

**DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR SYRIA
CLAUDIO CORDONE**

BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

15 May 2026

Thank you Mr. President (Ambassador Fu Cong, China)

1. Since I briefed the Council from Damascus three weeks ago, we have seen progress towards accountability and sustained international and regional engagement, while unresolved tensions, economic hardship, and repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty persist.
2. Let me start by highlighting developments of critical importance in the fight against impunity. On 10 May, Atef Najib appeared in court on trial for crimes committed at the outset of the revolution in Daraa in 2011. Bashar al-Assad, Maher al-Assad and others are being tried in absentia in the same case. The charges include the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations, arbitrary detention, torture, including of children, and killings in custody. The indictment invokes both Syrian and international law, as incorporated into the Syrian legal system by the Constitutional Declaration. It is a commendable effort to situate accountability within a broader legal framework which reflects Syria's international human rights commitments.
3. In other highly symbolic developments, on 24 April, Amjad Yusef, a principal suspect in the 2013 Tadamon massacre, was arrested. And on 29 April, former Major General Adnan Abboud Hilweh was arrested in connection with the 2013 Eastern Ghouta chemical attack.
4. Let me pause here and express my deep solidarity with all the victims and survivors of the atrocities committed during the conflict in Syria. I pay tribute to their suffering, patience and dignified pursuit of justice. It may not have seemed possible that perpetrators would one day appear before a court of law. Yet we are now seeing that justice, however delayed, can begin to be realized.

Mr. President,

5. How Syria addresses these crimes will serve as a key test of the country's commitment to justice and the rule of law. Ensuring due process will be essential to building public trust, holding individual perpetrators to account, and not their community. Suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty, and any confessions should be delivered in court. We support efforts to ensure that all judicial proceedings are conducted in line with fair trial standards, including the fundamental right to legal representation. And we also trust that these proceedings can disclose the full truth surrounding the crimes – one of the central demands of survivors.
6. More broadly, these developments underline the importance of an overall strategy on transitional justice. I welcome the work of the National Commission on Transitional

Justice to prepare a draft law for a comprehensive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process including truth-seeking, reparations and institutional reform, as well as accountability. And I commend the report, *Pathways to Criminal Accountability in Syria*, released this week by 27 Syrian civil society organisations. It offers practical options and solutions, situating criminal justice within a broader transitional justice framework, drawing on comparative experience, and highlighting support that the international community can provide.

Mr. President,

7. The Supreme Committee for Elections announced on 6 May the appointment of electoral sub-committees for the three districts in Hasakeh governorate and for Ain al-Arab, also known as Kobane, where indirect elections for eleven seats have yet to take place. We are awaiting the announcement of the voting date. We understand that the announcement of the 70 presidential appointees and the convening of the first session of the People's Assembly will follow thereafter. The political transition clearly needs a legislature that begins functioning without delay, with the meaningful participation of Syria's women and diverse communities.
8. Meanwhile, President al-Sharaa recently announced ministerial changes in the information and agriculture portfolios, a new Secretary-General of the Presidency, and changes of several governors. Responsive governance remains a work-in-progress, and wider inclusion is essential to ensuring legitimacy and stability.

Mr. President,

9. In the northeast, implementation of the 29 January agreement gained momentum with repeated visits by SDF representatives to Damascus for discussions with the Government on advancing military and institutional integration. It is our understanding that four brigades will be integrated into the national army structure, while discussion continues on the integration of additional SDF forces, including the female military unit, as well as on broader civilian integration and the education curriculum. In Hasakeh, a preliminary roadmap has been agreed to implement the 29 January agreement at the local level. And we look forward to accelerated progress, including on the release of prisoners.
10. I welcome the continuation of organized returns to Afrin – including the return this month from Hasakeh and Qamishli of 1,200 displaced. This is a positive step towards addressing protracted displacement and unresolved property issues.

Mr. President,

11. Sweida faces persistent political and security instability, with weekly demonstrations over demands for the release of detainees, the return of displaced persons, and greater local autonomy. Rivalries among Druze factions inside Sweida continue. While around 20,000 people/displaced persons have returned, more than 150,000 remain displaced. Efforts are ongoing to address key rehabilitation and educational challenges.

