

Incremental progress but 'we're not yet there,' UN mediator on Syria reports

31 March 2017 – The latest round of the United Nations-facilitated [intra-Syrian talks](#) concluded today in Geneva where UN envoy Staffan de Mistura told journalists the discussions had been serious and the parties engaged, but “we’re not yet there.”

When the current talks between the Syrian Government and opposition delegations began last week, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura said he did not expect [miracles, breakthroughs or breakdowns](#), but hoped to build on the previous rounds with some incremental, constructive steps.

The [Syrian conflict](#) now entering its seventh year, has devastated the country, killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions.

Summarising the spirit of the nine days of talks in the Swiss city, Mr. de Mistura said they had been “serious and engaged” on matters of substance – rather than on procedure. But he added that on the subject of real peace negotiations, many obstacles remain.

“No one can deny and I cannot deny that there serious challenges and I’m not seeing immediately this developing into a peace agreement, no doubt about that [...] In any negotiations there are certain issues that need to be prepared and discussed before the real peace negotiation starts. We are not yet there.”

During the talks, Mr, de Mistura said, the parties had covered all the issues on the table, including political transition, national integrity, counter terrorism, and confidence-building measures, among others.

Sometimes they’d been discussed “in depth;” on governance, security and constitutional issues – although he would have liked a little more detail on that last point, he said.

At the same time, he underscored: “There are real challenges on the ground, we are seeing them in front of our eyes, but let’s be frank: in spite of them, no one threatened to walk out and every one was serious and business-like in pursuing their points of view.”

He said that all the parties agreed to the next round of talks, but the details would be decided after he heads to New York late next week where he will seek guidance from the UN Secretary-General and Security Council.

In the meantime, Mr. de Mistura noted that next week, on 4 and 5 April, there will be an international conference on Syria and the region held in in Brussels, and that he hoped it would be an occasion for a better clarity of the international engagement on humanitarian assistance and reconstruction

efforts.

Approval of Somalia's new cabinet a 'green light for action,' says UN envoy

31 March 2017 – Welcoming the Somali Federal Parliament's approval of a new cabinet, the United Nations envoy for the country expressed hope that the new Government will be able to address the challenges confronting the Horn of Africa nation.

"The Parliamentary approval was [a bright green light](#)," the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Michael Keating, said today in a news release.

He noted that with a healthy mix of experienced leaders and relative newcomers to the political stage, the new cabinet will make a vital contribution to the efforts of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire.

In a recent statement, the Prime Minister had highlighted the need to eradicate poverty, build up Somalia's security services to combat the scourge of terrorism, and expedite the constitutional review process that will lay the foundations for the holding of one-person, one-vote elections in 2020.

For his part, Mr. Keating added that 27-Minister cabinet includes six women, the largest number of female ministers ever to be named to a Federal Government cabinet is a positive step towards empowering Somali women in the political affairs of the country.

"The United Nations and international partners look forward to working closely and fruitfully with the President, the Prime Minister and the new cabinet as they tackle the many political, economic, security and humanitarian tasks facing Somalia today," he said.