

**DEPUTY SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR SYRIA  
CLAUDIO CORDONE**

**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

18 March 2026

Thank you, Mr. President (USA), Special Envoy Barrack, and thank you also for your active role on Syria.

1. Since I last briefed the Council, I visited Syria for consultations with Foreign Minister Shaibani, senior officials, and a wide range of Syrians, UN colleagues and members of the diplomatic community. I saw first-hand the widespread destruction and legacy of abuses, including those epitomized by Sednaya prison. As Syrians mark this month the fifteenth anniversary of the revolution, we reflect on the immense human cost of the conflict, the aspirations that animated the early demonstrations, the long struggle that ensued, and our efforts, including in this Council, to support a future in which Syrians can live in dignity, peace and stability.

Mr. President,

2. Let me first address the alarming regional escalation and its impact on Syria. Incidents inside Syrian territory have mainly involved the crashing of debris following interception of Iranian missiles and drones in Syrian airspace, causing civilian casualties, and one incident of shelling from Lebanon attributed to Hezbollah. In addition, Israeli helicopter and drone operations in Syrian airspace have increased, and Israeli forces continued to carry out incursions into Syrian territory. Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon have claimed both Lebanese and Syrian lives, and resulted in approximately 140,000 persons, mostly Syrians, crossing into Syria seeking safety.
3. I reiterate our call in this context on Israel to fully respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, adhere to the terms of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, and refrain from any actions that could undermine Syria's stability and political transition.
4. I commend the Syrian Government for its engagement with regional and international stakeholders, to insulate Syria from further escalation and ensure Syrian territory is not used in ways that could widen the conflict. As the Secretary-General has stressed, respect for international law, de-escalation and dialogue remain essential to prevent further regional fall-out of this devastating war.

Mr. President,

5. A year ago, the Constitutional Declaration set out a five-year political transition culminating in a permanent constitution and new elections by 2030. Syrians rightly look to its full implementation.

6. Yesterday, indirect elections for four vacant seats in Raqqa governorate took place. The Supreme Committee for Elections has indicated that voting for a further 11 seats in Hasakah governorate and in the district of Ain-al-Arab, also known as Kobane, will take place in the coming weeks. This is expected to be followed by the announcement of 70 presidential appointees and of the date of the opening session of parliament. We look forward to Syria's regions and diverse population, especially women, to be meaningfully represented in the People's Assembly, given its role in shaping legislation and potentially Syria's permanent constitution, which must be a cornerstone of an inclusive nation, with checks and balances and respect for human rights.

Mr. President,

7. By creating the National Commission for Transitional Justice, the Syrian Government has recognized the critical importance of restoring the rule of law, ensuring accountability and fostering reconciliation. I was pleased to meet the Commission in Damascus, to note how active they have been in the first six months, and to offer our concrete support. Its members continue to engage with national and international partners as they chart the course ahead. Further progress will require close coordination with the Ministries of Justice and Interior and legislative reforms to strengthen the justice system and equip it to deal with atrocity crimes. Meaningful engagement with civil society and victims, and compliance with human rights standards, will remain central.
8. With regards to the overall human rights situation in Syria, the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry highlighted last week both persistent concerns and positive steps taken by the Syrian authorities. I echo the Commission's call for an inclusive vision for Syria, alongside urgent measures to strengthen rule-of-law institutions, including through a comprehensive security sector reform. And I welcome the Syrian Government's constructive response to the report, noting reform initiatives, cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms, and commitments to accountability.
9. On Sweida, I welcome the agreement reached on 26 February on a prisoner exchange, in which 61 persons were released by the Syrian Government and 25 persons were released by local forces loyal to Shiekh Hikmat Al-Hijri. Yet I remain concerned at the continuing unresolved issues in Sweida. Further confidence-building steps are essential for advancing the implementation of the political and military arrangements envisaged in the September 2025 Sweida roadmap. I also note that yesterday the Syrian National Investigation Committee released its report on the July 2025 violence in Sweida. I look forward to studying its findings and recommendations. Ensuring accountability and redress for victims will be extremely important.
10. Meanwhile, I was pleased to hear directly from both sides that the integration process between the Syrian Government and the SDF is moving forward on the basis of the 29 January agreement. There have been positive developments, including the appointment of an SDF-nominated Assistant Minister of Defense, the release of detainees from both sides, and the beginning of returns to the city of Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) and other areas. At the same time, key questions remain under discussion, including the modalities of the integration of SDF forces into the Syrian army and

police; the future role of the Women's Protection Units; the incorporation of civil employees into state institutions; and Kurdish-language education.