12. The future of nearly 13,000 students remains uncertain due to disagreements between local and central authorities over the logistical and security arrangements for administering their exams. Resolving this issue in line with students' interests would contribute to restoring trust and stability, together with inclusive dialogue and concrete steps on accountability, rehabilitation, the provision of services, and security, in full respect of Syria's unity and territorial integrity.

Mr. President,

13. We remain deeply concerned by ongoing presence and military activities of the Israel Defense Forces east of the ceasefire line, in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Israeli incursions, shelling and other military operations were reported in Quneitra and Daraa, as well as restrictions on movement, including temporary checkpoints, and the questioning and detention of civilians. These actions violate Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, threaten Syria's stability and harm civilians. I reiterate our call on Israel to cease violations and adhere to the 1974 agreement. I also call on Israel to clarify the fate of detained Syrians and release all those held in breach of international law.

14. In the face of this and other challenges, Syria continued its efforts to insulate itself from regional conflicts. The Syrian authorities have reiterated that Syrian territory should not be used to widen conflict and have continued to take effective security measures accordingly.

15. The authorities also announced the dismantling of an international drug smuggling network, seizing around one million Captagon pills and manufacturing facilities. We welcome cooperation with Jordan including on training Syrian police personnel. And meanwhile, the Jordanian military carried out strikes on 2 and 3 May against sites near the border and in Sweida, which it said were used for cross-border drug and weapons trafficking.

Mr. President,

16. There was a worrying incident in Idlib involving Uzbek militants who reportedly surrounded a security facility after one of their members was arrested on 2 May. The initial standoff ended after negotiations involving officials from Damascus, but then tensions escalated into sporadic clashes and security raids targeting Uzbek fighters across rural Idlib. The incident highlights challenges posed by the presence of foreign fighters as well as the potential for local incidents to escalate.

17. And terrorism has struck again. On 1 May, Daesh claimed responsibility for an attack that killed a Shiite cleric in the Sayyida Zeinab district of Damascus. The fight against terrorism continues, and I note the ongoing counter-terrorism efforts of the Syrian forces, including as part of the Global Coalition Against Daesh.

18. I also wish to report here that the challenges of hate speech continue, and that we have begun engaging with the Government and others on possible approaches to this issue.

Mr. President,

19. I was pleased to meet recently with a group of Syrian women from Idlib working on development. They emphasized that women's meaningful participation in public life is necessary for strengthening social cohesion and supporting Syria's recovery. They expressed support for special measures aimed at enhancing women's representation, welcomed the government's efforts to strengthen women's leadership capacities, and expressed hope for a national framework to support women's empowerment.
20. I also valued the opportunity to brief on 30 April the Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, where members emphasized the importance of women's economic empowerment and meaningful participation in legislative and transitional justice frameworks. Members also called for action to support measures by the government to prosecute perpetrators of violence against women and girls.

Mr. President,

21. Economic hardship has fueled protests and criticism in many parts of the country. Syrians continue to face high prices, reduced purchasing power, significant increase in the cost of electricity and uneven access to basic services, while ongoing regional tensions further disrupt trade flows and energy supplies.
22. Humanitarian needs remain severe and the response is underfunded, as USG Fletcher will brief you. Food insecurity persists, explosive ordnance continues to kill and injure, and degraded services make returns fragile.
23. As I told Ministers in my last visit, we support the efforts of the Government to attract investment and nurture opportunities for business. Confidence in Syria's prospects for recovery and reconstruction are constrained by remaining sanctions and the long-term economic and institutional legacy of former sanctions. It is important to urgently overcome such hindrances to investment and financial flows.
24. Earlier this week, together with UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and other UN colleagues, I attended the Syria Partnership Coordination Forum in Brussels, hosted by the European Commission and the Syrian Government. Participants expressed a shared desire to contribute actively to sustained and coordinated engagement in support of Syria's priorities for economic recovery. The United Nations is ready to play its part in these efforts.

To conclude, Mr. President,

25. I return to Damascus next week to advance discussions on the transition and my Office's role in supporting it. I hope to reach soon an understanding with the Government on broad areas of cooperation, building on proposals made in March and valuable discussions since, as well as on the relocation of our Geneva-based staff to Damascus. We are keen to move forward expeditiously and constructively in support of Syria, in line with this Council's expectations and Syria's national priorities.

Thank you.