



## **Conclusion 5th Round of Syrian Constitutional Committee 29 January 2021**

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### **Shotlist**

Continuity of Syria Constitutional Committee press conference - Syrian Gov Group & Syrian opposition have audio original on CH1 (L) and English interpretation on CH2 (R)

### **SHOTLIST OF EDITED STORY**

1. Exterior wide shot, Palais des Nations
2. Wide shot, press briefing room with cameramen
3. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Geir Pedersen, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria: “I think it is fair to say it was an open, frank and direct assessment of where we are. And I told the 45 members of the drafting body that we can’t continue like this, that the week has been a disappointment”.**
4. Medium shot, podium with screen in room

5. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Geir Pedersen, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria: “The reason for that is that there has not been a proper understanding on how we are going to make progress in the Committee”.**
6. Close up, view finder in camera
7. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Geir Pedersen, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria: “So my summary today is that this week has shown that such an approach is not working and we cannot continue to meet if we do not change this”.**
8. Close up, journalist in press briefing room at the UN Palais
9. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Geir Pedersen, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria: “We need the two co-chairs to work better together, via me, or they sit down and discuss, and we need to produce then a work plan for all the meetings that will be organized in the future”.**
10. Medium shot, journalists in the room
11. **SOUNDBITE (English) - Geir Pedersen, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria: “This is not a debating Committee. You know, you can continue debating forever. We need to move this into a manner where the members themselves start to identify areas where they agree or disagree and then move into the drafting phase and this is what is missing for the time being”.**
12. Medium shot, journalists and cameramen in press briefing room
13. Medium shot, Geir Pedersen at podium and on monitor of laptop screen
14. Close up, journalist taking photo in press briefing room
15. Medium shot, podium from behind

## Story

### Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria

#### Subject:

Press conference following the conclusion of the fifth round of the Small Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee

#### Speaker:

- Geir O. Pedersen, UN Special Envoy for Syria
- Syria Constitutional Committee - Syrian Gov Group
- Syria Constitutional Committee - Syrian opposition

#### Five days of talks on new Syrian Constitution end in “disappointment” –UN Special Envoy for Syria

As a fifth round of talks on Syria’s future constitution concluded today, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen expressed his disappointment at the fact that the 45-member committee had failed to even start drafting a new charter after a weeklong meeting in Geneva.

**“I think it is fair to say it was an open, frank and direct assessment of where we are. And I told the 45 members of the drafting body that we can’t continue like this, that the week has been a disappointment”**, Geir Pedersen, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria told journalists at a press briefing at U.N. premises in the Swiss city.

**“The reason for that is that there has not been a proper understanding on how we are going to make progress in the Committee,”** he explained.

A proposal on working methods submitted by the Co-chair of the Syrian Opposition group, Mr. Hadi al-Bahra, has been rejected by the Co-chair of Syria’s Government Group, Mr. Ahmed Kuzbari. Another suggestion made by the UN Special Envoy’s office had been accepted by Syria’s opposition group but rejected by the representatives of the Government of Syria.

**“So my summary today is that this week has shown that such an approach is not working and we cannot continue to meet if we do not change this,”** the UN Special Envoy said.

The so-called Small Body of the Constitutional Committee refers to the 45 people (15 representatives from each of three groups: the Syrian government, the opposition, and civil society) who undertake the talks in Geneva on behalf of the larger Constitutional Committee (also known as the “Large Body”, comprising the same three group with 50 representatives each), who are charged with drafting a new constitution ahead of UN-supervised elections.

Pedersen emphasized that he thought it would be possible to identify what he calls “commonalities” between the factions.

**“We need the two co-chairs to work better together, via me, or they sit down and discuss, and we need to produce then a work plan for all the meetings that will be organized in the future”**, he said.

Many topics on the agenda of the i Constitutional Committee have been under discussion for more than a year.

**“This is not a debating Committee”, the UN Syria Envoy said. “You know, you can continue debating forever. We need to move this into a manner where the members themselves start to identify areas where they agree or disagree and then move into the drafting phase and this is what is missing for the time being”.**

No future meetings of the Small Body have been planned so far. The Syria Envoy said he would aim to go to Damascus for further talks.

### **Transcript of remarks by Mr. Geir O. Pedersen, UN Special Envoy for Syria, following the conclusion of the Fifth Session of the Small Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee**

Thank you so much Jenifer and good to see you all. And also good afternoon or good morning to all of those of you I cannot see.

We have just concluded the fifth session of the drafting body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee and I gave a statement to all 45 Committee members. I think it is fair to say that it was an open, frank and direct assessment of where we are.

And I told the 45 members of the drafting body that we can't continue like this, that the week has been a disappointment. I set out a few things I thought we should be able to achieve before we started this meeting, and I am afraid we did not manage to achieve these things. I believe the reason for that is that there has not been a proper understanding on how we are going to make progress in the Committee.

You know, and I also said to the Security Council, that I had received a proposal from the Co-Chair from the SNC, [Mr] Al-Bahra, on sort of working methods for the Constitutional Committee. And these proposals were submitted to Co-Chair Kuzbari.

