

**UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA GEIR O. PEDERSEN  
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON SYRIA  
24 March 2022**

Madam President.

1. I am briefing you today from Geneva at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Small Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. The Committee has been meeting since Monday this week and concludes with its 5<sup>th</sup> and final day of meetings of this session tomorrow – on Friday.
2. Before the Committee began to work this week, I recalled that Syria remains one of the gravest crises in the world, and there is a clear need for progress towards a political solution in line with Security Council resolution 2254. Having passed this month the grim milestone of 11 years of conflict, and with the needs of the long-suffering Syrian people rising, I appealed to the Committee’s members to work this week with the sense of seriousness and a spirit of compromise that the situation demands.
3. This week, the Committee members have discussed draft constitutional texts on four titles of constitutional principles. Let me mention the four principles: “basics of governance”; “state identity”; “state symbols”; and today, they are discussing the following: “regulation and functions of public authorities”. These are important subjects, and deliberations, as you could expect, have not been easy.
4. We are now at an important moment in the week’s deliberations. In accordance with the Co-Chairs’ agreement that led to the convening of this session, the delegations are expected to submit revisions to reflect the content of the discussions, and these are then to be discussed by the Committee members tomorrow.
5. We will therefore see if the next 24 hours help to move us forward. There are significant differences, but it is possible to find and build on common points, if the will exists to do so. Serious attempts should be made by all delegations to begin to narrow differences. This requires taking on board aspects of points made by other delegations, and entertaining compromise formulations that could in time attract support within the Committee in accordance with its decision-making procedures. A constitution-making effort that actually starts to explore compromises could help build trust and confidence in this process - something sorely lacking among the Syrians at present.

Madam President,

6. Turning to the situation on the ground, Martin will be briefing you on the growing humanitarian needs and the continued effects on the Syrian people of the destruction of so much of the country and the collapse of Syria’s economy. I urge all concerned to take measures to reverse these negative trends, to expand cross-line and cross-border assistance, and to enhance efforts for early recovery to build resilience.

7. Beyond the humanitarian sphere, there is much else that could be done to build trust and confidence, something that I continue to explore with all actors. After all, it is clear that no one actor or existing group of actors in Syria can determine the outcome of this conflict. A military solution is an illusion. This was always the case, but it is now plain for all to see.
8. There have been no shifts in frontlines for two years now. Yet this past month, violence has continued between the different Syrian actors, two listed terrorist groups, and involving five foreign armies too. With front lines frozen, there is every reason to try to de-escalate militarily and to build a true nationwide ceasefire. Likewise, with listed terrorist groups still a threat, parties share an interest and a duty to cooperate amongst themselves.
9. Syrians on all sides continue to be affected by the plight of the detained, the abducted and the missing. Any credible attempt to build trust and confidence must include serious steps forward on this issue – an issue that has been a priority of mine from day one, and continues to be.
10. There is also much more that could be done by the Syrian government on the one hand and by outside actors on the other to address the very real concerns that Syrian refugees and IDPs express – the very concerns which prevent most from returning: safety and security; lack of livelihoods and work opportunities; lack of adequate housing as well as concerns over housing, land and property rights; military service requirements; and inadequate basic services.

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11. I believe in areas such as these, and potentially others too, it should be possible to identify concrete, reciprocal, verifiable measures that could be taken in parallel and that could begin to shift conflict dynamics – and in the process, to explore how a broader political process could be constructed to tackle all the issues in Security Council resolution 2254.
12. I have already received some ideas, and I continue to develop others. There is now a need to deepen the discussion, and I will be carrying forward the consultations with that objective. The constructive international diplomacy needed to support this effort has not been made easier by recent heightened international tensions. But I will keep working on this.

Madam President,

13. Let us also remember the impact of the Syrian conflict on the region. I am glad that you are hearing a briefing today from Assistant-Secretary-General Hossam Zaki from the League of Arab States. Regional input and support for the UN-led effort to facilitate a political settlement will be critical, as will contributions from many other international stakeholders. That is why I continue to consult widely. This past month I held consultations in Geneva with envoys of several states, travelled to Washington to brief officials of a number of states who met there under US auspices, and travelled to Antalya where I also was able to meet the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Russia, among other interlocutors.

Madam President,

14. I also continue to consult widely with Syrians as I pursue my mandate, and to value the insights and inputs I receive. The Women's Advisory Board met this past week and a half outside Geneva, and they continue to provide me with their perspective and ideas on the political process. Offering a gendered perspective, members of the Board underlined ways to ensure that the aspirations of all Syrians are considered as the political process continues. I welcome their willingness to engage on tough questions.
15. Earlier this month, we also convened in Geneva the Thematic Working Groups of the Civil Society Support Room on the topics of civic space and values, as well as on the economy, recovery, and development perspectives. Participants were keen to support our efforts to promote a functioning political process to implement resolution 2254. Many are involved in local peacebuilding projects to promote a society based on common civic values of participation, plurality, equality, non-violence and respect for rights and freedoms. They expressed their distress at the economic situation which nourishes the war economy and called on donors not to forget Syria and invest in early recovery efforts.

Madam President,

16. While I am concluding, I want to emphasize that I continue to rely on all members of the Security Council to support my efforts, in accordance with my mandate, to bring about the implementation of resolution 2254, to restore the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, and to enable the Syrian people to realize their legitimate aspirations.

Thank you so much.