

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 31 March 2025 from the Permanent Representatives of Denmark, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

Denmark and Sierra Leone, as co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Syria (see annex).\*

We would be grateful if the present letter and its attachment could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christina Markus **Lassen**  
Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**  
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**  
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

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\* Circulated in the language of submission only in line with current liquidity management measures.



## **Annex to the letter dated 31 March 2025 from the Permanent Representatives of Denmark, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

### **Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council**

#### **Summary of the meeting held on 27 February 2025 on the situation in Syria**

On 27 February 2025, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Syria. The members were briefed by the Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Najat Rochdi, accompanied by the Head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and colleagues from the United Nations. The briefing was followed by an overview of key recommendations for the Security Council by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

#### **Questions from Security Council members**

Members of the Security Council asked a number of questions on the inclusion of women in the transitional process, including whether the caretaker authorities have a formalized framework for engagement with women, the ways in which the United Nations supports women's participation and ensures that their voices are heard, how the Security Council members could contribute to further improving women's engagement in the different processes and what would be a realistic outlook for an inclusive constitution-making process. There were also questions on the priorities of Syrian women for the transitional period, whether the caretaker authorities are paying sufficient attention to accountability for crimes committed under the previous regime and how the rights of women-led households, including inheritance and child custody, will be addressed going forward. Lastly, Security Council members raised questions on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including women's access to maternal healthcare, women's economic opportunities and related constraints, the situation of women and girls in the Golan, and how the United Nations engages with Israel in this regard, and the impact of sanctions on poverty and on women and girls in particular.

#### **Women's participation in the caretaker authorities and conflict-resolution efforts**

- After the then President, Bashar al-Assad, was ousted on 8 December 2024, a new caretaker authority, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and its commander, Ahmed al-Sharaa, took power in Syria. Only two of the caretaker authority's Cabinet and provincial governorship appointments to date have been women: Maysaa Sabreen, the caretaker governor of the Central Bank, and Aisha al-Dibs, head of the Women's Affairs Office within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The United Nations has emphasized that it is essential that more women are appointed to entities of political importance for the transition and that they address women's rights and priorities.
- On 25 February, the caretaker authority organized a 1.5-day national dialogue conference, in which – according to participants – approximately 15 per cent of the participants were women. Women also played prominent roles in the working groups and as facilitators of the dialogues during the conference. The final statement of the national dialogue conference explicitly indicated the

intention to support women's roles in all fields in the future. Ahead of the national dialogue, a preparatory committee, consisting of two women and five men, travelled throughout Syrian governorates and held meetings in Damascus, consulting with approximately 4,000 people throughout Syria to gather views on the transitional process.

- Following the national dialogue conference, Mr. Al-Sharaa announced that a legislative transitional body and a committee to draft a constitutional declaration would be established. While these steps provide an opportunity for women's inclusion, it remains unclear how Syrian women will be represented in these mechanisms and how they can provide input into these processes.
- In their engagement with the United Nations, Syrian women have expressed their expectation that the transitional process, including the constitution-making process, will guarantee women's and girls' rights, including meaningful participation in public and political life, access to public services and livelihoods, transitional justice, the right to protection and the rights of Syrian returnees. They have expressed their willingness to participate in the transitional process and beyond, in various roles, from ministers to experts, activists and community leaders or as ordinary citizens engaged at the local, national and international levels.
- Syrian women from the grass-roots to the national level – as well as in the diaspora – have also demanded meaningful roles at the negotiation table and highlighted the important roles that they play in the local peacebuilding efforts. Further support is needed to build social reconciliation and social cohesion at the community level and to build a constituency of diverse women throughout Syria in general and the select women who have access to important spaces for the transitional process, such as the national dialogue.
- The United Nations continues to engage regularly with the Women's Advisory Board as well as the Civil Society Support Room, and continues to urge women's meaningful political, economic and civic participation, an enabling civic space and that women and girls' needs are fully considered in foundational elements, such as the constitution-making process, in line with the principles of Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).
- There have been some recent allegations of separate hours for women and men in recreation facilities, cars being stopped at checkpoints to see whether women and men passengers are related and leaflets being distributed setting out appropriate dress standards for women. The United Nations has not been able to verify these incidents or who is responsible for them but has communicated relevant concerns to the caretaker authority.

### **Humanitarian situation**

- The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be extremely dire, with limited access to basic services, including water, electricity, healthcare and education. The ongoing hostilities in parts of the country and attacks on critical infrastructure, including hospitals and medical care facilities, electricity, water and fuel stations and major roads have made the delivery of essential services, including sexual and reproductive services or even access to menstrual hygiene, very restricted.
- United Nations and humanitarian partners have appealed for \$1.2 billion to address the most urgent needs of 5.7 million Syrians from January to March. The humanitarian response priorities for January to March 2025 are only 10.4

per cent funded, and merely 4.1 per cent of the funding received has been allocated to gender-based violence protection.

- The United Nations country team has a very active gender working group and a women's advisory group as part of the humanitarian country team. United Nations partners provided examples of gender-responsive interventions, such as targeted outreach to women for legal support for access to housing or land or for civic documentation claims, or 60 per cent of beneficiaries of psychosocial support being women.
- Women and girls continue to suffer from the impact of the ongoing hostilities and open front-lines in the north-east, as well as the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and presence in parts of southern Syria. The United Nations Special Envoy continues to call for compliance with international humanitarian law and the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.
- Syrian women have continuously called for sanctions relief to allow them to better access employment opportunities.

