

UN envoy maps out 'ideal trajectory' to next round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva

27 June 2017 – The United Nations mediator for the conflict in Syria today mapped out what needs to happen in the next two weeks before the next round of intra-Syrian peace talks begins on 10 July in Geneva, Switzerland.

"We are at a time of testing whether the political will exists for real de-escalation and more meaningful political talks and move beyond preparatory talks," Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria, told the Security Council via videoconference from Geneva.

His briefing focused on the latest developments and some of the possible future steps ahead to create a conducive environment to bring the six-year war to an end.

He said that "the ideal trajectory" over the coming two weeks would be progress in the next round of the Astana talks on 4 and 5 July.

The process taking place in the Kazakh capital is led by Russia, Turkey and Iran and produced agreement on a ceasefire between warring parties in Syria in late December 2016. Five months later, a deal was struck to set up "de-escalation zones" in Syria to prevent incidents and military confrontation between the warring parties. These zones are expected to also give greater humanitarian access to the 6.3 million people still living the country today.

"Let's give de-escalation efforts a fair chance to succeed because that is what people are asking in order to bringing the violence further down and enabling confidence-building," Mr. de Mistura said.

Since the three guarantor States signed the de-escalation memorandum on 4 May in Astana, violence is clearly down, he said, noting that hundreds of Syrian lives continue to be spared every week, and many towns have returned to some degree of normalcy. But in some areas, the fight and violence has been continuing and in fact intensified.

And the overall improvement of the security situation has regrettably not yielded equally significant progress on humanitarian access to areas where the needs are the greatest, he added.

"With every week that passes, we know it, without a final arrangement for the de-escalation zones being indeed finalized, the fragility of the ceasefire regime and the risk posed by the fragility increases," warned Mr. de Mistura.

Next, Astana talks would be followed by a further set of joint technical expert meetings with the opposition groups in the same week, and then a

continued discussion and dialogue among international stakeholders, including at the G20 Summit in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July, in which Syria cannot be avoided as a subject, he said.

"I hope that a combination of these elements would help shape an environment conducive for the next round of [intra-Syrian talks](#) in Geneva in the months to come," the UN envoy said, noting that it "would bring us one step forward on the journey towards our shared goal" of implementing the resolutions of this Council, in particular [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#), which laid out the pathway to peace.

[UN welcomes major partnership initiative with tech giants to counter terrorism online](#)

27 June 2017 – A senior United Nations official has called for sustained joint efforts to combat terrorism and welcomed a partnership initiative with tech giants Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube to counter terrorism and violent extremism online.

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A senior United Nations official has called for sustained joint efforts to combat terrorism and welcomed a partnership initiative with tech giants Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube to counter terrorism and violent extremism online.

"I welcome this major initiative, which elevates our existing private-public partnership with these and other companies," said Jean-Paul Laborde, UN Assistant Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

"The [UN remains committed to addressing the scourge of terrorism](#), and we look forward to remaining a key partner to the private sector," he added.

The four tech giants have already developed and have put in place policies and removal practices to take a hard line against terrorist or violent extremist content on their hosted consumer services.

The *Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism* partnership will help further strengthen these "counter-speech" protections through research- and evidence-based efforts and technical and policy decisions around the removal of terrorist content, noted a news release issued by the Executive

Directorate.

By working together, and through the sharing of the best technological and operational elements of their individual efforts, they believe they can have a greater impact on the threat of terrorist content online, it added.

The new forum builds on initiatives, such as the European Union (EU) Internet Forum and the Shared Industry Hash Database as well as discussions with governments and the outcomes of recent G7 and European Council meetings.

It will also help strengthen existing and build future areas of collaboration between these companies, including with smaller tech enterprises, civil society groups and academics, as well as with governments, and intergovernmental bodies like the EU and the UN.

The companies will also be hosting a series of learning workshops in partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the ICT4Peace Foundation in Silicon Valley (which is home to many of the world's largest high-tech corporations) and around the world to drive these areas of collaboration.

Within the UN system, the Security Council continues to closely follow efforts to combat terrorism as well as other issues that represent serious threats to international peace and security.

Last month, it [unanimously adopted a resolution](#) which, among others, provides a comprehensive international framework to counter terrorist narratives and amplifies positive and credible alternatives to audiences vulnerable to extremist messages, especially those on social media.

[Upcoming Cyprus Conference 'a unique opportunity,' says UN negotiator](#)

27 June 2017 – A fresh round of talks on Cyprus will last “as long as it takes,” but there are no guarantees of success, the United Nations negotiator facilitating the process said today.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, Espen Barth Eide, the UN Special Adviser on Cyprus, said that the reconvening of the Conference is “not the last chance” but the “the best chance” of reaching an agreement between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots.

“It is a unique opportunity, and it would be extremely sad if it was wasted [...] and I think frankly that’s recognized by all participants.”

He highlighted however that sticking points remain between the delegations as

they prepared to meet tomorrow in Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland.

“Make no mistake; it’s not going to be easy,” he said, explaining that he and Secretary-General and will “do our utmost” to help. So would the Security Council which has remained “very united” throughout the process, so would the [European Union], which is lending extremely important and productive support, and so would the international financial institutions which are directly involved.

“But none of us can do it for the participants, they have to take the responsibility and try to make the best out of what I see is a unique opportunity,” Mr. Eide underscored.

