

**DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR SYRIA
CLAUDIO CORDONE
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

27 August 2026

Madam President (Ambassador Christina Markus Lassen),

1. I am briefing you from Damascus, following the Secretary-General's visit to Syria last month – the first by a Secretary-General in 17 years. Let me at the outset thank the Syrian authorities for all the efforts made to ensure a secure and open environment for all his engagements.
2. In his meetings with President al-Sharaa, Foreign Minister al-Shaibani and other senior officials, the Secretary-General welcomed progress in Syria's political transition, including steps to strengthen state institutions and towards reconciliation, accountability and transitional justice. He stressed that the success of the political transition will ultimately be measured by whether all Syrians feel represented in state institutions and able to participate meaningfully in shaping their country's future. He shared this message during his open engagements with a wide array of Syrian women, civil society, and diverse communities.
3. The Secretary-General was equally clear that Syria cannot meet the transition challenges alone. Greater international support is essential to meet urgent humanitarian, recovery and development needs and create conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary returns. Syrians need tangible improvements in their daily lives and a viable future in their country. International support is essential to the success of the political transition itself.

Madam President,

4. I welcome the US rescinding of Syria's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. These steps should help create more favourable conditions for economic recovery, investment, and broader international engagement with Syria. According to an International Monetary Fund mission that visited Damascus last month, recovery is accelerating and double-digit growth in 2026 is projected. But widespread poverty and renewed inflation mean conditions remain very difficult for most Syrians.

Madam President,

5. The People's Assembly has adopted rules of procedure, and we await the beginning of its substantive work, including on a host of legislative priorities. Further clarity is needed on the Assembly's oversight role regarding the executive. Its independence and transparency will be important to the Assembly's credibility, and to fostering public trust and international confidence in the transition.
6. The process for drafting a permanent constitution is also yet to be specified. We encourage an inclusive, transparent and participatory process capable of forging a new social contract for Syria. There is urgency in starting this process, as in preparing for

the elections at the end of the transition. And my Office stands ready to provide technical support and advice.

Madam President,

7. This month the Damascus Fourth Criminal Court convicted and sentenced to death several former officials, including former President Bashar al-Assad, who along with others was tried in absentia, as well as Atef Najib and Wassim al-Assad who appeared in person. Ahmad Hassoun, former Grand Mufti, was also tried in person and received a life sentence.
8. The proceedings incorporated several important fair-trial safeguards for the defendants present in court, and there is a right of appeal within 30 days. However, fair trial safeguards should be strengthened by reinforcing effective legal representation, and ensuring a full appeal on the facts, not just on points of law. Greater consistency with fair-trial standards will strengthen confidence in the fairness and integrity of the transitional justice process, and ensure that guilt is assigned to individual perpetrators and not to groups. And, consistent with UN policy and as called for by the General Assembly, I urge the Syrian authorities to establish a moratorium on all executions.
9. On 21 August I attended the commemoration of the chemical attacks in Eastern Ghouta and Mu'adamiya, which killed some 1500 and left thousands injured. I expressed my solidarity with the victims and survivors, my regret that the international community failed to prevent these atrocities, and underscored the need for full accountability for those responsible.

Madam President,

10. Israeli military activity has continued in southern Syria, including repeated ground incursions, house searches, and the destruction of private and agricultural property, particularly in Quneitra and the Yarmouk Basin.
11. I note the release of a number of Syrians held in Israeli detention, but remain concerned by continuing detentions. Families are seeking information on the fate and whereabouts of their detained relatives. I am also concerned by statements from senior Israeli officials, advocating an open-ended Israeli military presence on Syrian territory.
12. The continued Israeli presence east of the ceasefire line violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and is inconsistent with the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Let me also reiterate, as the Secretary-General did during his visit, that the Golan Heights remain occupied Syrian territory in accordance with international law and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.
13. Another worrying development was the Israeli airstrike on the Abu al-Dhuhur airbase in northern Syria on 18 August, which I condemn. I welcome the recent direct Israel-Syria contacts and talks in Jordan, and support the United States' efforts to mediate a security arrangement between Syria and Israel and the operation of a deconfliction mechanism. Diplomacy must prevail, and negotiations should progress within the framework of international law.

