



Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8113th meeting

Monday, 27 November 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Cardi (Italy)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
France	Mr. Delattre
Japan	Mr. Bessho
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Senegal	Mr. Seck
Sweden	Mr. Skau
Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Rycroft
United States of America.	Ms. Sison
Uruguay.	Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Expression of sympathy concerning the terrorist attack in North Sinai, Egypt

The President: On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I would like to condemn in the strongest terms possible the unconscionable terrorist attack in North Sinai, Egypt, which targeted civilians at a place of worship. The members of the Security Council express their deepest condolences to the families of those killed and their sympathy to the people and the Government of Egypt. I ask those present to now rise in a moment of silence for the victims.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting. Mr. de Mistura is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I am briefing members of the Council from Geneva as we prepare for the eighth round of the United Nations convened intra-Syrian talks. Allow me to explain how we got here over the past month and decided on the approach to the talks at the moment.

Last month (see S/PV.8076), as those present will remember, I said that after Raqqa and after Deir ez-Zor — and let us now perhaps also say after the Government of Syria recently defeated the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in its last stronghold of Abu Kamal — the operation to combat and defeat the territorial foothold of ISIL in Syria would have completed its main tasks and there would be a moment of truth to bring about a real political process. I still believe that the moment of truth has arrived, although I want to register my serious concern over the tremendous

escalation of violence in eastern Ghouta in recent weeks and the ongoing restrictions of humanitarian access in that area. As ISIL is being defeated, neither side should turn their guns back on the de-escalation areas. I therefore would like to urge, together with those present, the Astana guarantors to address those challenges in order to avoid the problem reaching the de-escalation areas.

With respect to the talks, in order to prepare for real talks in Geneva I have been calling and asking for real diplomacy. My messages have essentially been the following. First, the Government delegation should come ready to negotiate. Secondly, we need a united opposition delegation with common positions that will come ready to negotiate. Thirdly, negotiations will take place in Geneva and with no preconditions. Fourthly, they should initially negotiate a work plan, focusing on the essential 12 living principles and the constitutional and electoral issues with a view towards implementing resolution 2254 (2015). Fifthly, all other initiatives should support the United Nations mediation process that the Security Council has mandated that the United Nations alone conduct.

We have seen signals on all those points, and we will now see what happens in Geneva. I note with great interest that in Danang, Sochi and Riyadh, important meetings have taken place that might help us, in my opinion, to begin a genuine negotiation process in Geneva. International players are clearly looking for some common ground based on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), resulting from our urging Syrians to begin to find some common ground, too.

In Danang, President Putin of Russia and President Trump of the United States affirmed that the political process

“[m]ust include the full implementation of United Nations Security Council 2254 (2015), including constitutional reform and free and fair elections under the United Nations supervision, held to the highest international standards of transparency, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate”.

The statement of the two Presidents followed their taking note of what they termed

“President Assad's recent commitment to the Geneva process and constitutional reform and

elections as called for under United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 (2015)".

As a mediator, I also noted that President Al-Assad said in Sochi, after meeting President Putin on 24 November, "We do not want to look back. We will accept and talk with anyone, who is really interested in a political settlement".

Notwithstanding those potential interesting and frankly, important signals, when my Deputy, Ambassador Ramsay, held consultations in Damascus with the Government over the weekend, the Government had not yet confirmed its participation in Geneva, but indicated that we would be hearing from it soon. Last night, we received a message that the Government would not travel to Geneva today. Naturally, we hope, and indeed expect, that the Government will be on its way shortly, particularly in light of President Al-Assad's commitment to President Putin when they met in Sochi.

Turning our attention to the opposition, last week over three intensive days — and I witnessed at least one and a half, if not two of them — an expanded opposition conference was convened in Riyadh. The participants reflected components of the Syrian mosaic and the ideological diversity within the Syrian opposition and society. Resolution 2254 (2015) mentions three meetings by name: Riyadh, Cairo and Moscow. They were all present.

Armed groups controlling territory inside Syria, including those involved in Astana and the various de-escalation arrangements, were active participants in Riyadh. There was finally significant participation by women. There was a strong presence of independents, including activists, business people and tribal figures. Several parties based inside Syria were actually represented through their own political umbrellas. As the Riyadh initiative was clearly designed within the framework of advancing resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process, which speaks clearly of three by name and others, I was glad to attend it to urge the participants to move ahead. I therefore took note of the international attendees at the opening of the conference, including Russian President's Special Envoy Lavrentiev.

