



Security Council briefing on Syria (Political/Humanitarian) 27 February 2024

Malta Statement delivered by Her Excellency Ambassador Vanessa Frazier
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you, President. I also thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr Martin Griffiths for their important remarks.

Malta remains deeply concerned about the multitude of protracted and ever-deteriorating political and humanitarian crises across Syria. As we move towards the fourteenth year of this conflict, regional tensions and the danger of outright escalation could not be higher.

In 2024, the UN projects that 16.7 million people will require humanitarian assistance, the highest number on record. Since our last meeting, dozens of civilians have been killed or wounded by artillery shelling, airstrikes, and direct clashes in the northern areas. The multitude of militaries and non-state armed groups in Syria perpetuate the chronic destabilisation felt by the population for nearly a decade and a half.



Malta welcomes the extension of the authorisation by Damascus for the use of the humanitarian crossing at Bab Al Salam and Al Ra'ee for an additional three months. We also call for progress on crossline operations to the northwest.

Humanitarian operations must be free from political considerations. All crossings must remain functional as long as humanitarian needs are present.

We note the major funding challenges in the UN's Humanitarian Response in Syria. Once again, we underscore the need for greater early recovery, resilience, and livelihoods' funding to ensure the functioning and rehabilitation of essential civilian infrastructure.

President

Now more than ever, we are reminded that there is no military solution to this conflict. A political settlement in line with Resolution 2254 is the only way forward.



Malta reiterates its support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy. We encourage Damascus to engage constructively and tangibly with his Steps-For-Steps initiative, and we hope to hear of progress made on this after the Special Envoy's visit to Syria next month.

We also hope to hear news of positive developments related to the Syrian Constitutional Committee. For too long, considerations regarding the venue have caused unacceptable delays. The Syrian parties must return to the negotiating table and make immediate headway. To place peace on hold is to the detriment of millions.

Malta notes with great concern the findings of the latest OHCHR Syria report relating to the dire protection concerns which Syrian returnees have faced.

The report details a pattern of Syrian returnees facing gross human rights violations and abuses upon their return to Syria.



The absence of the rule of law, the economic crisis of seismic proportions, lack of functioning basic infrastructure, and widespread violence makes life in Syria near impossible for millions. All these factors also had a severe impact on children's access to education. We call on all parties to safeguard, protect, and promote children's right to quality education.

We also stress that returns of Syrian refugees and the internally displaced must be safe, voluntary, and dignified. We reject any attempts at forcing the return of Syrians, placing them again in great danger from the areas they fled.

Moreover, issues related to land and housing rights, access to civil documentation, and the sharp gendered element faced by female returnees, present a major challenge.

In conclusion, Madam President, we again call for a nationwide ceasefire in line with Resolution 2254, and for regional parties to the conflict in Syria to exercise maximum restraint.



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At this time of grave regional tension and hostilities, all diplomatic efforts must be aimed at ensuring the root causes of conflict are addressed, and a widespread halt to the fighting takes effect.

I thank you.