



Officials Express that the United Nations Will Push for a Nationwide Ceasefire in Syria as the Need for Humanitarian Assistance Increases

Last week, infighting between rebel groups began anew in northwestern Syria, rupturing a two-year ceasefire agreement formulated in 2020. The fighting was between militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army, supported by Turkey. HTS appears to be on the offensive in an effort to expand their reach and unite the few remaining regions not under government control. There is fear that they plan to overtake Azaz, the primary base of operations for the Syrian National Army. Perhaps in response to the fresh outbreak of violence, UN Special Envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen traveled to the country to speak to Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad and others about the potential for a nationwide ceasefire. Of the utmost importance, officials are seeking progress on a political solution for the end of the longstanding conflict that has had a devastating humanitarian impact on civilians, leaving half of the population displaced and hundreds of thousands killed since 2011.

The recently damaged truce was brokered by Turkey and Russia. At the time, the Iran and Russia-backed Syrian government headed by despot Bashar al-Assad had effectively taken control of the vast majority of the country and was besieging the last rebel stronghold in the northwest. The truce has prevented the advancement of one side or the other, but hundreds have died in skirmishes since it went into effect, and the truce was only applied in the rebel-controlled region. It has done little, if anything, to fetter the worsening of the humanitarian crisis that has made 80% of the population impoverished.

Over the past two years, Syria has endured record levels of food insecurity and rapidly rising prices of basic goods and services. Additionally exacerbating the ongoing humanitarian crisis is the fact that water shortages, particularly in northern Syria, have created drought-like conditions and jeopardized already compromised health and water systems. Furthermore, the number of those in need of humanitarian aid and health services has increased both in 2021 and now in 2022. With much of the world's focus being placed on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has also been a notable lack of global funding for addressing other important major humanitarian crises like the one in Syria.

When asked about the intentions of the United Nations for the situation in Syria in a press statement, UN Envoy Pedersen emphasized that we need "progress on the political front" in addition to a pause in the fighting. Despite admitting that Security Council Resolution 2254 has been a failure thus far, he reiterated the commitment of both the United Nations and the warring factions to the plan, although no concrete progress has been made. The 2015 Security Council resolution attempted to lay out a plan for restoring peace to Syria in which a Syrian-led assembly first created a provisional government and then held elections monitored by the United Nations. Part of that plan is the Syrian Constitutional Committee, a group consisting of 150 members total, 50 from each important area of the Syrian conflict. These areas include 50 government officials, 50 opposition members, and 50 civilians. The group has met several times since 2019 but has failed to come to any agreements.

Pedersen stated that in addition to meeting with the foreign minister, he was also in Syria to speak with a new nominee for the convention. Of course, Pedersen stressed the severity of the humanitarian disaster. UN Secretary-General António Guterres chimed in as well via Twitter, saying that "the international community has helped avoid a total collapse in Syria" but that "the only way to end this humanitarian tragedy is through a truly nationwide ceasefire and a political solution that enables the Syrian people to determine their own future."