After I left to travel to Moscow for useful consultations, Foreign Minister Lavrov and I were both active in assisting the efforts of Saudi Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir, whose determined efforts we really should be appreciating in order to obtain the outcome that we saw. The Syrian High Negotiations Commission formed in

Riyadh is arriving in Geneva as we speak. I expect all arrivals from various locations to be complete by tomorrow morning. I publicly noted that participation in Riyadh was an unequivocal rejection of terrorism and an affirmation that the only solution to the crisis is political and not military.

I noted that a united opposition delegation was formed, its composition reflecting that of conference participation. I noted that the delegation was tasked to negotiate in Geneva without any preconditions, to discuss all issues on the agenda and to use the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions as the sole reference for the negotiations. Assuming that both parties arrive in Geneva, we will seek to assist them in commencing serious discussions and, I hope, negotiations. I should like to make one thing in particular clear — we will not accept any precondition from either party. Let us be clear what a precondition is. It is when one party says "I will not begin to negotiate with the other side unless they do or say the following ...". I hope that both parties hear this message.

I will also assess, as a mediator should do, the parties' engagement by what they do in the room, how positively they engage on a work plan, and whether they show genuine readiness to discuss and negotiate, regardless of their publicly stated positions on any issue. We know there will always be differences; that is why negotiations are needed. All sides have the right to express their opinions, which may not be pleasant for the other to hear, as long as they do not put preconditions or refuse to talk to the other side. That is what negotiations are all about.

Resolution 2254 (2015) is a guideline for this endeavor. What, then, will the work plan look like, more or less? We can get an idea by working backwards from the end goal of resolution 2254 (2015). Members will recall that that resolution culminates in the end goal of free and fair elections held under United Nations supervision and meeting the highest standards of accountability and transparency, with all Syrians, including members of the Diaspora, eligible to vote. This includes refugees, of course; there can be no exclusion. The elections must be preceded by the popular ratification of a new constitution. The draft constitution should be prepared through an inclusive process and according to an inclusive schedule set, as resolution 2254 (2015) says, via a process in Geneva. Clearly, the drafting and approval process must be inclusive everyone. A national dialogue and/or national

conference would be important components of the overall process.

Syria's engagement in and negotiation on these matters should proceed on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and be guided by the 12 living principles developed during the process, which project a clear vision for the future of Syria that can be shared by all. I believe that, with good will, it should be possible to bridge the gaps regarding these principles. If possible, we will also begin to explore issues pertaining to baskets 1 and 4: governance and counter-terrorism, and security governance and confidence-building measures.

I will engage all those in Geneva in discussion on all of this. I will share with them thoughts on and a work plan for the negotiation process. And as I do so, I will remind them that the time has come to demonstrate, not to us, but to the Syrian people, that they care about their survival, their lives and the lives of their loved ones through immediate, unhindered, sustained humanitarian access, medical evacuations from the besieged areas, a willingness to address the plight of detainees, abductees and missing persons, and a concrete belief in negotiations on a political process.

Throughout the process, various ideas have emerged on a wider gathering of Syrian stakeholders. Indeed, the Geneva process itself does call for such a gathering of Syrians, and I have been building the foundation for it by inviting Syrians from all walks of life, from inside and outside, to participate. In this context, I also wish to stress that more than 200 — I repeat, 200 — civil society actors will be engaged here in Geneva in the United Nations-led political process over the coming weeks as part of the intra-Syrian talks. In the coming days, the Women's Advisory Board will be fully engaged once again, just as I hope it will be in the real negotiations.

I will engage a group of Syrian legal and constitutional experts and hear their advice and expertise. I will engage with a civil society organization with human rights expertise, including on detainees, abductees and missing persons. Aided by technology, we will be able to get in touch with refugee community leaders in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and with civil society actors working in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. All of this will be done from here in Geneva. I count on their commitment to the political process, sense of citizenship and real contact with the real

problems on the ground and their own insights and ideas in order to strengthen our ongoing mediation efforts.

I note the initiative of France to bring together in Geneva representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council for a preparatory meeting tomorrow, in which I have been invited to participate and give further detail on the agenda of this round. I warmly welcome any expression of support by the international community, including in particular the Security Council, for efforts to implement resolution 2254 (2015) through a United Nations-led political process in Geneva.

