

Intra-Syrian talks conclude in Geneva with 'clear agenda' and plans to resume later this month

3 March 2017 – The United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian talks are “moving in the right direction,” the UN Special Envoy for Syria said today, wrapping up the latest round of discussions in Geneva with counter-terrorism added to the agenda and plans to resume in late March.

Staffan de Mistura told journalists that participants had engaged in “serious” discussions and said that the sides would be invited to continue discussions later this month.

“It is now clear to everyone and that is beyond dispute that we are here to implement UN Security Council resolution 2254,” Mr. de Mistura said, referring to the Council text approved in 2015 endorsing a road map for peace process in Syria, including specific language on governance, constitution and elections.

“I believe therefore and expect that the sides should now pursue a framework agreement with an agreed political package so a transition can be implemented in line with 2254 – we’re here to talk about that,” he added.

In addition to the issues previously on the agenda, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), counter-terrorism has been added at the request of the Government of Syria, according to the envoy.

The major issue of detainees and abductees was also raised by the delegation from the Syrian Government.

In parallel, the talks in Astana – convened by the Governments of Iran, Russia and Turkey – would continue to address issues related to the maintenance of the ceasefire and confidence-building measures.

“We have a clear agenda in front of us,” Mr. de Mistura told reporters, adding: “The train is ready; it is in the station [...] warming up its engine. It just needs an accelerator and the accelerator is in the hands of those in this round.”

At first 'playable' UN conference,

tech experts, gamers drive new thinking on global development

3 March 2017 – Hands-free gardening for a greener future, video gamers using their skills to help achieve the United Nations-led Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – these were just a few of the innovative and forward-looking ideas in the spotlight at the world body's first ever 'playable' policy conference, held in the German city of Bonn.

The Global Festival of Ideas for Sustainable Development, a UN conference that aims to chart a new way of thinking on addressing some of the world's most complex development challenges, wrapped up today, after three days of intense debates and 'game-playing.'

Among the technology experts, gamers and activists putting their heads together to figure out how to best to help countries implement the UN vision of a more just and equitable world where no one is left behind, was Ryan Hooks, manager of a software company called Huxley, who showed off his 'hands-free gardening' app.

"It's an AI (Artificial Intelligence) and augmented reality for plants. Greenhouses that use hydroponics to circulate the water are very complex systems and it's hard to scale water efficient food solutions. I've found that augmented reality and AI can be really useful for reducing labour cost," he told *UN News*.

To demonstrate the app's capabilities, Mr. Hook pointed his phone at a plant on the table and his app identified it as "apple mint."

"It's augmented reality, it knows what kind of plant it is, what percentage its health is, when to pick it, pack it, ship it and the environment (around it), so people can have hands-free augmented gardening," he explained.

The hands-free gardening app, Mr. Hooks continued, makes it more efficient to use hydroponics, a method of growing plants without soil, which also uses 95 per cent less water to grow plants.

2030 Hive Mind

Participants at the Festival were also engrossed in the 2030 Hive Mind game, where they played for a hypothetical country, planning policies, and convincing other players to join forces with them.

The Festival organizers stress that the game, which focuses on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, and reveals the tough choices and trade-offs that might have been made along the road to sustainable development for all over the next 15 years.

Tom Juntunen, of the U Begin company, was playing for Goal 9, which focusses on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable

industrialization and foster innovation.

When Mr. Juntunen is not at his booth in the exhibit, walked around the conference centre trying to convince other players to support his policies.

“There’s a lot of negotiations, it’s a very robust simulation of real life dynamics with policy negotiation. Everyone has what’s important to them and what’s not important. In playing the game, you experience the parallel of that in a virtual environment. It is challenging as it is in real life,” he said of Hive Mind 2030.

‘Communicating the SDGs’ and the 2030 Agenda

“We have to make the world aware of this [...] agenda that is definitely going to transform the planet and that is going to ensure that no one is left behind,” Cristina Gallach, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said yesterday.

“The more we communicate about the SDGs and make people aware of the agenda, the more the governments we will be accountable and will ensure that it is implemented,” she added.

The UN Department of Public Information (DPI), headed by Ms. Gallach, is the Organization’s entity tasked with informing the wider world on the SDGs and ensuring that the 17 goals are known and understood.

To that end, 17 ‘icons’ – each with a designated bright colour, short name phrase and single image – have been created to illustrate each Global Goal.

