

[News story: Spring pay bump for Britain's workers as tax changes come into effect](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Millions of workers will benefit from increases to the Personal Allowance and Higher Rate Threshold on 6 April.

[Incremental progress but 'we're not yet there,' UN mediator on Syria reports](#)

31 March 2017 – The latest round of the United Nations-facilitated [intra-Syrian talks](#) concluded today in Geneva where UN envoy Staffan de Mistura told journalists the discussions had been serious and the parties engaged, but “we’re not yet there.”

When the current talks between the Syrian Government and opposition delegations began last week, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura said he did not expect [miracles, breakthroughs or breakdowns](#), but hoped to build on the previous rounds with some incremental, constructive steps.

The [Syrian conflict](#) now entering its seventh year, has devastated the country, killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions.

Summarising the spirit of the nine days of talks in the Swiss city, Mr. de Mistura said they had been “serious and engaged” on matters of substance – rather than on procedure. But he added that on the subject of real peace negotiations, many obstacles remain.

“No one can deny and I cannot deny that there serious challenges and I’m not seeing immediately this developing into a peace agreement, no doubt about that [...] In any negotiations there are certain issues that need to be prepared and discussed before the real peace negotiation starts. We are not yet there.”

During the talks, Mr, de Mistura said, the parties had covered all the issues on the table, including political transition, national integrity, counter terrorism, and confidence-building measures, among others.

Sometimes they’d been discussed “in depth;” on governance, security and constitutional issues – although he would have liked a little more detail on

that last point, he said.

At the same time, he underscored: "There are real challenges on the ground, we are seeing them in front of our eyes, but let's be frank: in spite of them, no one threatened to walk out and every one was serious and business-like in pursuing their points of view."

He said that all the parties agreed to the next round of talks, but the details would be decided after he heads to New York late next week where he will seek guidance from the UN Secretary-General and Security Council.

In the meantime, Mr. de Mistura noted that next week, on 4 and 5 April, there will be an international conference on Syria and the region held in Brussels, and that he hoped it would be an occasion for a better clarity of the international engagement on humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts.

[Press release: Minister for the Americas statement on developments in Venezuela](#)

On 28 and 29 March 2017, the Venezuelan Supreme Court issued two rulings giving itself new powers to exercise the National Assembly's legislative powers and restrict the parliamentary immunity of MPs. This effectively limits the constitutional powers of the National Assembly, which has been democratically elected by the people of Venezuela.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, said:

I am utterly shocked by the latest developments in Venezuela. The manner in which the Supreme Court of Venezuela has wrested power from the parliament represents a total breakdown in the separation of powers. Indeed, the Venezuelan Prosecutor General has herself said the decision of the Supreme Court is unconstitutional.

A strong, independent parliament is vital to any democracy and necessary to address the economic and social challenges Venezuela faces. The Venezuelan Government must therefore urgently act to restore Venezuela's democratic norms. Continued shortages of basic goods are having a detrimental impact on the lives of ordinary Venezuelan citizens. I implore President Maduro and his Government to take positive action to rectify this situation.

Further information

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Further information

[Approval of Somalia's new cabinet a 'green light for action,' says UN envoy](#)

31 March 2017 – Welcoming the Somali Federal Parliament's approval of a new cabinet, the United Nations envoy for the country expressed hope that the new

Government will be able to address the challenges confronting the Horn of Africa nation.

“The Parliamentary approval was [a bright green light](#),” the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Michael Keating, said today in a news release.

He noted that with a healthy mix of experienced leaders and relative newcomers to the political stage, the new cabinet will make a vital contribution to the efforts of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi.

In a recent statement, the Prime Minister had highlighted the need to eradicate poverty, build up Somalia’s security services to combat the scourge of terrorism, and expedite the constitutional review process that will lay the foundations for the holding of one-person, one-vote elections in 2020.

For his part, Mr. Keating added that 27-Minister cabinet includes six women, the largest number of female ministers ever to be named to a Federal Government cabinet is a positive step towards empowering Somali women in the political affairs of the country.

“The United Nations and international partners look forward to working closely and fruitfully with the President, the Prime Minister and the new cabinet as they tackle the many political, economic, security and humanitarian tasks facing Somalia today,” he said.