After decades of division in Cyprus [dating back to 1974](#), the UN envoy said that this was the “best chance” for successful talks and not the last chance, despite the “risks” and the “tense situation” on the Mediterranean island.

There are six main topics up for discussion; they include new territorial boundaries, power-sharing and the economy. Agreement has been found on most of these so-called ‘chapters,’ broadly, and concrete progress achieved, Mr Eide said.

The Turkish-Cypriot delegation had assented to what he called a “significant return of territory” to the Greek-Cypriots, and both sides had also exchanged maps in Geneva in January “an historic first,” the UN negotiator told journalists.

Nonetheless, Mr. Eide said that the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot positions still diverge on the issue of security and guarantees.

“What I’m saying is that on these five chapters, we have made substantive process, on the issue which is most complicated right now and very much in focus now and by the guarantors “Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom” and others who will be present, is the security and guarantees chapter; that’s where the sides are so far opposed,” he said.

“But they have also told each other and the world many times that are trying to seek a common vision also on that chapter, and that is what we are trying to do,” said Mr. Eide, insisting that this shared viewpoint is something only the Greek-Cypriots and the Turkish-Cypriots could do by talking together.

The UN would be there to help both sides find common ground, he said, so that an agreement owned by the people of Cyprus could prevail.

In a statement issued in New York, the Secretary-General picked up that thread saying that [welcomed](#) the reconvening of the Cyprus Conference and that the “the opportunity for the reunification of Cyprus is now finally before us.”

Calling on all concerned players to seize this opportunity, “for Cyprus first and foremost, but also for the wider Eastern Mediterranean

region,” Mr. Guterres reiterated his steadfast commitment to supporting this effort.

“I urge all participants to demonstrate the will and leadership required to conclude a comprehensive settlement,” he concluded.

[UN recognizes young entrepreneurs on Day for micro-, small, medium-sized enterprises](#)

27 June 2017 – United Nations agencies today launched a new campaign to make it easier for the 70 million unemployed youth to get financing and learn new skills to start a business.

The global campaign – launched by the the International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)), the International Trade Centre (ITC) , the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) – will run through August of this year.

It will aim to “effectively enable young entrepreneurs [to success and improve the sustainability and quality](#) of self-employment opportunities for youth,” according to ILO.

The UN agency added that the main challenges to be addressed include “the lack of enabling policy and ecosystems, the limited access to capital, the insufficient tools to enhance skills development and knowledge transfer.”

The campaign will focus on strategies to promote “an enabling regulatory environment” for young people, make use of technology and networks, aim to allow greater access to finance, and provide greater support for young people.

The UN estimates that while 70 million youth are unemployed, an additional 150 million work yet live in moderate to extreme poverty.

Today's launch comes on the first observance of the International Day for Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, which seeks to raise public awareness of these business which generally employ fewer than 250 people. This year's theme is “youth entrepreneurship and self-employment.”

[The Day](#) was created in April to observe the Day and raise public awareness of their contribution to the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, which aims to alleviate poverty and preserve the people and the planet.

According to the data provided by the International Council for Small Business (ICSB), formal and informal Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) make up over 90 per cent of all firms and account on average for up to 70 per cent of total employment and 50 per cent of GDP.

[UN agency saves 600 stranded migrants in Sahara Desert, but 52 dead in Niger](#)

27 June 2017 – The United Nations migration agency in Niger has saved more than 600 lives since April 2017 through a new search and rescue operation that targets migrants stranded in Sahara Desert, but 52 did not survive.

“We are enhancing our capacity to assist vulnerable migrants stranded in Northern Agadez, towards the Niger-Libya border,” said Giuseppe Loprete, Niger Chief of Mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in [press release](#).

“Saving lives in the desert is becoming more urgent than ever. Since the beginning of the year we have been receiving frequent calls to rescue victims who embark on this route,” Loprete added.

A 22-year-old woman was the only female among the survivors of a rescue mission on 28 May. She left Nigeria in early April hoping for a better future in Europe. There were 50 migrants on the pick-up truck when it left Agadez for Libya, but only six are still alive today.

“We were in the desert for ten days. After five days, the driver abandoned us. He left with all of our belongings, saying he was going to pick us up in a couple of hours, but he never did,” she recalled.

During the next two days, 44 of the migrants died which persuaded the six left to start walking to look for help. “We had to drink our own pee to survive,” she said.

We had to drink our own pee to survive.Survivor

On 9 June, another 92 migrants were also rescued through an IOM search and rescue operation; among them were 30 women and children.

More recently, 24 migrants were taken to Seguedine, where one died on arrival. Among the 23 survivors are migrants from Gambia, Nigeria, Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire. It was not clear for how long they had been walking in the deserts of central Niger. They had been in a group of 75 migrants in three different cars, eventually abandoned by smugglers during the journey north.

IOM has recorded 52 deaths since it launched a new project – Migrants Rescue and Assistance in Agadez Region (MIRAA) in April. The project will last for 12 months, and aims to ensure the protection of migrants in hard-to-reach areas while also strengthening the management of migration by the Government of Niger.

MIRAA is complementary to the larger initiative – Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM), which aims to bring together in one mechanism a wide range of services and assistance for migrants, including assisted voluntary return to their countries of origin and reintegration once they return.