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**DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR SYRIA
CLAUDIO CORDONE
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

22 June 2026

Mr. President

1. Syria's political transition is at a critical phase, with opportunity and fragility existing side-by-side. The United Nations is focused on supporting the Syrian authorities and people in addressing ongoing challenges in the political transition and advancing a sovereign, stable, peaceful, and inclusive future.
2. In this spirit, last month I paid my third visit to Damascus, where I met Foreign Minister Shaibani to advance discussions on specific areas of cooperation between the Syrian Government and our Office. I also met the Minister of Justice, the National Commission for Transitional Justice, representatives of the Syrian Bar Association, survivors and families of victims of past atrocities, and a wide range of civil society and women actors. I am returning next week for an extended visit and look forward to advancing this dialogue.

Mr. President,

3. Indirect elections took place last month in Hasakeh and Ain Al Arab (Kobane). They took place peacefully and in conditions of security, as witnessed by my Office who visited the area on the invitation of the Government. However, more than eight months since the main elections, the People's Assembly has still not been constituted, awaiting the Presidential appointment of a third of its members. The delay is generating anxiety. Syria needs the People's Assembly to begin its work. And it needs all Syrians – in particular, Syria's women and its various components – to feel meaningfully represented in it.
4. The scale of the challenges facing this transitional parliament cannot be overstated. New laws need to be debated and adopted, executive actions need to be reviewed, diverse voices must be heard, and progress made on the transition. As requested by the Government, my Office is already working to ensure that targeted and coordinated UN support is provided to the parliamentary members in delivering on their mandate.
5. Let us recall that the Constitutional Declaration envisages Syrians adopting a permanent constitution and conducting full national elections at the conclusion of the transitional period, now less than four years away. These must be sovereign, inclusive and unifying processes supported by careful preparation and coordinated international assistance.

Mr. President,

6. Last week, demonstrations in Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, Deir ez-Zor and Damascus saw participants calling for accountability for crimes committed during the conflict and demanding legal action against individuals associated with abuses under the former regime. In some locations, these demonstrations were accompanied by violence,

prompting government calls for restraint and the deployment of additional security forces. The mufti of Syria issued a fatwa criminalizing revenge, stressing that justice needs to be done by the state. The government announced that 5,989 persons linked to the former regime are in detention and awaiting prosecution for crimes allegedly committed after 2011. These developments highlight transitional justice challenges facing Syria, with frustration from lack of perceived sufficient progress. While the government swiftly calmed the situation, to avoid repetition of such incidents there needs to be a sense of the past being addressed swiftly yes, but also fairly.

7. Last month I attended the third hearing in the trial of Atef Najib and other defendants charged in connection with the repression of demonstrations in Daraa in 2011. These proceedings are a key opportunity to demonstrate Syria's commitment to accountability and due process.
8. Critical in this regard is the draft law on transitional justice, currently being prepared by the National Commission on Transitional Justice together with the Ministry of Justice. It is essential for the credibility of the transition and the building of a new Syria that the law covers all perpetrators of atrocity crimes, not just those associated with the Assad regime. The law should also ensure that the experiences of women and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are fully recognized and addressed. I note that a court in The Netherlands sentenced on 15 June a paramilitary member linked to the former regime to 26 years for crimes against humanity involving torture, rape, and other sexual violence against detainees.
9. Recent findings confirming the killing of the children of Rania al-Abbasi are a painful reminder of the suffering endured by countless Syrian families searching for answers regarding missing relatives. I express my solidarity with all affected families and encourage continued efforts to establish truth and accountability, and achieve closure.
10. In this regard, the Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence in 2025 highlights patterns of rape and sexual violence committed during the conflict by the former regime, as well as cases of sexual violence by Daesh and the so-called opposition Syrian National Army. It noted more recent conflict-related sexual violence against Alawite women during last March's coastal violence – and against men and boys of the Murshid communities – perpetrated by armed elements and some members of Government security forces. It also noted allegations of sexual violence against Bedouin and Druze women by armed elements. I urge the Government to ensure these crimes are addressed through transitional justice and appropriate measures for accountability, protection and survivor assistance, as well as prevention.
11. Let me address here also the phenomenon of hate speech. Hate speech of any kind endangers social cohesion and does a disservice to the noble efforts of so many to build a new Syria, as the Syrian authorities recognize, and must be addressed in a collective effort. We are working with the Government, civil society, and other UN colleagues to address this. And Syrian women interlocutors have noted the impact of hate speech and exclusionary narratives against women political activists.

Mr. President,

12. I welcome that women are being trained into the Ministry of Interior's law enforcement units. It is equally important that women have a meaningful role in drafting the laws they are meant to enforce. Syrian women interlocutors continue to emphasize the importance of women's meaningful participation in public life, legislative processes, and recovery efforts.
13. Protecting an independent and pluralistic civic space remains essential to a successful transition. Syrian civil society actors continue to offer their positive contributions to the political transition on the ground, and to seek to engage with the authorities with support, advice or critical perspectives. Hate speech, disinformation, restrictions on civic freedoms, and selective justice are among their concerns.

