 6,000 electors. The Supreme Committee for Elections itself noted that “the share of women is inconsistent with the societal and political role that Syrian women have long played.” And while more women are likely to be represented in the People’s Assembly via presidential appointees, Syrian women expect and demand future electoral processes designed to protect their legitimate right to participate and to maximise opportunities for their representation.

6. I truly believe that the women of Syria remain this country's greatest asset. They remain invested and engaged in the political transition. And they want to engage further - much further. I look forward to a collective and renewed focus by all to ensure that their demands and expectations are met as transition moves forward. We urge that this includes clearer measures and strategies to prevent exclusion from leadership roles, a stronger legal and political stand against discrimination, and state action to ensure protection from harassment, threats and violence. There is no substitute for Syrian women advocating on behalf of themselves and one another.

Mr. President,

7. The indirect elections for the transitional People's Assembly were held on 5 October. The elections proceeded in a manner that was largely peaceful and appeared orderly – though there were incidents of election-related violence in preceding days, including the killing in Tartous of a candidate. And the establishment of a transitional legislature will be important for addressing urgent legal and institutional priorities during the transitional period, including the framework for political and civic participation.
8. While there was no request for electoral assistance and the United Nations was not involved in the electoral process, over many months we counseled the importance of transparency and an inclusive electoral process that could ensure the representation of all communities – recalling the messages from the Interim Authorities to us that this process would be the opportunity to bridge the gaps in earlier transition steps.
9. I have noted already that six seats out of the 119 were won by women and the under-representation of women throughout the process.
10. Moreover, with one Christian, three Ismailis, three Alawites, four Kurds and no Druze among the 119 elected so far, the Supreme Electoral Commission has publicly acknowledged the need to improve representation of communities. Some of our Syrians interlocutors have also criticized this and other aspects of what they see as under-representation.
11. We await President Sharaa's appointment of a remaining one-third of the 210 seats. We also understand that voting for a further three seats will take place in districts in Hasakah and Raqqa governorates this week, but that 18 seats will remain vacant from other districts in northeast Syria and Suwayda.
12. In meetings with Syrian interlocutors, there was broad acceptance that temporary electoral arrangements were needed while operational challenges with civil registration and documentation preclude direct elections from taking place. However, we heard fairly sustained criticisms from some Syrians of a rushed process, with opaque decision-making, last-minute changes to legal procedures, and low public engagement. Elections are core to this transition and require significant advance planning and engagement with all sectors of society. It is therefore important that the Syrian authorities and civil society start soon to build on the lessons learned to define an inclusive pathway for holding future elections. The United Nations stands ready to support that work.

Mr President,

13. The economic aspects of the political transition are as crucial as the political – indeed, for millions they are the first concern. The staggering consequences of fourteen years of conflict and over half a century of dictatorship impose heavy consequences and constraints. For this transition to succeed, monumental levels of tangible support will be needed from the international community.
14. And let me be very clear: sanctions must be lifted, at a larger and quicker scale to give this transition a chance to succeed. Export controls relief is needed too, including with governments reassuring banks and companies that business with Syria is legal and worth the risk. We welcome the U.S. Government’s appeal for the repeal of the Caesar Act and we are following closely developments in the U.S. legislative process in this regard, potentially paving the way for renewed foreign investment and reconstruction.
15. Equally critical to achieve these goals is an enabling environment for investment, including progress on domestic reforms and transitional steps that bolster investor and donor confidence from the Interim Authorities.

Mr. President,

16. In addition, clear next steps are needed along the path of accountability, transitional justice and progress on the missing. The Interim Authorities have appointed national commissions to work on these issues, and the United Nations remains poised to assist as required. Furthermore, we reiterate our calls for the publication of the conclusions of, and follow-up actions on, the national committee for investigation and fact-finding into the coastal events in March – a necessary step for all in Syria to feel that impunity and the prevention of recurrence are being addressed.

Mr President,

17. This month brought renewed turbulence in the northeast, with fierce clashes erupting between Interim Authority forces and those affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces in Aleppo city. These events highlight the persistent fragility of Syria’s security environment and transition.
18. But thankfully, they also demonstrate the ongoing willingness by all Syrian sides to de-escalate and turn to dialogue. We welcome that, just one day after the violence, President Sharaa and senior ministers met with SDF leadership in Damascus, agreeing to a comprehensive ceasefire. We further welcome technical talks held the following week between the Ministries of Interior and Defense and SDF representatives addressing key military integration elements of the 10 March agreement. We hope all parties advance in a spirit of compromise—both militarily and politically—to fully implement the 10 March agreement.

Mr President,

19. The situation in Sweida remains fragile, with sporadic clashes on the margins. We continue to welcome the joint efforts of the United States, Jordan and Syrian Interim

Authorities to address the crisis in Sweida, including through operationalizing the 16 September roadmap. We encourage all parties to take tangible steps forwards, particularly initial confidence-building measures. The recent visits of the UN Commission of Inquiry to Sweida is a welcome development.

It is essential that any proposed solution upholds Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence, and territorial integrity, and addresses the very real anxieties felt by the Druze regarding their safety and human rights, and inclusion in Syria's political future. The concerns of the Bedouin communities also need to be addressed. And we appeal to all external and Syrian parties to avoid statements or actions that could be seen as threatening Syrian sovereignty and civilian protection.

20. It is unacceptable that external interference in Syria continues. Ongoing Israeli territorial incursions into southern Syria must stop. We call for the full respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. We call on the parties to fully respect the terms of the 1974 Agreement of Disengagement and to refrain from actions that may jeopardize the ceasefire. Continued dialogue between Syria and Israel is encouraging, and we hope it leads to meaningful results. Strong international and regional engagement is essential.

Mr. President,

21. We are in the still-early stages of a five-year transition process. During the High-Level week of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General met President Sharaa and took note of the key steps taken on the path of a political transition. He emphasized the importance of advancing this process through inclusive dialogue, and broad-based participation. He also emphasized the importance of promoting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Secretary-General and President al-Sharaa discussed ways to further strengthen the partnership between the United Nations and Syria.
22. The United Nations stand ready to accompany the Syrian authorities and people in writing the next chapters of a Syria that is safe, inclusive and prosperous for all.

Thank you, Mr. President.