

We must stop a devastating 'battle-to-the-end' in southwest Syria, declares UN envoy

A "full-scale" ground and aerial offensive in southwest Syria could inflict an even heavier toll on civilians than the suffering caused by previous devastating battles in the war-ravaged country, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria has warned.

"Let us be aware of what this would mean, if the southwest sees a full-scale battle-to-the-end: it could be like eastern Aleppo and eastern Ghouta combined together," Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, told the Security Council on Wednesday.

"We ... cannot allow ... this to become another Ghouta, another Douma, or another Aleppo, where so many civilians were sacrificed and died. And yet I see things moving in this direction," he said.

Speaking via video link from Geneva, Mr. de Mistura also cautioned that such fighting could increase tensions across the region and risk compromising momentum in political talks to reach a lasting peace deal.

In his briefing, Mr. de Mistura told Council members that intensified efforts were on-going "to find a way ahead" for the implementation of a deal and for the establishment of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated committee on a new constitution, within the framework of the Geneva process and in accordance with Security Council [resolution 2254](#).

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– UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura

"I will continue on my side to facilitate further movement in this direction to seek the support, counsel and advice of many – which is why I anticipate inviting the Sochi co-convenors back to Geneva in the coming weeks ... and then, of course, report to you, to the Security Council," he said.

Concluding his briefing, the UN Special Envoy urged the Security Council as well as the Syrian Government to support efforts on the political front to put Syrians themselves in charge of their own future, because "no country or no organization can simply impose a fait accompli on the Syrian people."

He also called on all parties to the conflict and on those who have influence over them to help find a solution that will "spare civilian suffering", prevent more people from being displaced, and "reduce potential tensions."

Worsening fighting could jeopardize aid efforts – UN relief official

Also briefing the 15-member Council, John Ging, the Director of Operations at the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), detailed the humanitarian consequences of the fighting in the southwestern Governorate of Dara'a, saying that to date, an estimated 45,000 to 50,000 people have been displaced due to hostilities.

The number, he added "[could nearly double](#)" if fighting continues to escalate, and most hospitals and medical facilities there have already closed, he told Council Members.

UN cross-border relief operations from Jordan, bringing much needed aid to hundreds of thousands in need across southern Syria, could also be jeopardized if violence worsens, said Mr. Ging.

"I call on all stakeholders to ensure that cross-border humanitarian deliveries continue in a sustained, safe and unimpeded manner to reach all those in need, including the newly displaced people," said the senior OCHA official.