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UNITED NATIONS DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA
NAJAT ROCHDI
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
29 June 2023

Madam President (Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh),

1. The past month, the violence and suffering experienced by the Syrian people have reminded us all of what is at stake as diplomatic efforts continue on Syria.
 2. Syrians still face acute and internationalized conflict. In recent days we have seen multiple rounds of pro-Government airstrikes in the north-west. We have received deeply worrying reports of a strike on a market in northwest Syria, reportedly killing and wounding civilians. Russia states that strikes were carried out on command posts of illegal armed formations, liquidating militants and arms depots in the Idlib de-escalation zone. We have also seen multiple drone strikes from areas controlled by listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, into Government-controlled areas, reportedly also killing and wounding civilians. Meanwhile, regular exchanges of mortar, rocket and artillery have continued across frontlines. We have also seen many other concerning incidents: reports of Turkish drone and artillery strikes on SDF and Syrian Government positions, as well as civilian infrastructure; SDF shelling of Turkish positions; Israeli airstrikes; security incidents in southern and central Syria; and ongoing attacks by listed terrorist groups. Special Envoy Pedersen has raised with key actors in the Ceasefire Task Force in recent days the need for restored and sustained calm. Ultimately, we need a nationwide ceasefire in line with Security Council resolution 2254.
 3. Syrians face an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis. As I stressed to the Humanitarian Task Force this week in Geneva, Syrians' needs must be at the centre of our approach and humanitarian action must be depoliticized.
 - This means sufficient resources: we are grateful for the solidarity shown and generous pledges made in the Brussels Conference, to support operations in all areas of Syria, and we need swift disbursements too.
 - This also means access, via all modalities, including cross-line and cross-border. We welcome the recent cross-line convoy into north-west Syria. As we approach the expiration of this Council's cross-border resolution, let me underline the words of the Secretary-General who has repeatedly called for a 12-month extension, as well as the need for assistance to be provided across all pillars of the Humanitarian Response Plan, including enhancing early recovery.
 - This also means sanctioning states should continue to build on the moves they made in response to the earthquakes and step-up efforts to counter over-compliance.
- Let me note that more children than in the past crossed combat-lines to take exams this past month – a welcome development which signals that all sides have it within themselves to depoliticize access to aid and services when they want.
4. Syrians still face an acute economic crisis. The Syrian pound stabilized for a short period in June. But ordinary Syrians continue to grapple with rising inflation and energy and fuel shortages. Syrians from *all* quarters and *all* backgrounds are affected, feeding into rising needs across the country.

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5. The tragedy of the detained, the disappeared and the missing continues. Their families, particularly women and girls, are deeply affected. Many are looking to the General Assembly vote today with hope that a new entity dedicated to the issue of missing persons in Syria could bring some measure of relief to families across Syria and outside of it who have been demanding their right to know the truth. Having said this, let us also remember that thousands remain subject to arbitrary detention, and at risk every single day. We continue to call for releases, unilaterally and at scale, without delay. My colleagues who participated in the latest meeting of the Astana Working Group on the subject appealed to those member states with influence to press for action on this issue, at a scale commensurate with the problem. And we will continue to raise it directly in our dealings with the Syrian Government and all relevant parties.
6. Let us also not forget the millions of Syrians living in displacement, both inside Syria and abroad. They have still seen no concrete shift in conditions that might see them return voluntarily and in safety and in dignity. Many Syrians were among those who tragically drowned recently when an overcrowded boat sank in the Mediterranean Sea – a tragic reminder to all of us of what hopelessness can bring.

Madam President,

7. All of these factors show us why it is so important for renewed diplomacy to translate into real solutions to meet the immediate concerns of the Syrian people, build some trust and confidence among the parties, and move forward towards a political solution in line with Security Council resolution 2254. We have carried this message to all this month.
8. Special Envoy Pedersen engaged the Syrian Negotiations Commission in Geneva; senior US, UK and European officials in Paris; EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and senior European officials in Brussels; and the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and high-level officials of Italy. The Special Envoy looks forward to continuing the close cooperation with the Arab Contact Group.
9. The Special Envoy travelled to Moscow where he met the Russian Foreign Minister and other senior officials. He attended the high-level meetings in Astana, where he met with Deputy Foreign Ministers of Iran, Russia, Türkiye and the delegations of the Syrian Government and Syrian opposition. Iran, Russia, the Syria Government and Türkiye held a quadrilateral meeting in Astana.
10. From these engagements, it is clear that moving from intention to action requires genuine engagement, flexibility and commitments from more than just one group of actors. Even modest steps – to improve the lives of Syrians and move on the political track - will require action from many different sides – each of whom has easy means to spoil if excluded. This is why the Special Envoy has welcomed the enhanced attention to Syria and seeks to maximize coherence, coordination and complementarity of the diplomatic efforts underway, and to seek to engage directly the Syrian parties and all key players as the facilitator of the political process.

Madam President,

11. In this regard, the Special Envoy continues his effort to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. We must overcome the issues that prevent the Committee from convening,

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and to see it resume its work and develop some substance and at pace. We continue to appreciate creative ideas to overcome the obstacles and we remain engaged with all relevant parties to reconvene the Constitutional Committee in Geneva.

12. On confidence-building, the question of Syrian refugees and the internally displaced is another issue of common concern. Our message remains very clear: the principle of safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns must be upheld. The way forward is for the relevant parties to take concrete steps on the protection and livelihood issues that refugees themselves say inhibit them from returning – actions which could also bring us towards a more safe, calm and neutral environment. This is something that Special Envoy Pedersen is continuing to look at with key players, and to coordinate closely with other senior UN officials.

Madam President,

13. As diplomatic efforts intensify it is ever more important to hear the voices of the Syrians themselves. It was therefore welcome to hear representatives of the Civil Society Support Room and Women's Advisory Board, in Brussels, deliver a clear message coordinated by a wide range of Syrians from inside and outside: Syrians want a political solution that preserves the unity and stability of Syria, that aims to rebuild social cohesion in a way that would respond to the aspirations of the Syrian people, all the Syrian people.
14. In Beirut last week we heard a similar message from an ad hoc consultative group of Civil Society Support Room members, who discussed concrete ways to harness the recent regional dynamics in support of Syrians themselves and the 2254 political process, which they need to see move urgently.
15. This month the Women's Advisory Board convened in Geneva and Brussels. It is essential to consult with women because the conflict impacts them in specific ways and they must play an active role in shaping a political solution. It is also extremely useful to consult with these women, who provided sharp insights and advice on political opportunities and also potential pitfalls, such as the need to address protection concerns in any efforts emanating from regional re-engagement.

Madam President,

16. As the Special Envoy noted, we will only be able to say that the current opportunity has been seized when we see confidence-building on the ground and a genuine political process resuming. We still cannot say the opportunity has been seized. Diplomatic moves have yet to produce concrete results. But the opportunity is still there all the same. The Special Envoy continues to probe and test possibilities for diplomatic traction on all aspects of resolution 2254, including via step-for-step confidence-building measures and resuming the Constitutional Committee. We hope that, in the coming weeks, we can continue to zone in, with greater clarity and specificity, on how to build confidence, resume the intra-Syrian political process and implement resolution 2254. We look forward to continuing our engagements with the the Syrian parties and with the Arab, Astana, and Western players on these issues, to promote coordination and move towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political resolution that restores Syria's sovereignty,

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independence, unity and territorial integrity and meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, all the Syrian people.