

Syria talks end with 'incremental progress' but 'no breakthrough' – UN envoy

15 July 2017 – Speaking to reporters in the early hours of Saturday in Geneva, United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura said that the latest round of the [intra-Syrian talks](#) ended with 'incremental progress.'

'We made, as we were expecting and hoping, incremental progress. No breakthrough, no breakdown, no one walking out, incremental progress,' he said at a press conference, following the conclusion of the 10-15 July round of the UN-facilitated talks aimed at ending six years of war in the Middle East country.

Referring to a technical consultative mechanism agreed on in the previous round, he said that 'in addition to this technical agreement... there has been a generous effort among them (the opposition) to build something they didn't have before, trust, mutual trust.'

'I would not have imagined two months ago that they would have been sitting in such an intensive and constructive way together in confidence,' the envoy said.

He said he intends to reconvene the intra-Syrian talks in early September.

'I have asked the parties to be ready to offer clear, substantive positions on issues across all four baskets, and we hope that we will be at least pushing them to sit in the same room.'

The 'four baskets' are: a credible non-sectarian transitional government; a future constitution; early and free parliamentary elections within 18 months; and a united war against terrorism within Syria.

UNICEF names YouTube star Lilly Singh as goodwill envoy

15 July 2017 – The United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has appointed Indian-origin Canadian YouTube star and actress Lilly Singh as its newest Goodwill Ambassador.

In this role, Ms. Singh, known by her digital alias Superwoman, will use her unique cyber presence to engage children and young people and empower them to

speak out about the challenges they face.

"I am honoured to join UNICEF as a Goodwill Ambassador, and to use my voice to support its mission of reaching every child," she said at a special event today in New Delhi. "The children I have met here are overcoming so many challenges and they are living proof of what a child can achieve, if given a chance," she added.

According to a [press release](#) on her appointment, the 28-year-old has gained a huge fan base of over 11 million YouTube subscribers. This year, she released her international and New York Times bestselling book *How To Be A Bawse*, and was recently cast in HBO's film adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*. Additionally, she was ranked 1st on the Forbes Magazine Top Influencers List in the entertainment category.

"Lilly Singh is already a Superwoman, helping empower girls around the world and we are delighted that she will lend her passion and her powerful voice to speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable children," said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth.

"Lilly is a role model to so many young people, especially girls, and we look forward to the role she will play in generating greater discussion and greater action around the value of girls in India and everywhere," said Yasmin Haque, UNICEF's Representative in India.

More than 50 per cent of India's population are below the age of 25 and India is already the second largest market for YouTube, Facebook, and many other video platforms.

Ms. Singh joins a list of other UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors that includes David Beckham, Orlando Bloom, Jackie Chan, Muzoon Almellehan, Danny Glover, Liam Neeson, Priyanka Chopra, Ricky Martin and Shakira.

[Two years on, UN chief stresses 'sustained commitment essential for long-term success' of Iran nuclear deal](#)

15 July 2017 – Marking the second anniversary of the historic agreement aimed at ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has commended the Gulf country for implementing its nuclear-related commitments.

Two years ago, Iran and the so-called 'E3+3' or 'P5+1' – composed of

China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States reached an agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was endorsed by the Security Council.

The JCPOA was a major achievement in the area of nuclear non-proliferation, said Mr. Guterres in his statement issued overnight.

It gives us all hope that the most complex issues in this domain can be addressed through dialogue, understanding and cooperation, he added.

He welcomed the recent recommitment expressed by the JCPOA stakeholders on 25 April to the full and effective implementation of the Plan, and called on them to continue to work together in good faith and reciprocity.

Their sustained commitment is essential for the long-term viability and success of the agreement, he said, also calling on all Member States to support further pursuit of this historic agreement and pledging that he will do the same.

It is in the interest of the international community that this achievement of multilateral diplomacy endures transitions and implementation challenges cementing our collective commitment to diplomacy and dialogue, he stressed.

[Faith central to hope and resilience, highlights UN chief, launching initiative to combat atrocities](#)

14 July 2017 – Voicing concern over the abuse of religion to justify incitement to violence and discrimination, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today underscored the importance of religious leaders in preventing violence and contributing to peace and stability.

Around the world, we see how [religion is being twisted](#) [and] cynically manipulated, stressed the Secretary-General today, speaking at the launch of an initiative to prevent atrocity crimes, which include [genocide](#), [crimes against humanity](#), and [war crimes](#).

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres cautioned against the proliferation of hate speech both online and offline and said that such messages spread hostility and hatred, and encourage populations to commit violence against individuals or communities, often based on their identity.

