


# Syria: Briefings on the Humanitarian and Political Situations and Arria-formula meeting with the SNC

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## What's In Blue

Posted Thu 23 Apr 2015

Tomorrow morning (24 April), Jordan's Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Nasser Judeh will preside over a meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria. At this session, the Security Council will adopt a presidential statement on the impact of the humanitarian crisis in Syria on neighbouring countries. In the afternoon, Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura will brief Council members in consultations on the political track. Next week, Council members are expected to meet with the head of the Syrian National Coalition in a closed Arria-formula meeting.

### *Humanitarian Briefing*

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos, High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres along with UNHCR Special Envoy, Angelina Jolie, and the head of the UN's World Food Programme, Ertharin Cousin, will brief the Council on the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries.

Amos will present the Secretary-General's latest report on the humanitarian situation (S/2015/264) and is expected to deliver the clear message that violations by one party do not exempt others from their obligations to protect civilians. She is also expected to send a strong message to President Bashar al Assad about his particular responsibility to end the bloodshed and start a political process, emphasising that a government aspiring to legitimacy does not massacre its own people. Amos may be critical of the P5 at tomorrow's briefing, restating what she recently wrote in a Washington Post op-ed that the Syrian people she had met questioned why the narrow national interests of the P5 overrode broader global responsibilities, despite the efforts of three UN special envoys to chart a way out of the crisis.

In addition, Amos is expected to stress the need for sustained and predictable resources as only 18 percent of the Syria emergency response plan for 2015 has been funded. She is also likely to focus on the perilous situation in Yarmouk—a Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of Damascus that has been besieged by the government for two years and where civilians are now trapped between government forces on the outside and by armed groups and terrorist groups on the inside. (Council members held emergency consultations on Yarmouk on 6 and 20 April and released a press statement expressing their grave concern but were unable to agree on language referring to the government's siege of the camp [SC/11865].)

On the broader situation, Amos is likely to convey that access for delivery of available aid inside Syria is still severely constrained and cross-line deliveries are inherently difficult due to the security situation and the government's use of administrative obstacles to slow aid delivery. Medical neutrality is not observed with the government attacking medical facilities and the targeted killing of medical personnel. Indiscriminate aerial bombardment by the government has been constant. Armed opposition groups and terrorist groups shell civilian areas and block access to each other's areas of control.

Cousin is expected to highlight funding needs for food assistance to continue to be delivered to Syrian refugees as well as those who have been internally displaced. Late last year the agency had to cut food rations and suspend vouchers due to lack of funds. Similarly, Guterres is expected to stress the importance of supporting the funding needs of the UN's 2015 Syria response plan to aid the nearly 4 million refugees who have fled Syria.

Council members expect Guterres and Jolie to reiterate many of the points made by Amos. Guterres will likely emphasise the challenges to Syria's neighbouring countries where the needs of Syrian refugees far outpace the ability of the host country to respond without significantly increased support from the international community. In addition, Guterres is likely to report that the overwhelming number and needs of Syrian refugees have led Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to restrict the refugee influx due to concerns about the destabilising impact on their own security and economic situations. In that regard, he will likely urge other member states to shoulder their share of the responsibility to provide safe haven for refugees. In particular, he is expected to stress that Syrian refugees account for nearly a third of the migrants who are smuggled across the Mediterranean—a growing crisis that Council members recently responded to in a press statement when over 700 migrants were killed after a boat capsized off the coast of Libya last weekend (SC/11870).

### *Presidential Statement*

The humanitarian penholders—Jordan, New Zealand and Spain—drafted a presidential statement on the impact of the humanitarian crisis in Syria on neighbouring countries which was shared with the P3 last week and negotiated by the entire Council membership on Monday (20 April). The presidential statement is of particular importance to Jordan as a neighbouring country that hosts almost 630,000 registered Syrian refugees, though the estimated actual number is well over a million.

The presidential statement focuses on the social, demographic, environmental and economic effects on neighbouring countries and how such effects have exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, overstretched limited resources and basic social services, aggravated unemployment, diminished trade and investment and affected regional stability and security.