#### **Human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual violence and arbitrarily detained and disappeared persons**

- The situation of the Syrian Arab Republic has been covered in the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2012. Successive reports have documented the use of different forms of sexual violence against civilians, with particular concern for sexual violence in detention settings, early and forced marriages and sexual violence in the internally displaced people's camps. Unless transitional justice mechanisms integrate concrete provisions on the occurrence of conflict-related sexual violence and provide for measures to deliver justice, truth and guarantees of non-repetition, these crimes may disappear from the historical record. This includes evidence preservation, including for records from detention facilities, which could be crucial to future accountability.
- Displaced women and girls continue to be vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, especially in the internally displaced persons camps. The economic crisis has led families to increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as child and forced marriage and prostitution. Syrian refugees remain vulnerable, including to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and strategies to prevent these acts should remain a priority.
- Thousands of prisoners, including women and girls, who were arbitrarily detained for years or even decades were released from prisons following the fall of former president al-Assad. Specialized support is needed for the women, men, boys and girls who were subject to sexual and gender-based violence in detention and any children born as a result of rape.
- The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to support the determination of the fate and whereabouts of missing people in Syria, including missing women, and to support the families of the missing, including in relation to inheritance and child custody.
- More than 2,500 Yazidis abducted by Da'esh remain missing to this day. Many of these women and girls and their children may remain in Syrian Arab Republic and continue to be at risk of sexual violence and exploitation. In 2024, eight Yazidi survivors of sexual violence were rescued, including from Syria, and returned to Iraq.

## Recommendations

In any upcoming decisions on Syria,<sup>1</sup> the Security Council should:

- Urge the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of diverse Syrian women, using a 30 per cent threshold as a minimum, in a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political transition, including any broader political dialogues, discussions on confidence-building measures, national consultations about the future of Syria and the electoral and constitution-making processes, and adopt measures to ensure that these targets are reached.
- Encourage the authorities, with the support of the international community, to ensure that recovery, reconstruction, transitional justice and stabilization efforts address the needs of women and girls, and that their rights are protected and promoted.
- Reiterate the importance of women's participation in local and national peacebuilding efforts, including conflict-resolution efforts throughout Syria.
- Demand that all parties clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons, and call on the caretaker authorities to urgently secure and preserve information and evidence of atrocities and to cooperate with and facilitate access for mechanisms working on the rights to truth and justice, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, as well as to ensure that the transitional justice process is gender-sensitive, human-rights based and non-discriminatory, and designed and implemented in partnership with survivors.
- Demand unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout Syria and that humanitarian service providers are able to conduct their work safely and without discrimination on the basis of gender, including the effective delivery of services to address gender-based violence, to ensure continuity in access to lifesaving aid and basic services and keep pace with the unprecedented scale of needs.
- Encourage and/or welcome regional organizations and/or Member States' adoption of further humanitarian exemptions to their own sanction regimes.
- Call on Member States to facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of their nationals from camps and places of detention in the north-east of Syria, with particular urgency for children and their families, in line with international law and standards; and further develop tailored gender- and age- sensitive policies for risk assessment, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration.
- Call on the authorities to reform Syrian laws to align with international standards, in particular in addressing gender-based violence, and ensure that accountability and transitional justice efforts are gender-responsive.

<sup>1</sup> These recommendations have been prepared by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, in consultation with other United Nations entities, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In addition, members of the Security Council could:

- Urge the international community to fully fund the humanitarian response plan, with special attention to addressing all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, and stronger investments on sexual and reproductive healthcare, mental health and psychosocial support, mainstreaming gender equality throughout the humanitarian response and ensuring women's participation in decision-making at all levels of the humanitarian response and throughout the humanitarian planning cycle.
- Call for international partners to provide direct, flexible and consistent funding to women-led and women's rights organizations to support local grass-roots peacebuilding efforts and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including through mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.
- Recommend the creation of survivor-centred justice mechanisms for all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including reparations, guarantees of non-repetition and measures to preserve evidence, and request that survivors of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups be recognized as victims of terrorism to be entitled to reparations and redress.
- Call for the establishment of appropriate reception facilities for women and girls at border crossing points, staffed by trained female personnel, mobile documentation units to reach women in displacement settings, standardized protocols for identifying and responding to protection risks faced by women and girls during population movements, including conflict-related sexual violence, and regular monitoring and reporting on the specific challenges faced by displaced women and girls in accessing documentation and civil registration.
- Prioritize targeted support for women's economic empowerment, including vocational training, cash-for-work initiatives and microenterprise development, and women's full participation in recovery efforts.
- Support national and international efforts focused on ensuring the full involvement of Syrian women and addressing atrocities committed against women and girls in Syria since 2011.
- Encourage and/or welcome regional organizations and/or Member States' adoption of the Secretary-General's Common Pledge for Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation in Peace Processes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/thematic-areas/gender-women-peace-security/common-pledge>.