Mr. President,

14. In northeastern Syria, implementation of the 29 January agreement between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continues to move forward. We understand that four integrated SDF brigades are now receiving salaries through national structures. The release of detainees has continued, with approximately 1,300 SDF-affiliated detainees released to date. Progress has also been reported regarding the return of displaced Kurdish families to areas including Afrin and other parts of northern Syria. The longstanding issue of recognition of high school certificates previously issued by the de facto authorities in the northeast was resolved.
15. At the same time, important issues still need to be addressed. These include the integration of Asayish personnel into the Ministry of Interior; the future status of the Women's Protection Units; integration of the civilian administration; and the education curriculum. We encourage continued constructive engagement to advance implementation of the agreement in a manner that promotes inclusion and national unity.

Mr. President,

16. By contrast, there has been no progress on the implementation of the September 2025 Roadmap of confidence-building and reintegration in Sweida. The underlying issues that contributed to the violence of July 2025 remain unresolved, including accountability measures. Distrust between Damascus and actors within Sweida persists, as do strong feelings of distrust at societal level. Calls within Sweida for secession threaten to undermine the country's unity and territorial integrity.
17. Kidnappings, counter-kidnappings, and internal rivalries among Druze factions continue to affect the province. The recent escape of detainees from a National Guard facility, subsequent arrests and protests underscore the fragility of the security environment. Building on the findings of the International Commission of Inquiry, whose work was facilitated and supported by the government, dialogue, accountability, rehabilitation, and confidence-building measures remain essential if trust is to be restored while fully respecting Syria's unity and territorial integrity.
18. Difficulties surrounding national examinations this month in Sweida highlighted the depth of these divisions and the need for dialogue. With the government's endorsement, we engaged in a mediation effort to seek arrangements enabling more

than 13,500 Sweida students to sit examinations in conditions acceptable to all concerned. Regrettably, no solution so far has been found. The overwhelming majority of students in Sweida have now missed out on their exams for two years in a row. A practical solution still needs to be found that secures the right to education of these students, and the UN continues to offer its good offices and support for implementation modalities on the ground.

Mr. President,

19. Israeli military activity in southern Syria has continued, including in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Israeli forces have maintained presence in the area of separation and conducted near-daily incursions across parts of southern Syria, establishing temporary checkpoints and carrying out searches and detentions of civilians. Some were released following interrogation by the IDF, and others reportedly remain in Israeli custody. Protests have taken place demanding their release. Restrictions on Syrian civilian access and damage to agricultural lands were also reported. And there was a further incident of Israeli settlers crossing and being returned by the IDF.
20. The Syrian Government has exercised restraint while signaling openness to a security arrangement with Israel, although no tangible progress has been achieved to date. The UN in Syria is enhancing its efforts to address the needs of the affected population amidst continued Israeli military activity. We strongly reiterate our call on Israel to adhere to the 1974 Agreement, release those illegally detained and respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. President,

21. To address threats from extremist networks, the Syrian authorities report having conducted extensive counterterrorism operations, resulting in over 230 arrests in the past three months, including foreign nationals; the dismantling of seven Da'esh-linked cells; and the seizure of weapons and equipment across several governorates. We welcome these efforts, as well as Syria's continued cooperation with regional partners.
22. At the same time, Da'esh activity outside traditional operating areas, and its attempt to exploit governance gaps and local grievances are concerning, as evidenced by a 14 June attack on a security headquarters in Raqqa that killed security personnel and injured others. In addition, continued concern about foreign fighter networks highlights the importance of ensuring effective integration.

Mr. President,

23. I note positively the continued efforts by the Syrian authorities to insulate Syria from wider regional conflicts. Syrian security forces reportedly blocked attempts to transfer rockets from Syria into Lebanon and have launched further operations targeting cross-border smuggling networks. Syria has also affirmed its position of non-interference in Lebanon and its support for stability in the country, as reiterated last night also by President Sharaa.

24. We hope that the recent Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be implemented and that greater regional stability can re-enable focus on Syria's stability – and its economy.
25. And economic conditions remain a key challenge for the transition. Inflation, depreciation of the Syrian lira, rising electricity and fuel costs, and declining purchasing power continue to fuel frustration and social unrest. At the same time, Syrian authorities continue efforts to attract investment, strengthen private-sector activity, and promote economic reform. We welcome these efforts and stress the importance of building the rule of law and improving conditions for recovery.

Mr. President,

26. Let me also note here that I visited Ankara on 3 June, meeting Deputy Foreign Minister Musa Kulaklikaya and other Turkish officials, who expressed strong support for a Syrian-led transition and the work of the United Nations. I will continue engaging closely with regional and international stakeholders in support of Syria's stability and recovery.

To conclude, Mr. President,

27. Syria's political transition needs to move forward in establishing the legislature, consolidating state institutions, and building the rule of law. Engagement between the Syrian authorities and the UN on the political transition is, I believe, moving forward concretely and constructively, but there is plainly more to do, and the Mission's relocation of its Geneva staff to Damascus would facilitate that. I look forward to being back in Damascus next week and continuing to engage with the Government, civil society, and international partners.

Thank you.