



TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA, MR. GEIR O. PEDERSEN, AHEAD OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE SIXTH SESSION

Very good to see you all. Pleased that we can meet like this as Jenifer said. It is now close to two years since we had the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee. Then, as you will recall, 150 members met here in Geneva, 50 nominated by the government, 50 nominated by the opposition, and 50 nominated from civil society, the so-called Middle Third

Among the 150 they decided to establish a drafting committee of 45 members, 15 from each category. This drafting committee has met for five times, but after the fifth meeting in January this year, we concluded that we are not making sufficient progress, and that we could not continue the way we have been working. Since then, close to nine months, I have been negotiating between the parties, trying to be able to establish a consensus on how we are going to move forward. And I am very pleased to say that we have reached such a consensus. And the two Co-Chairs now agree that we will not only prepare for constitutional reform, but we will prepare and start drafting for constitutional reform. So, the new thing this week is that we will actually be starting a drafting process for constitutional reform in Syria

I have had the pleasure this morning to meet already with the Co-Chair nominated by the government and the Co-Chair nominated by the opposition and I also met with the so-called Middle Third or civil society 15 members. All very good meetings. But then also another very important meeting took place, and that was for the first time, the two Co-Chairs, the one nominated by the government and the other nominated by the opposition, were sitting down together with me for a substantial and frank discussion on how we are to proceed with



the constitutional reform and indeed in detail how we are planning
.for the week ahead of us

The reason why this meeting with you will have to be a bit short is that
I am going to run immediately after this back to a meeting with the
two Co-Chairs and discuss the details on how we are going to move
.forward for the rest of the week

But my appeal, of course, to the 45 is that we work as we have agreed
to, and that we now start the drafting process of the Constitutional
Committee. And of course while we are doing that we all realise that
we are not working in a vacuum, we understand the realities of the
ground in Syria, we know that since last March 2020, there has been
relative calm on the ground, but when I say relative the emphasis
should be on relative because we daily have civilians being killed
and injured, and my appeal has therefore been that we need to do
something to correct the situation. And as you all know on top of all
this, we have an extremely difficult humanitarian and economic
situation. There are more than 13 million Syrians in need of
humanitarian assistance and close to 90 percent are living below the
poverty line. So, the time, and I appealed in my last briefing to the
Security Council, I appealed to the Security Council that we now
need to come together and start a real process to the benefit of the
.Syrian people to move this process forward

And as I said many times, the Syrian Constitutional Committee is an
important contribution to the political process, but the committee in
itself will not be able to solve the Syrian crisis, so we need to come
together, with serious work, on the Constitutional Committee, but
.also address the other aspects of the Syrian crisis

.Thank you



Question: What is your assessment Mr. Pedersen after the first direct meeting between both sides, how was the atmosphere in the room, how can you describe it and what is the impact of this meeting ?on this round and the next rounds

Mr. Pedersen: I think I will describe it as serious, and frank and that they were committed to the principles that we agreed on beforehand. So, I am hoping that we will be able to continue the meeting in the same spirit, but of course I will not pre-judge the outcome of the week ahead of us, we will start tomorrow and hopefully we will then be able to deliver what we, I believe, that we .have promised that we have agreed upon

Question: Mr. Pedersen, first of all congratulations on starting to draft the constitution for the first time after five tours, so my question is, how many more rounds do we expect for the completion of the ?constitution that will shape the future of Syria

Mr. Pedersen: Very short answer to that, I don't know. We will see how the meeting proceeds this week and then you know, it is not only a meeting of the 45 but it will then also, based on proposals from the 45, the 150 will also have to start to meet, and to see how we can move this process forward. But we have agreed that we will try to make progress, and that we work continuously to provide progress. So hopefully when I meet you by the end of the week we .will see if we are a bit closer to that

Question: (Translated from Arabic) Mr. Pedersen, we know that the three delegations submitted 18 constitutional principles to be discussed and it was expected that there would be an agreement on 4 principles to be discussed during this round. Was there an agreement reached on these principles? And are there clear ?principles to be discussed during this round.



Mr. Pedersen: Yes, I do believe there are clear principles that will be discussed and that we have agreed that we will have them in four titles, will develop draft constitutional text that will be discussed throughout the week. So, based on that understanding I am hopeful that we will be able to make progress, as I stated at the very beginning, that we have in principle already agreed upon. But as I also said, lets now work seriously throughout this week and then when we meet again on Friday, we will be able to summarize where we are.

.Thank you

Geneva, 17 October 2021