As Council members are aware, the Russian Federation has continued to pursue plans for a large gathering related to Syria, on a date in the relatively near future to be confirmed. It has been reported that the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey met recently in Sochi. The Russian Federation has indeed sought United Nations support for this conference. I have been in continuous and open consultation with them. I have also continued to assess the views of Syrians and the wider international community, including all members of the Security Council, bearing in mind the mandate entrusted to the United Nations by the Council. It is therefore, as far as I can see, premature for me to say anything regarding this initiative at this stage. I will continue to view this proposal and all other initiatives through the same prism — does it contribute to effective United Nations-led intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva to implement resolution 2254 (2015)?

Syria has been at war for the past six years. Half of its population has fled their homes. Reconstruction will cost at least \$250 billion. There have been myriad obstacles to this settlement: a constellation of actors, a variety of shifting agendas, and a real and continuing danger of soft but concrete fragmentation of Syrian territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. We have also witnessed the largest terror group in history, bringing terrorists from over 100 countries, and the use of force against civilians on a horrific scale. All of that has transpired before our eyes over the past six years. This crisis — one of the worst in the history of the United Nations — now has the real potential to move towards a genuine political process. A clearer map of the de-escalation, ceasefire and de-confliction arrangement has emerged, largely enabled by the Astana and Amman processes. We now see the emergence of international consensus. We must begin to stitch the

process together into concrete results, thereby enabling Syrians to determine their own future freely. The united support of the international community, centred in the Council, will be vital for negotiations to move forward in a concrete way.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we did with the delegation of France in October, we commend you, Mr. President, on your decision to hold this meeting as an open briefing. We encourage other Council members and the new members that will join the Security Council next year to continue with this practice.

As we do every month, we would like to thank Special Envoy Mr. Staffan de Mistura for the information he has provided us and for all the work that he does in the intervals between the Council meetings and the rounds of negotiations in Geneva and Astana. He and his team continue to work to achieve a political solution to the crisis in Syria. His unshakable optimism and determination to achieve a political solution to the Syrian crisis by implementing the road map provided for in resolution 2254 (2015) is genuinely praiseworthy. Once again, we express to him our gratitude for his excellent work and that of his entire team. We hope that the steadfastness and the single-minded commitment to achieve the eagerly sought-after goal prevails until we are all able to celebrate peace in Syria and have an opportunity to reunite and rebuild the country and thereby alleviate the suffering of its afflicted people.

We trust in his efforts, but the Council must also live up to its obligations and responsibilities and support his work resolutely and must, in particular, unequivocally and constantly assert that all the actors who have been involved in the conflict must understand that a solution to the crisis can be achieved only through a negotiated political solution with the widest possible participation of all Syrians.

The situation we see today is very different from what we saw exactly one year ago in Syria, when the siege or the liberation of Aleppo, depending on one's perspective, generated levels of violence, destruction and death that had rarely been seen before in this long crisis. We cannot deny that flash points of violence continue to exist in Syria, but it is clear that the situation

on the ground has changed radically, through the establishment of de-escalation areas, local ceasefires and a significant reduction in the levels of fighting and armed clashes.

We must first and foremost commend the almost total loss of power and territory on the part of terrorist groups, in particular of Da'esh, which terrorized Syrians during the past three years and committed unimaginable atrocities against civilians in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor and other areas. Sooner or later, accountability for those war crimes and crimes against humanity will have to become a reality, just as with what is beginning to happen in Iraq. There is no doubt that in recent months important events have taken place for the settlement of this conflict and the achievement of the eagerly awaited political transition.

Secondly, in addition to the facts already mentioned, the military upper hand of the Syrian Government over the dozens of armed groups that it has been fighting since 2011 is a fact that will make it possible to move to the next stage, which must be a political and diplomatic stage and not a military one. A victory, if it happens, will be one of the most pyrrhic and sad military victories in history, since the human, social and economic cost of this conflict has been, and will continue to be, of titanic proportions, not only for Syria but for other countries of the region that have been involved in this conflict.

As in many other cases, this was an avoidable conflict. It would have been entirely possible, six years ago, to hold negotiations on elections, constitutional reforms and other elements that are on the negotiating table today, yet the influence of the powerful prevented it. Had that happened, Syria would have avoided 400,000 deaths, its complete destruction and the tragedy of having to save entire generations from the poverty and the psychological trauma that Syrian children and young people are suffering from today.

Uruguay continues to support every effort and initiative that contributes to ensuring the cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access and the continuation of the political process led by the Special Envoy. We reiterate that there will be no military solution to this conflict and that it will be possible to end this horrific war only through a Syrian-led political transition process and with United Nations mediation, in accordance with the road map provided for in resolution 2254 (2015).

