European External Action Service (EEAS)

Press release – EU Special Representative for Human Rights Kajsa Ollongren visits Syria

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European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights Kajsa Ollongren visited the Syrian Arab Republic from 15 to 16 June 2026. The visit took place in the aftermath of the High-Level Political Dialogue, which reaffirmed the EU's commitment to an inclusive, Syrian-owned and led transition.

The EUSR met with Foreign Minister Asaad Hasan al-Shaibani, with whom she discussed the EU-Syria partnership, the domestic context in Syria, the regional situation and Syria's extensive efforts re-engage with the multilateral system, including various human rights mechanisms. The partners agreed to start the preparations for the next iteration of the Day of Dialogue, for which the EUSR stands ready to return to Syria later this year.

With Minister for Justice Dr. Mazhar Al-Wais, they discussed a deepening EU-Syria relationship, which also includes sharing knowledge and expertise on transitional justice. The Minister told the EUSR about training and capacity strengthening on human rights in the justice sector. The EUSR was pleased to hear that a National Human Rights Institution is under consideration.

Minister of Interior Anas Hasan Khattab told the EUSR about initiatives to prevent the re-occurrence of violations, including the establishment of a women's police institute as well as relevant reforms to ensure gender responsive investigations. The EUSR encouraged the authorities to find a sustainable solution for students in Sweida, who are due to take their final exams.

The EUSR also engaged with the National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ), discussing the draft Law on Transitional Justice, which will be discussed by the new People's Assembly upon its formation. In this context, the EUSR reiterated the EU's principled stance on the death penalty. She learned about the structures established by the NCTJ to ensure inclusive, gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches. The National Commission for Missing Persons (NCMP), told the EUSR about its extensive work to bring answers and relief to thousands of Syrians from all communities who do not know the fate of their loved ones.

Five dedicated discussions were organized on priority topics identified during extensive consultations prior to the mission. On the occasion of the International Day against Hate Speech, which will take place on 18 June, the EUSR met with independent journalists and

media professionals. They discussed combating mis- and disinformation, the freedom of expression, and the protection of journalists, including women journalists. Civil society actors working on justice and accountability emphasized the need to address all violations, also those after 8 December 2024, and to meaningfully engage civil society on these topics.

Together with UN Women, the EUSR convened a discussion with women leaders and organizations working on gender equality and women's rights. Civil society emphasized the linkages between transitional justice and the right for women to grant a nationality to their children, security sector reform, as well as housing, land and property rights. The Constitutional Declaration and the National Recovery Plan provide a strong basis for women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in public and political life in Syria.

With humanitarian NGOs, the EUSR discussed the continued humanitarian needs in Syria, which should not be forgotten as recovery and reconstruction needs are immense. The presence of foreign actors in Syria is also an impediment to humanitarian access. With UN agencies, she discussed the role of international organizations in supporting the transition. In this context, key challenges related to returns and a rights-based approach to the dismantlement of camps were also discussed.

On her first day in Syria, the EUSR visited the heavily destroyed Jobar neighbourhood, where she met with representatives of the Syrian National Mine Action Service as well as the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), with whom she discussed the extensive needs for clearance of unexploded ordnance and mines across the country. Contamination is also a major impediment to refugee returns, in addition to socio-economic and housing, land and property concerns.

"There is a unique window of opportunity as Syria is embarking on a path towards transitional justice and societal reconciliation. My office stands ready give all the support needed to make this transitional justice process a success, and to accompany the authorities in building a future in which all Syrians feel safe and have a say. Civil society must be a true partner in all these efforts, including as Syria approaches its next Universal Periodic Review," the EUSR noted.

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