Negotiations weren't contentious and the draft passed silence procedure this morning. However, two issues that continually plague any Council outcome on Syria emerged: terrorism and Syria's sovereignty.

During Monday's negotiations Venezuela urged extensive references in the text to the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters who enter Syria from neighbouring states. Venezuela's suggestion was reflected in a paragraph stressing the importance of strengthening the resilience of host countries including by preventing radicalisation.

Meanwhile, China and Russia insisted on including language on the UN's guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance. The language stems from a 1991 General Assembly resolution that says "humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country" (A/RES/46/182). This language, a nod to China and Russia's overriding concern for Syria's sovereignty, had been agreed in previous humanitarian resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191, but the logic for having it in a presidential statement focused on neighbouring countries and not the internal situation in Syria was less clear. Nevertheless, it was included in a paragraph that emphasised the importance of compliance with international humanitarian and refugee law. In the minds of the P3 and like-minded, having "guiding principles" language after references to compliance with international law clarifies that the government's obligation to protect civilians trumps sovereignty concerns.

Finally, the presidential statement to be adopted tomorrow emphasises that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution and urges de Mistura to start a political process to implement the 30 June 2012 Geneva Communiqué. While this is the first time the Council has focused substantially on the challenges in neighbouring countries, the statement does little to advance a solution to the Syrian crisis.

### *Political Briefing*

Council members will have the opportunity to discuss the possibilities of reviving the political process when Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura briefs them in consultations tomorrow afternoon.

De Mistura last briefed on 17 February when he announced that Syria had indicated a willingness to halt all aerial bombardment over Aleppo for a period of six weeks. However, on that same day government forces launched a surprise offensive north of Aleppo. De Mistura said he feared it was an attempt to solidify gains before the freeze went into effect. However, with aerial bombardments still continuing Council members will likely be interested to hear de Mistura's assessment of why his plan for an "Aleppo Freeze" did not gain traction. The most recent effort to revive the freeze plan was during the discussions de Mistura's deputy, Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, had with the Syrian government last week about the situation in Yarmouk.

Council members also expect de Mistura to outline his plans for bi-lateral shuttle diplomacy, over the course of six weeks starting in May in Geneva, among Syrian actors, regional actors and P5 representatives. Syrian actors are expected to primarily be the government and the Syrian National Coalition but could include other opposition groups and civil society. The regional actors are expected to include Syria's neighbouring

countries as well as Iran and Saudi Arabia. These bilateral consultations with various actors hope to tease out areas of commonality for implementing the Geneva Communiqué.

Council members expect de Mistura will likely want to limit expectations about whether conditions on the ground have shifted enough to allow parties to untangle what has become known as the “Assad knot” enshrined in the Geneva Communiqué—i.e. trying to find openings between Iran and Russia’s support for the Assad regime and the position of the P3 and their Arab allies that Assad must go. Nevertheless, with no other options on the horizon Council members appear willing to throw their weight behind another attempt at a Geneva peace process. Several Council members have suggested the need for more action from the Council on the political track. In this regard, they see the return to higher level talks in Geneva as a positive sign, but without major shifts on the part of US and Russia most members are aware that little may come from this next round of bilateral talks.

#### *Arria with the Syrian National Coalition*

At press time, it seemed that France, the UK and the US are organising a closed Arria-formula meeting for next Wednesday afternoon (29 April) so that Council members can interact with the head of the Syrian National Coalition, Khaled Khoja. Council members expect Khoja to describe how the Coalition has tried to create the conditions needed for the political transition envisioned in the Geneva Communiqué. Council members will also likely want to know more about the successes and challenges related to the Coalition’s attempts in the recent Cairo talks to unite the many Syrian opposition groups under a single platform. The Coalition has also met with Syrian opposition groups that participated in the Moscow talks. In light of de Mistura’s approaching bi-lateral shuttle diplomacy, Council members will be interested in Khoja’s opinion of the Coalition’s interactions with the UN Special Envoy and his expectations for the bi-lateral talks in Geneva.

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