

Speech: Facing a Grave Challenge to International Peace and Security

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Thank you very much Mr President. Thank you to Staffan [de Mistura] and his team for briefing us today.

Mr President, I find it incredible that we should have to rehearse for the benefit of the Syrian authorities why the UN needs to be involved in Syria.

It isn't a matter of national sovereignty that there are over a million refugees.

It isn't a matter of national sovereignty that there are 400,000 dead in Syria.

This is a threat to international peace and security.

It is right that the UN is involved. The UN has been involved on the humanitarian side. It's involved on the refugee side. It's involved in the health side. It is absolutely front and centre right that it should be involved in the political process.

So I will go further than you, Staffan; you talked about a serious challenge. I think we actually face a grave challenge. We face a grave challenge to the way members of the United Nations cooperate with the United Nations. And as my American and French colleagues have said, we face a grave challenge in terms of the situation on the ground.

And there's now additionally enormous doubt over what Sochi was and what it now represents. Either Russia has given the UN and this Council assurances it has proved too weak to deliver on, or it was all a cynical smokescreen designed to divert attention and energy while Russia, Syria and Iran prosecuted the military campaign. And that military campaign has been brought to a halt only by the international outrage at the threat to three million civilians in Idlib, and then the Turks bravely stepped in and brokered an agreement designed to protect those civilians.

So I think we need five things in support of what my French and American colleagues have said. We need clarity on the status of the Sochi agreement and these new proposals from the Syrian authorities. What do they mean? What does Russia, what do Iran think about them? We need clarity on what steps need to be taken by all the players before 19 November when Staffan you've offered to come back and brief the Council, and before the end of November when you step down. We need clarity that Russia – as a P5 member, an Astana guarantor, and the Sochi convener – along with Syria and Iran – will work constructively and tirelessly with the UN.

All UN members have a responsibility to support you, Staffan, as the

Secretary-General's Special Envoy. We need to hear today that that promise of constructive, tireless, dedicated engagement to bring this conflict to an end is there. We need the agreement on Idlib to hold. We need that opportunity that others have mentioned to be seized. We need the Constitutional Committee to be convened and I share the views of my American and French colleagues on that. We need humanitarian access to be improved, and we need 2254 to be upheld. The Council needs to come together to support the political process. Without the political process, this dreadful conflict will never truly end, whatever happens militarily on the ground.

We look forward to further reports after the international meetings in the coming days, but I do believe Mr President that we must hear today from all Council members that they will support the UN as it tries its very best to move the political process forward.

Thank you.