

DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR SYRIA
CLAUDIO CORDONE
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
21 July 2026

Thank you, Mr. President (Ambassador Zenon Ngay Mukongo, Democratic Republic of Congo)

1. I am briefing you from Damascus, where I am present throughout July, continuing my engagement with the Syrian government, civil society, women leaders, and regional and international partners.
2. Despite the challenges - underscored by security incidents, economic hardship and unresolved local tensions - the opportunities for Syria are real, if institutions are built that are inclusive, accountable and capable of delivering for all Syrians, building confidence across Syria's diverse communities. Sustained commitment from the international community, including this Council, will remain critical.
3. I am pleased to inform the Security Council that the Secretary-General will travel to Syria later this week at the invitation of the Government. The Secretary-General will meet President al-Sharaa, Foreign Minister Shibani and other government officials, as well as civil society, women's organizations and diverse communities. Throughout his stay he will reaffirm the United Nations' commitment to supporting the Syrian Government and the Syrian people at this defining period in Syria's history. Further details have just been announced by the Secretary-General's Spokesperson and you will hear on this also from Ambassador Olabi.

Mr. President,

4. This month has seen important institutional developments. On 5 July, a Supreme Constitutional Court was appointed by President Sharaa, composed of seven judges, including two women. And, following President Sharaa's naming on 1 July of 70 appointed members of the People's Assembly, I attended its inaugural session on 12 July. The formation of both institutions are milestones in the transitional process defined by the March 2025 Constitutional Declaration.
5. The 206 current members of the People's Assembly represent a range of backgrounds from across Syria, including professionals, business leaders, tribal representatives, former opposition figures and combatants, as well as survivors of detention and chemical weapons attacks. With the President including 15 women among his 70 appointees, the overall women's representation in parliament increased to 22 members, over ten percent.
6. The presidential appointments reflected efforts to broaden participation and representation of Syria's religious, ethnic and social diversity. As I have noted in other briefings, concerns are nevertheless expressed to us regarding the limited representation of women across transitional institutions established to date, as well as the question of whether all communities feel adequately included. Ensuring effective responses to questions of inclusion, participation and representation will continue to be essential for social peace and stability in Syria.

7. The Assembly is now tasked with adopting its rules of procedure before tackling a huge legislative agenda across a range of urgent and critical areas. As an interim parliament, it is expected also to play an important role preparing for two key milestones laid out in the Constitutional Declaration: a permanent constitution and inclusive elections at the end of the transition. The consolidation of the legislative and the judicial institutions as independent from the executive, reflecting the principle of separation of powers enshrined in the Constitutional Declaration, will be an important component of a credible, inclusive, and sustainable transition. The Member of Parliament's professionalism and responsibility with which they tackle their work, will also be crucial factors in fostering public confidence in the emerging state institutions. As I have told the Speaker whom I met the other day, we stand ready to support the Assembly in its work.

Mr. President,

8. Recent domestic judicial proceedings, including continued hearings in the trial of Atef Najib, proceedings involving former Mufti Ahmad Hassoun and others, and further arrests of former officials associated with the previous regime, demonstrate continued efforts to address crimes committed during the conflict. International accountability efforts have likewise advanced, including recent convictions before European courts.
9. Beyond criminal accountability, we look forward to further efforts to define a comprehensive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transitional justice framework, including truth-seeking, reparations and institutional reform, that addresses violations committed by all perpetrators, ensures due process, recognizes the experiences of women and other survivors of sexual violence, and contributes to restoring confidence in public institutions.

Mr President,

10. In the northeast, progress has continued on military and internal security integration pursuant to the 29 January agreement. There was progress on judicial integration, and the completion of integration of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour – the first Ministry to announce that. On the ground, additional displaced Kurdish families returned to Afrin.
11. Discussions continue over a range of issues, including command arrangements, the integration of the Women's Protection Units, governance and administrative appointments, and the management of natural resources. There continue to be differing expectations regarding implementation on many of these aspects, but at the same time, the process continues, and we welcome that. No one expected it to be easy.
12. By contrast, a year since grave violations of human rights in Sweida, the political impasse remains as deep as ever. On the ground, there were clashes between General Security Forces and the National Guard in late June. While these did not escalate into a wider confrontation, the security environment continued to deteriorate. At least five people were reportedly killed in intra-Druze fighting, and kidnappings and retaliatory

attacks continued. Organized crime and narcotics trafficking likewise remain a source of instability.

