

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

**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

22 April 2026

Mr. President (Ambassador Jamal Fares Al Rowaiei, Bahrain)

1. I am pleased to join you from Damascus. This past month has seen progress on stabilization and some success in insulating Syria from the region's multiple crises against huge odds, and despite repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty. However, economic, institutional, and social pressures, as well as localized insecurity, present challenges to Syria's political transition. Addressing them requires consolidating institutions, promoting social peace, and advancing Syria's full reintegration into the international economic and diplomatic order – all objectives that the UN as a whole is actively supporting.

Mr. President,

2. Let me start by noting that Israeli military activity in southern Syria continues in breach of existing agreements and international law. On 19 March, after Syrian Government forces clashed with local forces loyal to Sheikh Hijri in a counter-smuggling operation in western Sweida, Israel carried out airstrikes against Syrian military infrastructure for the first time since July 2025. Israeli forces have continued to conduct incursions into Syrian territory almost daily, including an operation on 29 March against Hizbullah in south Lebanon from Jabal al-Sheikh/Mount Hermon in Syrian territory. Israeli forces also continued to erect checkpoints and detain Syrian nationals. Yesterday I visited UNDOF and in the Area of Separation I met the families of some of the over 50 people still detained, some for more than one year. They shared with me their distress at not having any news on the fate and whereabouts of their family members.
3. Today, dozens Israelis crossed several hundred meters into the Area of Separation near the village of Hadar. Both the crossing and their behaviour was highly provocative. They were brought back by the IDF which condemned the incident.
4. I reiterate our strong call on Israel to cease violations, respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, adhere to the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and prevent incidents such as the one today. I urge Israel to return all Syrian detainees taken in violation of international law. And I hope that talks between Israel and Syria with US facilitation can lead to sustainable security arrangements.

Mr. President,

5. More broadly, I commend the Syrian Government for its efforts to shield Syria from the conflicts raging in the region, with Syrian security forces deployed defensively to control borders. As of 19 April, nearly 300,000 people fleeing the fighting in Lebanon had crossed into Syria, all but 51,000 Syrian nationals.

6. The Ministry of Interior has announced the arrest of several Hizbullah-affiliated cells planning attacks inside Syria or towards Israel, as well as the destruction of cross-border smuggling tunnels and the confiscation of weapons and other military equipment.
7. Drone attacks in late March from Iraqi territory struck military installations in the northeast, including sites previously used by US forces, although bilateral efforts and the current regional ceasefire contributed to a restoration of calm.

Mr. President,

8. In the northeast, there has been incremental progress on the implementation of the 29 January agreement between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Democratic Forces. Government deployments and the handover of various sites have taken place, and further detainees have been released. Issues related to education, military and administrative integration and public appointments, among others, remain to be resolved. Good faith implementation by both parties is key for trust and stability. And we welcome the recent meeting between President Sharaa and SDF leader Abdi in Damascus, trusting that it will move implementation forward.
9. By contrast, there was no progress on advancing the elements of the Sweida roadmap. Protests continued, including demonstrations on 11 April calling for self-determination, improved living conditions, and the release of detainees. Deteriorating socio-economic conditions, alongside reported restrictions on freedom of expression inside Sweida, are creating further frictions.
10. The findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry released last month, together with those of the Syrian National Commission of Investigation, underscore the gravity of the events in Sweida in July last year. Widespread and serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law were committed by government or government-affiliated forces and other actors. These include unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detention, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as large-scale destruction and displacement. Both the National and International Commissions have advanced important recommendations to strengthen accountability and promote professionalism and security sector reform. I welcome the Syrian Government's stated commitment to implement these recommendations and cooperate further with international mechanisms. I look forward to the Syrian Government translating its commitments into concrete action, and to all relevant parties engaging constructively in seeking to restore trust and stability in Sweida, by addressing local grievances while upholding Syria's unity and territorial integrity.

Mr. President,

11. It is a notable achievement that March 2026 recorded the lowest levels of direct conflict-related violence in 15 years, although civilians continued to be killed by remnants of war. And the Government is prioritizing mine clearance and the removal of unexploded ordnance, and UNMAS is offering its support.

