

‘We remain firm in our belief that the way to secure rights for all Syrians is by bringing about a negotiated end to this appalling conflict’

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Thank you very much, Mr President. Thank you, Special Envoy Pedersen. As others have said, it's very good to see you back here in the chamber with us.

I'm also very grateful to Ms Hussein for her briefing. I think she offered us a stark description of the desperate conditions in Syria, but especially of violence and discrimination against women and their counter-productive exclusion from the political process. It was interesting to hear the extent to which her remedy for the situation aligned with ours. But as she insisted, we offer her no sympathy, only admiration for her strength and for her determination to challenge an illegitimate regime and fight for change and accountability.

Mr President, we remain firm in our belief that the way to secure rights for all Syrians is by bringing about a negotiated end to this appalling conflict, and that the political process established by resolution 2254 remains the only viable route to a lasting and inclusive peace.

As this Council made clear in resolution 2254, meaningful participation of women in the UN-facilitated political process is critical and it was good to hear Ms Hussein reiterate that herself. Indeed, we cannot envisage a solution without the participation of women. So we therefore welcome the vital work of the Syrian Women's Political Movement and ongoing engagement by the Special Envoy with women representatives. And indeed I was very encouraged by the information he gave us on the way in which he is engaging civil society in the process in innovative ways, and I encourage that, too.

Mr President, now that the distraction of the so-called Presidential elections in Syria is out of the way – and I noted Ms Hussein's description of them as a sham – we call on the Syrian regime finally to engage constructively with the political process and the Constitutional Committee towards a new constitution and free and fair elections pursuant to that constitution. We recognise the Special Envoy's efforts to this end and his efforts to accelerate progress on all aspects of resolution 2254, including by encouraging greater international consensus on the path forward. And we would be interested to hear more on his ideas for a new international dialogue.

We must not forget that conflict continues in Syria. We are deeply concerned at increasing levels of violence, including strikes on southern Idlib, a regime attack on a school facility in an IDP camp on 9 June, and an attack on yet another hospital in Afrin on 12 June. We call on all parties to observe their obligations under international humanitarian law, abide by existing ceasefire agreements, and implement resolution 2254's instruction for a nationwide ceasefire. This remains as urgent as ever.

We also note resolution 2254's call to allow humanitarian access to those in need and thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his comments today. We obviously discussed this imperative humanitarian access on Wednesday, so we won't reiterate our points here again today.

We call, as others have, on the regime to release those it holds in arbitrary detention – I think Ms Hussein described this as the greatest priority – and allow medical access to those detained. And we also call on the regime to provide information on the missing to their families, again in line with resolution 2254, and Human Rights Council Syria Resolutions.

Finally, progress on the political process is the only way to build conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes and to secure a lasting end to the conflict in Syria.

Thank you, Mr President.

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