13. Accountability for last July's events remains essential to rebuilding trust. It was recently announced that 23 members of the General Security Forces and the Syrian Army have been arrested, and a first public hearing in the Military Criminal Court was held on 1 July. We encourage progress towards transparent and fair judicial proceedings and further implementation of the recommendations of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry, consistent with the authorities' stated commitment to accountability and the rule of law.
14. Dialogue, rehabilitation, and confidence-building measures, such as those included in the September 2025 Roadmap, remain essential if trust is to be restored. As one immediate example, a practical solution still needs to be found that secures the right to education of Sweida's students, and the United Nations continues to offer its good offices and support for implementation modalities on the ground. Governmental rehabilitation efforts are taking place in areas under Government's control, as I witnessed last week. But ultimately, a political process is needed to resolve the underlying issues while upholding Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. President,

15. We commend the Syrian authorities for consistently reiterating their intention to avoid becoming a theatre for a wider regional conflict. Recent reports of the targeting of the al-Tanf base in Syrian territory underscore the importance of respecting Syria's sovereignty and preventing further escalation. The authorities also announced the interdiction of a cross-border weapons shipment originating from Iraq and reportedly intended for transfer to Lebanon, highlighting the continuing risks posed by illicit arms trafficking across Syria's borders.
16. Meanwhile, on the internal security situation, there were bomb attacks in Damascus near the Palace of Justice on 2 July and during French President Macron's visit on 7 July. Clearly, terrorist groups continue to seek to undermine the country's transition, especially at a time of growing international engagement with Syria. I reiterate my condemnation of these attacks and my condolences to the families of those killed, and send my wishes to the injured for their full recovery.
17. For their part, the Syrian authorities have reported further actions to counter Daesh and other terrorist threats. Security operations resulted in numerous arrests, and benefited from continued cooperation with regional and international partners. These efforts are welcome, while recent attacks in Raqqah and Damascus demonstrate that broad and sustained counterterrorism efforts remain essential.
18. Finally, Mr. President, I remain deeply concerned by continued Israeli military activity in southern Syria. Incursions, shelling, drone overflights and restrictions on civilian movement continued across Quneitra and Daraa. Particularly concerning were the events of 27 and 28 June, when members of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) reportedly killed two individuals east of the ceasefire line before carrying out a ground incursion into Abdin village. The operation displaced civilians and was followed by the deployment of Syrian security forces after the IDF withdrew. More

recently, residents of Hader publicly complained of repeated raids, restrictions on access to agricultural land and intimidation of civilians. And on 29 June, the IDF delayed the movements of a United Nations humanitarian assessment mission visiting several villages in Rural Damascus governorate, including questioning and photographing mission members.

19. These developments have been accompanied by repeated public statements by senior Israeli officials indicating that Israeli forces intend to maintain positions beyond the 1974 ceasefire line. These actions violate Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, heighten regional tensions, impact civilians in their daily lives, and risk undermining confidence at a critical moment in Syria's transition. We reiterate our call on Israel to end violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, and respect international law.

Mr. President,

20. We see continued efforts by the Syrian authorities to advance economic recovery. Syria and France have just concluded a broad package of cooperation agreements covering transport, logistics, infrastructure and investment. Syria and Lebanon launched a review of their bilateral trade framework with a view to expanding economic ties, while Syria and Iraq are discussing cooperation to rehabilitate the Kirkuk–Baniyas oil pipeline, an important regional energy corridor. Moreover, US President Trump's announcement on the lifting of the designation of Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism is a significant step forward. These developments are encouraging and reflect growing international confidence in Syria's recovery. Their success, however, will ultimately be measured by whether they translate into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary Syrians who continue to grapple with high prices, unemployment, deteriorating purchasing power and uneven access to essential services.

Mr. President,

21. The establishment of the People's Assembly has renewed discussion regarding women's participation in Syria's public institutions. During my engagements, women from across Syria consistently emphasized that representation must be accompanied by meaningful participation in decision-making. They stressed the importance of ensuring women's full involvement not only in legislative institutions but also in transitional justice, constitutional development, local governance and economic recovery. These perspectives remain essential to building institutions that enjoy broad public confidence. Today I am engaged in discussions with the members of the Women Advisory Board over substantive issues, as well as future modalities to expand and strengthen our engagement with Syrian women in full respect of Syria's sovereignty.
22. We have likewise continued our dialogue with Syrian civil society organizations, who continued to emphasize the importance of protecting civic space, strengthening consultation mechanisms and advancing accountability for all victims of the conflict.

Mr. President,

23. The past month has demonstrated both the opportunities and the fragility of Syria's transition. Important institutional milestones have been reached. But, ultimately, the success of this transition will not be judged solely by the institutions that are created, but by how they function. Building confidence will require an effective and balanced system of governance, with the meaningful participation by women and all components of Syrian society, continued progress on accountability and transitional justice, and tangible improvements in the daily lives of Syrians.
24. As the Secretary-General will underscore when he visits Syria, the United Nations remains fully committed to supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition. My Office will continue working with all Syrians, regional partners and members of this Council to help consolidate recent progress and support a sovereign, united, stable and inclusive Syria. We remain committed to doing so, including by being ready to relocate our Geneva office to Damascus, to enable effective collaboration.

Thank you, Mr. President.