12. Daesh/ISIL remains a concern, and I welcome the continued counter-terrorism efforts of the Syrian forces and the US-led Global Coalition. I note the Syrian Government's announcement of handover of former US bases to its control.
13. Separately, recent joint operations with neighboring countries to counter smuggling, including drug seizures, demonstrate ongoing efforts to strengthen border security.
14. And let me stress the importance of protecting diplomatic premises in light of the breach and vandalism by protesters of the embassy of the United Arab Emirates on 3 April.
15. Meanwhile, let me note that, despite comparatively low levels of violence, for many Syrians, localized, intercommunal, and sectarian incidents and criminality are real concerns. These forms of violence are rooted in long-standing grievances exacerbated by wartime divisions, and highlight persistent tensions linked to past abuses and sectarian mistrust. The recent events in Suqaylabiyah illustrate this trend, where a localized dispute of a non-sectarian nature escalated into broader clashes between neighboring Muslim and Christian communities.
16. These developments have reignited concerns among communities, particularly Christians. Feelings of insecurity led to the cancellation of religious celebrations. At the same time, it is important to note efforts by the authorities, including public outreach by President al-Sharaa and security measures undertaken by the Ministry of Interior aimed at protecting the Christian community during Easter celebrations.
17. Separately, local measures towards banning alcohol in Damascus also generated unease. While not directed at any specific community, aspects of their implementation, including exemptions, were perceived as stigmatizing a particular community, while also impinging on personal freedoms of citizens.

Mr. President,

18. Economic hardship is translating into social unrest. Across the country, new sets of protests are emerging. Last Friday, peaceful demonstrators in Damascus called for improved living conditions and political reforms. They were confronted by a counter-demonstration that escalated into physical violence, resulting in injuries. We welcome the intervention of security forces that separated the groups and prevented further escalation. At the same time, we emphasize the importance of addressing growing popular concerns.
19. In this context, I welcome the ongoing efforts to develop a poverty reduction strategy and ensure transparency, priorities that were emphasized by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Economy and Industry in our discussions earlier today.

Mr. President,

20. We note preparations to hold indirect elections for nine vacant seats in the People's Assembly from three districts in Hasakeh governorate. We look forward to information on when the elections will be held, as well as the announcement of the 70 presidential appointees and the opening session of the Assembly. With over six months since initial voting took place, it is essential for the viability of the transition that a functioning and widely representative legislature is established as soon as possible.
21. A priority for the forthcoming People's Assembly will be to review and enact legislation aligned with the aspirations of the Syrian people, including a law on transitional justice in coordination with the National Commission on Transitional Justice. The adoption of a comprehensive framework on transitional justice, grounded in inclusive consultations, would be an important step toward strengthening legal certainty and public confidence. The same applies regarding the work of the National Commission on Missing Persons and its legislative framework. I encourage the Syrian authorities to make full use of the offers of cooperation by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. My Office also remains ready to support these efforts.

Mr. President,

22. A sound legislative basis for reforms is also essential for economic recovery. Syria's economic outlook remains fragile. The regional conflict has raised import costs, disrupted supply chains, and affected food production. Commendable efforts to improve service availability, such as electricity supply, have often been accompanied by significant price increases. This underscores the need to strengthen reforms to support investment.
23. We welcome the engagement of the Syrian authorities with the World Bank and the IMF on this. We equally stress the importance of continued action on sanctions relief and to address the legacy of sanctions. And we must guard against regional tensions diverting international attention and resources away from Syria at a time when exactly the opposite is needed.

Mr. President,

24. Syrian women continue to play an active role in the political transition. At the same time, like other members of civil society, they express growing concerns about restrictions on personal freedoms and their ability to operate without undue constraints. Our attention has also been drawn to recent online campaigns targeting women activists from one particular organization documenting human rights violations. Civil society organizations and individuals condemned the campaign, describing it as incitement. And Syrian women continue to call for greater representation in positions of authority and decision making. Their meaningful participation remains essential to an inclusive and credible transition.

Mr. President,

25. Sustained and coordinated international engagement is needed to support of the Syrian-led political transition. The United Nations is ensuring close coordination among its in-country and system-wide leadership, evidenced recently by a joint visit of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Administrator of UNDP, as we will hear shortly from Under-Secretary-General Fletcher. I am also pleased that Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Frazier will brief you shortly.
26. We welcome the progress in preparing the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2027–2030, led by the Syrian Government in coordination with the UN system and partners. The framework emphasizes durable solutions, social cohesion, and the humanitarian, development and peace nexus as pillars of recovery, alongside accountable and transparent institutions.

Mr. President,

27. The peace dimension of this nexus underscores the importance of strengthening cooperation between our Office and the Syrian Government. I am grateful to the authorities for maintaining open channels with us. We have offered concrete ideas on areas of cooperation, aligned with the Office's mandate from the Council and the priorities identified by Syria. We are expecting shortly the government's feedback so that we can reach a shared understanding on next steps, including the relocation of the Mission to Damascus at the earliest feasible date. We stand ready to move forward immediately.
28. In conclusion, I continue to welcome the Council's unity of purpose on Syria as evidenced in its press and presidential statements and Security Council resolution 2799, all of which have endorsed the UN's political role in support of Syria's transition. We stand ready to continue to engage with Syria's Government and society in this endeavour.

Thank you.