

AS DELIVERED

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

17 September 2026

Mr. President (Ambassador Jérôme Bonnafont, France),

1. In my latest stay in Syria, I have seen further progress in institutional development, while Syrians continue to grapple with dire economic conditions and the country confronts internal and external security challenges. Above all, I had the opportunity to hear from local officials and civil society in different parts of the country a strong commitment to build a Syria where everyone feels they belong, with representative institutions, a culture of accountability for both past and present, and tangible improvements in people's lives with sustained international support.

Mr. President,

2. On 27 August, the People's Assembly announced the composition of the 26 standing committees established following last month's adoption of a comprehensive set of rules of procedure. Five of the 26 committees are chaired by women. And Syrian women interlocutors continue to seek further leadership roles in the Assembly and a commitment by all its members to meet the diverse expectations of Syrian women, and those of Syrians as a whole.
3. Throughout this week, the People's Assembly has been holding an Extraordinary Session to adopt its budget and start consideration of a number of laws – notable is the abrogation yesterday of the Court on Terrorism. MPs have also been hearing from the Minister of Education on challenges related to access to schools. These are notable initial steps in the Assembly's developing oversight role.
4. Last week I met with Speaker al-Awwak to discuss how my Office can best support the Assembly, including as it establishes its administrative structure and considers multiple offers of international assistance. And I agreed with the Speaker that these offers should be well coordinated and tailored to the needs of the Assembly.

Mr. President,

5. Earlier this month, I also discussed with the Syrian authorities preparations for the holding of future parliamentary and presidential elections, and possibly other elections, in line with a new constitution. We considered legal, political and operational challenges for future polls, drawing on lessons from the experience of establishing the People's Assembly. The heavy lifting needed for the implementation of these electoral plans within the remaining three-and-a-half years of the transition must not be underestimated. But I am pleased with the developing cooperation with

the Syrian authorities also in this field, including in exploring potential opportunities for UN electoral assistance.

6. As for the drawing up of a new constitution, the inclusive, transparent and participatory nature of any process is essential if a genuine social contract and shared vision of a future state is to be forged, and we will be ready to support a Syrian-led process in this regard.

Mr. President,

7. Two days after the United States removed Syria from its list of State Sponsors of Terrorism last month, the first international Visa and Mastercard transactions were successfully conducted in Syria. This comes alongside deeper engagement by international financial institutions and growing interest from international business. Syria is also seeking to position itself as a regional corridor for energy and trade. These moves towards economic integration are notable. And I urge donor countries to facilitate investment and economic cooperation, on the understanding that these should be equitable and accompanied by strong safeguards. Ultimately, ordinary Syrians will judge economic recovery through their daily lives: jobs, affordable food and housing, functioning electricity and other basic services, and the ability to return and rebuild their lives.
8. Yet these opportunities stand in stark contrast to the economic pressures confronting ordinary Syrians. The sharp increases in fuel prices announced last weekend triggered demonstrations and roadblocks across several parts of the country. These protests reflect the immediate impact of higher energy costs, but also wider concerns over whether economic recovery is translating into tangible improvements in people's lives, especially the poorest.

Mr. President,

9. In the past weeks, I visited Aleppo, Tartous, Latakia and Idlib where I met the Governors and a wide range of civil society actors. Local officials illustrated encouraging developments in several areas, including steps to strengthen local governance and efforts to expand participation of different components of Syrian society in State institutions. They welcomed close cooperation with the United Nations and urged more coordination in humanitarian and recovery programming.
10. Civil society interlocutors stressed the need for further progress on transitional justice, for women's economic and political participation and for greater clarity on the vision for the transition. The message from many was clear: progress at the national level must translate into greater inclusion, security, services and economic opportunity at the local level. And I look forward to further engagement across the country, with officials as well as with women and civil society.
11. In this context, we are currently working with the Government, civil society and other UN entities on initiatives to address the proliferation of hate speech.

Mr. President,

12. On the Northeast, we see important progress. Three days after Mazloun Abdi announced the dissolution of the Syrian Democratic Forces and integration into the Syrian military, he was appointed as a Presidential Adviser. There have also been further steps on military, police and civilian administration integration in Hasakah.
13. I am, however, concerned that a former SDF fighter was recently abducted and killed, triggering demonstrations in several Kurdish-majority towns and a standoff between General Security and some other security forces around a detention centre, which some detainees then set on fire. I note that several suspects have reportedly been arrested and that investigations are continuing. And it is important that the abduction and killing are fully investigated and that those responsible are held accountable. And I welcome efforts of senior Government officials and Presidential Adviser Mazloun Abdi on restoring calm.
14. Returns also continue to take place. On 1 September, approximately 50 families displaced for more than a decade returned voluntarily from Ras al-Ain to al-Hasakeh city in the first organized return convoy of its kind, a pilot initiative facilitated by the authorities to support and inform future return movements in north-eastern Syria.
15. And discussions are continuing on the use of the Kurdish language. Attention continues on the future role of women who served in the Women's Protection Units. It will be important that women who played prominent roles in the political and social life of northeastern Syria can continue to participate meaningfully in the institutions of the new Syria.