The icons have also been translated in over 50 languages, from Czech to Bahasa Indonesia, and the number is growing.

The Global Festival of Ideas, the first in a series of annual forums, is hosted by the UN SDG Action Campaign in partnership with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) with the support of the German Government.

Iraq: 15,000 children flee west Mosul over past week as battle intensifies by the day, says UNICEF

3 March 2017 – Some 15,000 children have over the previous week fled the western section of Iraq’s Mosul city where fighting between the Government forces and terrorists is intensifying by the day, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has reported.

“UNICEF is responding to the immediate needs at the Hamam Al Alil camp, 20km

from Mosul, where aid is provided to children upon their arrival,” UNICEF Regional Emergency Advisor Bastien Vigneau said over the phone from Iraq during the regular press briefing held in the UN Office at Geneva.

He noted that the children were very scared of the sound of the bombs, which was one of the main reasons their parents had decided to flee. They fled with very little luggage and in most cases with a bare minimum of clothes. The children and their families arrived mostly by buses organized by the military.

The main priorities, other than the first emergency response, included health, to ensure that children were immunized, primarily against measles and polio, said Mr. Vigneau.

Matthew Sarmash, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said that a significant increase in displacement had been noticed in recent days and the Hamam Al Alil camp was close to reach its maximum capacity. At the moment, 150,000 places were occupied. He said construction under way to accommodate up to 250,000 people there.

UNICEF’s Vigneau said that more than 100,000 children have been displaced from Mosul since the military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) began on 17 October 2016.

He said that 874 unaccompanied or separated children have been identified since mid-October, with half of them reunified with their families or taken care of by extended families, and the others being provided dedicated assistance until they reunify with families.

[‘Political leadership needs to support its own people,’ urges UN mission chief in South Sudan](#)



A WFP helicopter arrives Thonyor, Leer County, South Sudan, with supplies of nutrition items and vegetable oil, as part of an inter-agency rapid response mission to provide assistance to people threatened by famine. Photo: WFP/George Fominyen

3 March 2017 – The top United Nations official in South Sudan is calling on the country’s political leadership to support its own people in the wake of a famine affecting some 100,000 people, and calling for local authorities to provide humanitarian access to those most in need.

David Shearer, the recently arrived UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the country, today voiced alarm “at how little a response to the plight of these people has been heard from their leaders.”

On 20 February, famine was declared in parts of Unity state. Since then, humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations evacuated the heart of the afflicted-area, a town called Mayendit, due to the threat of resumed fighting between the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLA in Opposition.

“Those affected by the humanitarian crisis are still citizens of this young country, and they deserve protection,” Mr. Shearer said in reference to the women and children most affected by the crisis. “But the constant fighting shows they are getting none. Instead, they are bearing the brunt.”

Mr. Shearer, who is also the new head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), reiterated the UN’s call for a complete cessation of hostilities between all those involved.

[Labour welcomes House of Commons Select Committee calls for mission-based industrial strategy](#)

The non-partisan House of Commons select committee for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has today released a report calling for a new mission-based approach to industrial strategy. The select committee’s report criticises the Government’s sector based strategy for ‘picking winners’ and for lacking ‘meaningful metrics’ to determine success.

In its report the select committee backed the ‘mission-based’ approach to industrial strategy, which is also advocated by the Labour Party. Labour’s industrial strategy will be challenge-led, mission-oriented and values-driven – providing a long-term vision for the economy that mobilises both public and private investment.

Chi Onwurah MP, Labour’s Shadow Minister for industrial strategy, commented:

“This report reaffirms what we’ve been saying all along: cherry-picking favoured sectors for backroom deals is no substitute for a real long-term vision. Theresa May says she wants to see a high-wage, high-growth economy, but public investment has fallen to half the

amount it was under Labour and her sectoral approach is leaving the vast majority of British workers out in the cold.

“Labour’s industrial strategy will be led by the big challenges of our time, from decarbonizing the economy to caring for an ageing population. Rather than taking a scatter-gun approach to sectors and technologies, we’re setting out key missions, such as drawing 60 per cent of our energy from low carbon sources by 2030.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

An article by Iain Wright MP, who chairs the select committee, summarising the report’s findings can be found here: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/very-little-industry-and-still-less-strategy-wdt7f99wd>