Hate speech sows the seeds of suspicion, mistrust and intolerance [and] over time, it can play an important role in convincing people that violence

is logical, justifiable, even necessary,” added Mr. Guterres, joined by UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and a number of religious leaders from around the world.

Hate speech is one of the most common warning signs of atrocity crimes, Mr. Guterres said, noting that early action can be taken to prevent them from occurring and that religious leaders are key actors in that warning process.

Also in his remarks, Mr. Guterres highlighted the commitment expressed in the *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes* to promote peace, understanding, mutual respect and the fundamental rights of all people.

He said the Plan sets out a broad range of ways in which religious leaders can prevent incitement to violence and contribute to peace and stability.

“These principles summon us to show respect for all human beings, even those with whom we might profoundly disagree or whose cultures might seem alien,” he said, calling for the widest possible dissemination and implementation of the Plan of Action.

“Let us work together to prevent and end atrocity crimes and all affronts to human rights and dignity,” he stated.

The Plan of Action is the product of two years of consultations led by Special Adviser Dieng, that involved religious leaders and actors representing different faiths and faith-based organizations around the world.

Known more commonly as the “Fez Plan of Action” for the city in Morocco where it was drafted in 2015, the Plan called for monitoring of incitement, the development of alternative messages, engagement in dialogue, efforts to develop and revise education to include better mainstreaming of appreciation of all cultures, engaging in and strengthening inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue and activities to ensure understanding, respect and communication, engaging in dialogue on grievances, strengthening clarity of message and engaging with political leaders.

It was further developed over the past two years in discussions with religious leaders, as well as young people, women and civil society groups.

Mr. Dieng spoke to *UN Radio* ahead of today's launch. He said the Plan has been designed to counter the kind of ideology that led to the genocide against the Yazidi minority group at the hands of Islamic State (ISIL) militants.

AUDIO: Religious leaders find common ground to prevent future atrocities.

Ahead of Sunday's consultation in Venezuela, UN voices concern for demonstrators

14 July 2017 – The United Nations today expressed concern about the situation in Venezuela, where nearly 100 people have died since April and more than 1,500 were injured in connection with ongoing protests.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, a spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), noted that it has received accounts from several sources that some members of the Venezuelan security forces have used repressive tactics, intimidating and instilling fear, to try to deter people from demonstrating.

In addition, thousands of demonstrators have reportedly been arbitrarily detained.

"We are [very concerned](#) that more than 450 civilians have reportedly been brought before military tribunals," OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssel said.

"We urge the Government to immediately end this practice, which is against international human rights law, particularly due process guarantees. Civilians accused of a crime or an illegal act should appear before a civilian court," Ms. Throssel said, urging all those who have been arbitrarily detained to be released.

This Sunday, Venezuela is scheduled to hold a public consultation organized by the opposition-led National Assembly and other groups. Questions will include President Nicolas Maduro's plans to rewrite the constitution.

The OHCHR spokesperson urged authorities to respect the wishes of those who want to participate in this consultation and to guarantee people's rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

An independent human rights expert today echoed the concerns, urging Venezuelan authorities to comply with international rights standards.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Annalisa Ciampi, said she was also worried about alleged intimidation of protesters and opposition members by police.

"Coercion is never an answer to the legitimate demands for democracy and to people's expression of frustrations against the background of economic and social unrest triggered by increasing poverty and deteriorating living conditions," Ms. Ciampi said.

As the situation in Venezuela continues, the number of asylum applications by citizens of that country has soared and is projected to continue growing,

according to UNHCR.

Last year, there were some 27,000 Venezuelan asylum seekers worldwide; this year, over 52,000 have applied for asylum.

UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler said even this figure represents only a fraction of the total number of Venezuelans who may be in need of international protection, as many do not register as asylum seekers, despite fleeing because of violence and insecurity.

Due to bureaucratic obstacles, long waiting periods and high application fees, many Venezuelans opt to remain in an irregular situation instead of using asylum or migratory procedures to regularize their stay, Mr. Spindler told journalists in Geneva.

He added that the large influx of Venezuelans has posed challenges, including international protection and physical security considerations, lack of documentation and exploitation, among others.

UNHCR is [also concerned](#) that indigenous groups living along Venezuela's borders with Brazil and Colombia are being increasingly affected by the situation and have fled their home territories, Mr. Spindler said.

Particular attention to the rights of these communities as well as a differentiated and targeted protection and humanitarian response is required, he added.