

Speech: Calling on the Syrian Authorities to Engage with the UN and the Broader Political Process

Thank you very much Mr President. Thank you Special Envoy for your briefing and for all the work that you and your teams do on the ground. I learn with personal regret of your intention to move on, much as I understand the reasons, and I'll come back to that if I may. But I think this Council and all the United Nations owe you a tremendous debt because you have stuck with one of the most difficult portfolios that I think any representative of the Secretary-General can have in any conflict, and you've done it for four long years, so we thank you very much for that. And as I say, I'll come back to that later.

The war itself of course has gone on even longer than your tenure. I think you're the third Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the war has gone on for seven very long, very gruesome, very awful years for the Syrian people.

And I'll start with Idlib. Idlib is a terribly important moment because three million civilians remain at risk there and we salute the work that the Turkish government have done, working with the Russians, to get the current situation in Idlib under control. And if I can quote the Emergency Relief Coordinator; we hope that it is a reprieve and not a stay of execution. But I think everyone on the Council remains fearful that the delivery agreement won't hold. So I think my first point is that this Council should do everything it can to support you and support Turkey in having that Idlib agreement be preserved.

Secondly, as the French ambassador said, the humanitarian situation still remains very difficult and very challenging. There has been progress in certain areas but it is not the case that aid is going to all the people who truly are in need. And so we also call upon everyone and the Council to redouble efforts to support OCHA, the ICRC and others in getting aid through. And we call on the Russian and Syrian governments to ensure that the aid gets delivered on the basis of impartiality and need.

As you said Special Envoy, Idlib does represent not only the potential salvation of three million civilians, but also a window of opportunity on the peace process, and my American and French colleagues set out very clearly how that might be taken forward. And I just want to add the United Kingdom's voice to what they said. You have described, Special Envoy, exactly how the Constitutional Committee should be constituted, how it might work, what sorts of things it could look at. Now under 2254, this was supposed to have all been set up within six months. And frankly, I think on our side, it beggars belief that the Syrian government cannot work with what you have set out. And I agree with the American representative that the fact that the Syrian government cannot work with the Constitutional Committee as you have set out

calls into question either Russian good faith in brokering that deal at Sochi in the first place or it shows that the Russian government does not have power and influence in Syria. And I think both of those two things are quite dangerous for the potential of the Syrian political process and I think we should spend some time thinking through the consequences of there being no progress at all on the Constitutional Committee. And even at this stage, we would appeal to the Syrian authorities to make every conceivable effort to work with the UN to bring the Constitutional committee into being on the lines you have set out to set out. We completely agree with you and the Secretary-General; the UN cannot be involved in this charade. This Constitutional Committee must be a genuinely credible and representative process.

As the French ambassador said, it isn't the only part of the political process. It isn't a threat to Syria's sovereignty or her territorial integrity or her unity to work with the United Nations on a broader political process. All the experience of this Council, over very many decades, but in recent times from the Balkans to Africa to the Middle East, shows that when you have conflict as divisive and as awful and as damaging as the Syrian conflict has been for the last seven years, you need to have a representative political process if you want a country to be stable, if you want it to be coherent and above all, if you wish to reintegrate back into the international community. And I assume that the Syrian people really want those things.

So we take the opportunity today to call on the Syrian authorities to put aside self-interest and to engage with the United Nations and the broader political process. We call on them to ensure sustained humanitarian access as I said earlier, but we also call on them to put an end to policies and practices that create obstacles for displaced people and refugees returning home and rebuilding their lives. And we call on them to start progress towards creating a safe and neutral environment in which all of Syria's communities, regardless of religion or ethnicity, can thrive and be fairly represented.

Moving on to your visit to Damascus, I hope that you go with the Council's full support in delivering the Secretary-General's clear and direct message to the Syrian authorities.

We thank you for the offer to come back to the Council and to brief us further, and I think as others have said, it's of such vital importance that we seize this opportunity. You'll always be welcome in the Council any time, but I hope you will err on the side of keeping the Council updated as to how your talks are going.

You mentioned the Brussels Conference. I want to be very clear again: the sort of reintegration of Syria into the international community, the coherence and stability that need to flow from a genuinely representative political process, will need reconstruction money and it will need reconstruction money from the West. This is also a lesson of all conflicts that we have been dealing with collectively over the last few decades. And I take this opportunity to reiterate, as I am sure the Brussels event will do

so, we will not provide reconstruction assistance for Syria absent a credible political process leading to a settlement that is genuinely in the interests of all of Syria's communities. To do otherwise would be to see the awful seven years that have bedeviled Syria be repeated time and again until we are all locked in the most vicious of spirals. Syria needs to overcome the factors that led in the first place seven years ago to the conflict that we are now all struggling with and that cannot be done by ignoring help from the United Nations. It cannot be done by turning your back on the international community. And I hope that the Syrian representative will be able to transmit these messages to his authorities in advance of your visit to Damascus.

I'll save a fuller tribute to your work, Special Envoy for when we get your final thoughts and advice on what follows in the future after November. I welcome the fact that you have said you will be honest and direct and clear. We look forward to that. We hope you will give us unvarnished advice on what to do next. We hope that the outcome of that will be a way that the United Nations can assist the people of Syria in coming to a political settlement, but we must also contemplate other scenarios unless we see movement from the Syrian authorities. It is a defining moment. I hope the Council will be able to support you to the full. I look forward to hearing your future account, but I do just want to close by expressing our deepest thanks on behalf of all the British government for everything you have done to work for the United Nations on this most difficult of dossiers. Thank you.