

Press Conference by Pedersen Ahead of Seventh Session

Geneva
20. 03. 2022

Let me start by emphasizing the obvious, and that is that Syria remains one of the gravest crises in the world and that there is a clear need for progress towards a political solution.

I am pleased that the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated Small Body of the Constitutional Committee is meeting for the Seventh Session this week.

As you will recall, the Constitutional Committee consists of the Large Body, 150 persons, 50 from the government, 50 from the opposition and 50 from civil society. The Small Body is then represented by 15 members nominated by the government, 15 members nominated by the opposition and 15 members of the civil society group, what we call the Middle Third.

As I said they have met seven times (the Seventh Session convenes the week of 21 March 2022) and it is now more than, or close to two and a half years since we had the first meeting.

I will not pre-judge the outcome of this session but as Jenifer said, I will try to provide you with an update of the work when the week concludes.

I was pleased to meet jointly with the two Co-Chairs this morning, with the Co-Chair nominated by the government and the Co-Chair nominated by the opposition SNC.

In that meeting we agreed also that we should meet later in the day with the Civil Society delegation, and I just left that meeting after we had a good meeting together with the Co-Chairs, and with the 15 representatives of the Middle Third.

In the meeting with the two Co-Chairs, we went through the agenda for the week, we agreed on which four principles or titles that shall be discussed during the week, and I will mention those four principles to you so that you have an idea of that:

The first is Basics of Governance, the second is the State Identity, the third is State Symbols, and the fourth is Structure and Functions of Public Authorities, and we will spend one day on each principle. And I think that you, Khawla, made sure that we have the correct Arabic translation.

As you may or may not recall during the last session in October, the two Co-Chairs noted that the Committee needed to improve the work of the last day of the session.

They said that they wanted to have a better mechanism when it comes to revisions of proposed constitutional texts and there is now an agreement with the two Co-Chairs on how this should be done, and I am looking forward to seeing then on Friday how this will be put into practice.

Let me just remind you what is the mandate of the Constitutional Committee, it is to prepare and draft for popular approval a constitutional reform and as the mandate or the terms of reference says, that may be through an amendment of the current constitution or draft a new constitution.

I have consistently said that the Committee should work in a way that builds trust and confidence. And during this session, I hope to see the Constitutional Committee work with a sense of seriousness and purpose and determination to make progress that the situation demands.

Thank you so much.

Question: Do you see any signs of optimism of positive outcomes of this week's meeting, you have said that you have been frustrated with the

outcomes of previous meetings, do you see signs of a bit more optimism this time?

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, listen, let me be careful by stating whether there are grounds for optimism or not, I think if the three delegations do what they have said they will do, I hope that we can see some steady progress, but I learned through the six previous rounds of talks, that seeing you on Sunday I should not pre-judge the outcome of the discussion. But I should emphasize that I had good meetings with the two Co-Chairs in preparation for this meeting, and I have had a good meeting with all the 15 members of the Middle Third and hopefully – and as what I would call business-like meeting we had with the two Co-Chairs earlier today, hopefully that will make it possible for us to make progress during this week.

Question: The last meeting, as you mentioned, was in October and now, we are in March, five months later, I wonder if we can assume that there have been many difficulties to get together the delegations? I would like you to explain, as much as you can, what were those difficulties that took so long to get this meeting arranged?

Mr. Pedersen: The reason for that is clear, what we agreed in October was that we needed to agree on a mechanism for how to improve the work on the last day of the Constitutional Committee, and that has taken a little bit of time. I have been travelling to Damascus to meet with the government and the government-nominated Co-Chair, and I have been travelling to meet with the opposition and the SNC and these take a bit of time. But in the end, we now have an understanding for how we are going to proceed also on the last day, that is on Friday, so that is the reason for why the work has been delayed.

Question: I have two brief questions, are we going to see the 15 members of the opposition present here, particularly the representative of the Moscow platform? In order for you to determine this round of talks and the next talks, this means that you have no reasons, no factors that enable you to determine and hold this round, to my knowledge you do not like to have the

same results and in the previous failed rounds, you cannot accept the same failure for the next rounds, so what are the reasons, are there international factors? And also factors from the opposition and Syria that will push you to hold this round and the next rounds of talks?

Mr. Pedersen: Frankly I am not sure I got the whole question, but let me just say that the reason why we are meeting now is of course that the Syrian parties themselves wanted to have the meeting, agreed to have the meeting, and that they have managed to come to an understanding, that we agreed that we needed to solve during the last round of talks here in Geneva in October, as I said to the previous speaker. So, we will then, hopefully, when I meet you on Friday, we will be able to see whether we have made progress or not. But as I said, let me not pre-judge the work that Syrians themselves will be doing this week.

Thank you.