On Sunday, I had extensive discussions with the two Co-Chairs trying to get an agreement on how we can move forward. Co-Chair Kuzbari made it clear very early on that the proposal from [Mr] Al-Bahra was not acceptable, but he accepted that I could forward some proposals for how we could move this process forward. I then presented a proposal to the two Co-Chairs hoping that we could achieve a consensus for the work on the two first days of the Committee. My proposal was also then rejected by Co-Chair Kuzbari, nominated by the government, but accepted by Co-Chair Al-Bahra. We then started the meeting on Monday morning without an agreed methodology for how to continue, in other words that we would continue the meeting in the same manner as we had with the four previous meetings.

So, my summary today is that this week has shown that such an approach is not working, and we cannot continue to meet if we do not change this. This is what I had told the 45 members of the Committee, and also followed-up with discussions with the two Co-Chairs. And I explained that we need the two Co-Chairs to work better together, via me – or they sit down and discuss. And we need to produce then a workplan for how the meetings will be organised in the future.

I hope that it will be possible for me to go to Damascus, in the not too distant future, and to have discussions on these, but of course also to have discussions in Damascus with the government on how to implement all the broader aspects of Security Council resolution 2254.

I will, of course, also have that discussion with the SNC, and as I already had this week, I will also be meeting, of course, with the Russians, with the Turks, with Iranians, with Arab friends, and of course also

Europeans, and hopefully also with the new US Administration. But first and foremost, this is of course something I hope to be able to sort out with the two Co-Chairs.

So, as for now there is not obviously an agreed time for a new meeting, I hope then to be able to get back to you later, but before that I will also be briefing the Security Council -- most probably on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February. And I will then also, of course, go into more details on what was discussed this week.

Thank you.

**Question: I imagine you are very disappointed in this, can you confirm whether the government representatives engaged at all in terms of actual drafting, or was it just discussions, I mean did you get down to the heart of the matter, was there any engagement on their side and did they present anything meaningful during this session. And you also said you are expecting to discuss it with the new US Administration, and I wonder if you have any sort of hopes for that contact, and whether anything is planned for in the near future?**

Mr. Pedersen: I said to the 45 Committee members that during these five days there have been many excellent interventions, but what we are missing is a mechanism where we can use these interventions through what I call textual submissions into a process where we can start identifying areas where we agree or where we disagree and then move that into what I will call a proper drafting process. My main challenge is that this is what we are lacking. At the very end of the session, the government-nominated delegation presented its paper, it hasn't been possible for me to read that paper yet, because as I said it was presented at the very end, and earlier during the process the SNC presented quite a few constitutional principles, nine principles and then there were also discussions and also members of the Middle Third presented constitutional principles. And there was an exchange of views on this in the room, absolutely, and as I said, it will take a little bit of time for me to analyse what we have received from the government side.

And to the possible interactions with the new incoming US Administration, we will get back to you when that has happened.

**Question: As far as we understand the government side disappointed you the most, and the opposition already submitted some articles to draft the constitution to the Committee, so did you have the chance to talk with Iran, the Russian delegation here, who has influence on the government side, if you talked to them, what did they tell you about it?**

Mr. Pedersen: I wish life was so easy so that I could tell you everything I am discussing with my diplomatic interlocutors, but that is obviously not possible. But you are absolutely right, I had good meetings with my Russian interlocutors, also with Iran, also with Turkey, but as I said of course, also with a wider group of countries. And that will of course continue and indeed be intensified during the next few days.

**Follow up question: So, is it correct that you are disappointed the most over the government side during these talks this week, is that correct?**

Mr. Pedersen: Listen, I gave you I think a pretty honest description of where we are in the process.

**Question: I wonder if you could just give us a heads up on what were the things that you actually thought were achievable and also whether in the discussions that followed on the constitutional principles submitted by the SNC, whether you saw any serious engagement from the other side with those principles that you think makes them useful for possible future discussions?**

Mr. Pedersen: Listen, it is a little bit early for me to go into detailed discussions about the different submissions along the lines that you indicated. But let me just say this: I know from my interactions with members of the Committee that, based on what we have heard so far, with the right mechanism in place it will be possible to identify what I call commonalities. But we need this mechanism in place. And this is what I am asking for. So you know, this is not a debating Committee. You can continue debating forever.

We need to move this in a manner where the members themselves start to identify area where they agree or disagree and then we can move into the drafting phase, and this is what is missing for the time being.

**Question: During the 10 meetings, the opposition provided about 10 texts and the civil society also provided many principles, whereas the government delegation confined itself to a general discussion, my question is how did the Astana track influence this session, and will there be a meeting in Sochi next months?**

Mr. Pedersen: I will not even attempt to describe how the Astana three are working, so I think you better ask them on this. But I was informed by the three members of the Astana group that indeed there will be a meeting in Sochi next month, so I do believe that that is confirmed but maybe check with the Astana three about the exact timing for that.

**Question: Thank you Mr. Pedersen, it seems that Jenifer didn't want me to put my question. You talked about changing the methodology in order to move this process forward, and we have noticed that these discussions are stagnating and are not moving forward, what is the methodology that you suggest in order to move these discussions forward?**

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you for your question. I have been rather detailed in my discussion with the two Co-Chairs on this and they have already received a few ideas from me that is actually more detailed than what I have told the Security Council, so I have now, in my follow-up discussions with the two Co-Chairs, encouraged them to continue dialogue with me on this so that we can work this out together. And as I said it is my hope that it will be possible for me to continue this discussion with the SNC, and I also hope to continue that discussion when I go to Damascus.

Thank you.

*Geneva, 29 January 2021*