Mr. President,

16. The situation in Sweida remains deeply concerning. On 1 September, renewed clashes between Internal Security Forces and the National Guard affiliated with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri left several casualties.
17. I also deplore the abduction and expulsion from Sweida on 4 September of Druze notable Atef Hneidi by armed men reportedly affiliated with the National Guard. He had publicly rejected statements associating the Druze community's future with Israel and expressed his support for Syria's unity. These and other forms of repression of freedom of expression cannot provide a path forward.
18. Following the Presidential Decree last month granting students from Sweida Governorate an exceptional examination, only around 150 of approximately 14,000 eligible students participated. The examination centers were in areas under Government control, specifically in some of the villages devastated during the events of July 2025, and students from within Sweida were prevented from reaching examination centers and faced other restrictions of movement. At this point, unless these children can sit for examinations in a safe, secure, and supportive environment, without pressure or disruption of movement, other solutions should be considered to

ensure that their right to education is upheld. And my Office and UN agencies stand ready to help.

19. I wish to take this opportunity to stress that the issue of Sweida and the future of its Druze community must ultimately be resolved by Syrians themselves, within a united Syria, and without disruptive foreign interference. I look forward to renewed efforts to reinvigorate the September 2025 roadmap, promoting the restoration of state authority while addressing the real trust deficit that followed the events of July 2025 and continued grievances within the community in Sweida. A phased but determined process could be initiated to address detainees and missing persons, and support gradual sustainable returns, among confidence-building measures to build trust between the state and the Druze community and promote reconciliation between the Druze and Bedouin communities. And my Office and the rest of the United Nations in Syria are ready to cooperate in exploring these dimensions and provide operational support, while supporting mediation efforts aimed at reaching broader political and security agreements.

Mr. President,

20. Israeli presence and military activity in southern Syria has continued in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, with near-daily incursions, temporary checkpoints, searches of homes and artillery fire, particularly in Quneitra and western Daraa. Two Syrians who were taken to Israel and held there were returned home, but others remain in Israeli custody.
21. On 9 September, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Israeli forces on Jabal al-Sheikh/Mount Hermon, reiterating that Israel would not permit hostile forces to establish themselves along its border. I have taken very clear note of the statement by the Syrian Permanent Representative and 43 member states last week in response to this other violation of Syrian sovereignty.
22. The Secretary-General has been very clear: violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must cease and the 1974 Agreement must be respected. Security concerns cannot be addressed in any sustainable way through unilateral military action or an open-ended military presence. Diplomacy must prevail. And I welcome in this regard the mediation efforts led by the United States, aimed at reaching an understanding among Syria and its neighbours that reduces tensions and promotes sustainable security arrangements. And these must respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and comply fully with international law.

Mr. President,

23. I welcome the General Assembly's unanimous adoption on 1 September of a Syrian-sponsored resolution establishing 19 December as the International Day for the Recognition of Women Searchers for Missing Persons. It is an important recognition of Syrian women who have spent years seeking truth and accountability. Their experience is also a reminder that Syrian women have been among key political, civic

and social actors in this transition, and must be able to participate fully in shaping its future.

24. I also welcome Syria's cooperation with the OPCW, which has verified the destruction of materiel related to chemical weapons in Syria, and with the IAEA, whose Board of Governors declared on 9 September that Syria is no longer in non-compliance with its nuclear non-proliferation obligations.

Mr. President,

25. As attention turns to this General Assembly period, we can reinforce a simple message. Syria has made important advances, and these should be recognized and supported. At the same time, progress should create momentum for the next steps, addressing the significant challenges that persist.
26. For the Syrian authorities, this requires strengthening accountable institutions, widening participation, protecting civic space and advancing transitional justice. For international partners, it entails sustained political and practical support for recovery, reconstruction and safe, dignified and voluntary returns.
27. And for our part, this requires my Office consolidating in Damascus to fit the growing cooperation with the Government and engagement with Syrian society, to better implement our mandate of support to the Syrian-led political transition. And the UN as a whole remains committed to develop its partnership with Syria.

Thank you.