We appreciate the recent efforts that have been made to unite the Syrian opposition under a single bloc

and to ensure the genuine commitment of the Syrian Government to the Geneva process. We congratulate Mr. De Mistura on the progress he has achieved in his visits to Riyadh and Moscow, and in particular on his insistence on the participation of women in the delegations representing the opposition. The Astana process has paved the way for a successful effort to reduce clashes following the implementation of various de-escalation of violence areas.

We interpret as a positive sign that the press release of the three Presidents in Sochi agrees with the Geneva process that resolution 2254 (2015) should serve as the ultimate guide and that the goal should be inclusive general elections under United Nations auspices and constitutional reform in the country. We call on the three guarantors of the Sochi process to finalize the details of the agreement in order to understand the implications with regard to humanitarian access in the de-activation areas, the free movement of people and confidence-building measures, such as the release of those who have been kidnapped and detained and the identification of disappeared people, all of which will lead to improving the conditions for a strengthened political transition process. The defeat of Da'esh will no doubt contribute to the acceleration of that momentum. We emphasize that it is essential that de-escalation areas have a transitional status so that the unity and the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic can be preserved and new tensions that could lead to new armed conflict in the future can be avoided.

In conclusion, we are concerned that humanitarian access continues to encounter serious difficulties, even under circumstances that are relatively better than those that we faced months ago, owing essentially to the reduction in the levels of violence.

We wish Mr. De Mistura every success during the eighth round of intra-Syrian negotiations, which will begin tomorrow, and the negotiations that will be held in December. We hope that they will once and for all lead to a discussion of substantive issues, especially with regard to the process on a constitution and the convening of elections in Syria.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing. We once again reiterate to him our support and gratitude for the work he is undertaking.

My delegation recognizes the efforts that the people and the Government of Syria are carrying out in the fight against Da'esh. We reiterate our vigorous condemnation of all acts of terrorism and underscore that any such act is by its very nature criminal and unjustifiable, irrespective of where, when and by whom it is committed. In that regard, we believe it is important to take all the measures necessary to avoid in the short term the re-organization or emergence of new terrorist groups. We stress that it is imperative to pool our efforts to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and achieve the four key objectives of the Geneva negotiations, namely, combating terrorism and ensuring governance, a new constitution and new elections to be held under the supervision of the United Nations. We believe that any unilateral military action is totally illegal and contravenes the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, such actions undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and jeopardize the roll-out of the road map put together under the framework of resolution 2254 (2015).

We welcome all the meetings that have been held at various levels aimed at a stable peace, and we encourage all the relevant stakeholders to align their efforts to achieve the political decisions that are urgently needed. In that regard, we highlight the agreements reached this month by the Presidents of Russia and the United States on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting. We underscore their commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, to a reduction of violence and to compliance with the ceasefire agreements and conditions that will make possible a lasting political solution to the conflict.

We also welcome the memorandum of principles reached in Amman on 8 November among the Kingdom of Jordan, the Russian Federation and the United States, which reinforced the ceasefire initiative to continue efforts to reduce and eliminate the presence of foreign terrorist fighters and foreign combatants in Syria in order to guarantee lasting peace.

We highlight the meeting hosted in Sochi on 22 November, whose outcomes and commitments between Russia, Iran and Turkey reaffirm the resolve to eliminate terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front. Such commitments will help pave the way to reduce violence and halt the flow of refugees and allow us to begin the work to ensure the

safe and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

We welcome, and are following, the outcomes of the latest meeting in Riyadh, where the opposition reached agreements that could contribute to a peaceful solution to this stage of the conflict. We also welcome the efforts made in the framework of the current meetings in Astana, which to date have become an important aspect of the process of setting up de-escalation areas, and thereby serving as a way of reducing violence and ensuring stability in Syria. We hope that in the upcoming rounds of the Astana process in December we will be able to forge new agreements to benefit the Syrian population.

We also look forward to the upcoming fresh rounds of the Geneva consultations, where the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) should continue to serve as the road map, all the more so if there is a commitment on the part of the parties concerned to move further along that path.

Nevertheless, we believe that it is also important to make headway on the issue of detainees, hostages and missing persons. That is a subject on which much more needs to be done. It is also an issue that must feature on the agenda of the upcoming Geneva meeting and in further upcoming rounds of talks.

In conclusion, we reiterate our view that the only way of resolving this conflict is through an inclusive political process, which is led by and for the benefit of the Syrian people. That will allow for a peaceful resolution of the dispute between all parties involved. Such a political transition must also safeguard the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence of Syria through the means provided for under the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite the Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.