Mr. President,

11. We have seen renewed calls by Daesh (ISIL) for violence and an increase in attacks against Syrian government forces in Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and other areas. While small-scale and geographically dispersed, these attacks underscore Daesh's intent to rebuild, and I welcome renewed vigilance and counter measures by Syrian forces and the rest of the US-led Global Coalition.
12. Separately, al-Hol camp is now closed. Most inhabitants, mainly women and children – including Syrians and Third Country Nationals – fled and have reportedly dispersed throughout Aleppo, Deir Ezzor and Idlib; some may have even left Syria. As you know, a number of those who had been in the camp were suspected of being associated with or had family ties to Daesh. Those who remained were transferred to Akburhan camp in Aleppo where UNHCR has registered 731 families. Al-Roj camp, where over 2000 Third Country Nationals as well as some Syrians are held, remains under SDF control.
13. In addition to security concerns, the developments related to al-Hol give rise to significant protection and integration challenges. Meeting them is also important if the risk of radicalization is to be stemmed. The UN supports efforts for the reintegration of Syrians within Syria conducted in a manner that promotes social cohesion and the security of all. We also urge the speedy repatriation of Third Country Nationals, in a manner consistent with human rights standards.

Mr. President,

14. Let me turn now the Council's attention to economic recovery, which is key to Syria's political stabilization. After more than a decade of conflict and isolation, and a year of transition, Syria's economy remains extremely fragile. Regrettably, the regional conflict has forced the Syrian authorities to reduce electricity supply, and cross-border trade has also been negatively impacted. This of course comes at the wrong time for Syria, which is trying to turn the corner and move into recovery.
15. An International Monetary Fund delegation who visited Damascus in February, reported early indications that economic activity may be improving, supported by increasing electricity provision, the return of refugees, increasing investments and Syria's gradual reintegration into regional economic networks. It is also notable that the Syrian Central Bank recently reactivated its account at the Federal Reserve in New York.
16. However, as the Central Bank Governor told me in Damascus, the slow pace of Syria's reintegration in the international financial system is a threat to Syria's recovery and stability. Despite the lifting of most sectoral sanctions, Syrians have yet to feel the benefits. There is a need for continued easing of remaining restrictions and export controls, alongside efforts to address the legacy of sanctions, particularly financial over-compliance. Support from public and private partners is also essential.

Mr. President,

17. Our Office continues, in coordination with international partners, to support an inclusive Syrian-led political transition and the institutional processes required to sustain it. I appreciate my discussion with Foreign Minister Shaibani on this matter. We are now actively discussing areas of cooperation between the Office and the Syrian government. I hope to report to the Council soon that we have reached an understanding, and also that the Mission can relocate to Damascus.
18. Meanwhile, our Office continues to engage regularly with Syrian officials and Syrian civil society, whose meaningful participation and ability to operate freely is vital to an inclusive political transition. In my discussions in Damascus, Syrian women in particular stressed that women's participation in emerging institutions remains below legitimate expectations. I welcome here though the recent recruitment of women into the Ministry of Interior, including those who defected from Assad-era security institutions. And I very much look forward to listening to Yusra Mardini shortly, with her vision for a Syria where everyone feels safe and at home.

Mr. President,

19. Let me conclude by recalling my starting point: Syria's steady but fragile recovery – political, institutional and economic – could be undermined by the impact of a prolonged regional conflict. Let us redouble efforts to support Syria in shielding itself from this conflict, and let us refocus on helping Syria continue, and even accelerate, its path towards recovery, reconstruction and stability. The success of Syria's transition will depend on the ability of Syrians themselves to shape a future grounded in sovereignty, accountability and inclusion.

Thank you.