Madam President,

14. Syria continues to face significant internal security challenges. Although overall violence declined in August from July, violent criminal acts continue to be frequently reported, particularly killings perceived by local communities as retaliatory attacks against specific groups.
15. Civil society organizations continue to report disappearances of women, men, and children. While some individuals have returned to their families, including an eight-year-old girl this month, others have been found dead, and many remain unaccounted for.
16. Deaths in custody, possibly resulting from torture, have been reported. A commission of inquiry established by the Ministry of Interior found that Muhammad Ghmeira died as a result of physical abuse inflicted during interrogation in custody. I condemn this and send my condolences to his family. I welcome the Minister's commitment to hold accountable responsible personnel, while urging a clear and sustained public government position against any abuses in detention, as well as enhanced guidelines and training.
17. Effective law enforcement will be essential to efforts to rebuild a society in which all citizens feel protected from violence and abuses. The Ministry of Interior's efforts to train women police officers represent a positive step, particularly in strengthening responses to crimes affecting women and girls.
18. I also wish to stress that the threat posed by terrorism, specifically Daesh, remains a serious concern. Earlier this month, the Syrian authorities announced the arrest of a prominent Daesh commander as part of continuing efforts to pursue Daesh leaders and networks. Sustained counter-terrorism efforts, consistent with international law, remain essential.

Madam President,

19. I welcome the important progress achieved in the 25 August meeting between President al-Sharaa and Mazloum Abdi, marking continued steps forward on security and administrative integration of northeastern Syria. And I particularly welcome the announcement of Mazloum Abdi of the end of the mission of the Syrian Democratic Forces and their dissolution. I note the importance of the issue of education and look forward to further progress on that issue. I also note that further discussions have taken place between the Minister of Interior and the Women's Protection Units on the latter's integration. I reiterate our support for the full implementation of the 29 January agreement, and the readiness of the United Nations to provide support on the ground.
20. I note at the same time that the first convoy of returnees to Ras al-Ain was attacked on 10 August, triggering tensions that spread to Ain al-Arab/Kobani, Hassakeh and elsewhere, underscoring the potential for localized tensions to challenge broader progress.

Madam President,

21. Sweida continues to be characterized by a political and security stalemate. Relations between local actors and the authorities in Damascus remain marked by mutual distrust, with some actors continuing to call for independence or joining Israel. Longstanding grievances remain unresolved, particularly those concerning accountability, although trials of some of the alleged perpetrators started in July.
22. A concerning incident involving the desecration of Christian graves was reported in al-Sawara al-Kubra, an area under government control in the northern countryside of Sweida, following earlier similar reports involving Druze graves.
23. We take note of the Presidential decree of 17 August providing for an exceptional examination session for Sweida students who missed their examinations last June. There are concerns about the location of the examination centres and about how many students would actually sit the examination. And there are reports indicating attempts from within Sweida to prevent students from traveling to sit for their examinations.
24. We remain ready to support the implementation of the September 2025 roadmap, including the returns of displaced Druze and Bedouin populations, and addressing the issue of detainees and the missing, while remaining guided by Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Madam President,

25. Ensuring the meaningful participation of all segments of society remains essential. In Damascus, Syrian women shared with the Secretary-General their views on a broad set of issues, including the recognition of all victims as part of a transitional justice strategy; the importance of proper investigation of allegations of abductions and sexual assaults of Syrian women; and the importance of greater representation of women in decision-making positions, as well as their meaningful participation in the recovery and reconstruction efforts. I am pleased that the Council will have the opportunity to hear more on these issues from Rola al-Rukabi.
26. Syrian women remain an extraordinary reservoir of experience and capacity. Their efforts to build a Syrian state that meets the expectations of Syrian women and indeed all Syrians predate this transition. For more than a decade, the Office of the Special Envoy has benefitted from the Women's Advisory Board's invaluable contribution to mediation efforts. With the change of circumstances on the ground, we conducted an extensive consultation process to explore how best to continue this strong engagement with Syrian women. We will now expand our outreach to Syrian women, discuss themes of their choosing, and share their recommendations with the government. Although the Board held its final meeting in July, its members will continue contributing to the transition. I thank them for their commitment and advice, and the donors for their support over the years.
27. Civil society organizations likewise emphasized inclusion and participation in their meeting with the Secretary-General, welcoming progress while calling for judicial and security sector reform, accountability, an inclusive transitional justice process, equal rights and the protection of civic space. The discussions showcased the range and

depth of Syrian civil society and the contribution they can make to Syria's successful transition.

Madam President,

28. Before concluding, allow me to underline the continuing cooperation with the Syrian authorities. Together, we are collaborating on areas of mutual interest, and doing so in close coordination with the UN Country Team. Our objective remains to develop further such cooperation, through the presence of a restructured Office in Damascus. And we will continue to build on this progress, with the support of the Council, guided by our shared commitment to Syria's successful transition.

Thank you, Madam President.