

'We need to start now' on road to peace, UN envoy says as Syria negotiations open in Geneva

23 February 2017 – Welcoming the representatives of the Syrian Government and its opposition to the United Nations-facilitated negotiations that opened today in Geneva, Staffan de Mistura reiterated the need to work together for a political solution.

"We face an uphill battle. It will not be easy," the UN Special Envoy for Syria said, "but we must apply ourselves to this task."

"Let's try to work together to end this horrible conflict and lay the foundation for a country at peace with itself, sovereign and unified," he noted.

Making reference to the Palais des Nations where the intra-Syrian negotiations are being held, he said the UN headquarters in Switzerland was a symbol "unifying all of us" given its history and could be the place where "Syrians started a long, hard journey to peace."

He stressed that after six years of conflict, people are waiting for a relief from all suffering and dream "for a new road out of this nightmare."

Mr. de Mistura is continuing to push for a resolution to the conflict based on UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) that endorsed a road map for peace process in Syria, including specific language on governance, constitution, elections, and even how negotiations should be timed.



On 5 August 2016 in Aleppo, Syria, a child with spinal muscular atrophy who needs special medical care, now lives on the streets, after fleeing with her family from attacks and intense fighting in the 1070 neighbourhood. Photo: UNICEF/Khuder Al-Issa

Today's intra-Syrian negotiations follow talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, where participants agreed on how to monitor the ceasefire effort started in December 2016.

As in Astana, representatives of Russia and the United States are among the Security Council Member States present at the discussions.

Syrian women and children bearing the brunt

The Special Envoy also pledged to do everything to promote the role of Syrian women in the political efforts.

Earlier today, he was greeted by a group of Syrian women holding a vigil in Geneva for relatives and friends – sometimes children – who had been arrested, abducted or are still missing apparently as a result of the Government or the opposition.

Calling them Syrian mothers, wives and daughters, Mr. de Mistura said they were symbolic of everyone still missing “in this horrible conflict.”

He pledged to raise the issue of detainees, abducted and missing people as part of the ongoing discussions.

Meanwhile, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today urged participants to the talks to put Syria’s children first.

In a statement UNICEF Regional Director Geert Cappelaera said at least 20 children were reportedly killed in attacks in the country since the start of this year, and many more injured.

“The numbers are a grim indication that the cessation in hostilities announced last December has yet to result in real gains in protection and humanitarian assistance for all children in Syria,” Mr. Cappelaera said.

“What if these were your children?” he asked.

VIDEO: UN Special Envoy for Syria, Steffan de Mistura, has acknowledged the “long, hard journey” ahead, while calling on all sides to work together towards a political solution to the country’s protracted conflict.