

The United Nations Security Council Unanimously Votes in Favor of a 30-day Cease-Fire in Syria

On 24 February 2018 the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously in favor of a 30-day cease-fire in Syria, and demanded immediate lifting of sieges on war-ravaged enclaves like eastern Ghouta – at the end of one of the bloodiest air assaults of the seven-year war. In addition to a 30-day nationwide ceasefire, the resolution demanded weekly aid convoys, medical evacuations and the immediate lifting of sieges, particularly eastern Ghouta. The resolution further affirmed that the cessation of hostilities will not apply to military operations against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (also known as ISIL/Da'esh), Al Qaeda and Al Nusra Front.

Previous ceasefire deals on the ground, however, have had a poor record of ending fighting in Syria. Since March 2011, Syria has been in the throes of a conflict that has forced more than half of all Syrians to leave their homes. An estimated 5 million Syrians have fled the country and more than 6 million are internally displaced. The crisis, described as the worst humanitarian disaster of our time with more than 13 million people in need of assistance, has caused untold suffering for Syrian men, women and children. Since the Syrian conflict began nearly seven years ago, the Security Council has been deeply divided, with Russia backing President Bashar Assad's government and the US, Britain and France supporting the opposition. The result has almost always been paralysis and inaction.

Nevertheless, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, continues to work tirelessly to bring the parties to the negotiating table and an end to the war. The Special Envoy on 25 and 26 January 2018 engaged in consultations in a special round 9 meeting with the delegations of the Government of Syria and the Syrian Negotiations Commission within the framework of the UN-facilitated political process on Syria in Vienna, on the basis of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). As mandated by Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), the talks focus on governance, a schedule and process to draft a new constitution and the holding of elections as the basis for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned process to end the conflict. Discussions include counter-terrorism strategies. The Special Envoy further attended the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi on 29 and 30 January, which is expected to contribute to the intra-Syrian talks process under the auspices of the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254.