

Statement by The Autonomous Administration of North East Syria for UN Security Council discussion of Syria on 22 January 2026

To:

HE Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

HE Ambassador Abukar Dahir Osman, Permanent Representative of Somalia to the United Nations, President of the UN Security Council

"We would be grateful if this message could be shared with other members of the Security Council in preparation for the discussion on 22 January. Given the situation on the ground, it is important that the views of all of those involved are shared"

CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION

The immediate situation – on 21 January, today - is that the military forces of the Syrian Transitional Government (STG) of President Ahmed Al-Sharaa continue to attack towns and villages in the North East region despite the announcement of a ‘ceasefire’ by the transitional president on 20 January.

For our part, the SDF has announced its acceptance of the ceasefire. We want a cessation of all violence immediately, but if the government's attacks continue, we are forced to engage militarily in order to defend and protect civilians.

URGENT NEED FOR CEASEFIRE

The need for a ceasefire is urgent and we hope that the Council will call for one immediately. At the same time, it's important for Council members to note that only the government currently is engaged in aggressive hostilities. We are not. It is easy in these circumstances to place blame equally on 'both parties' or call for general 'de-escalation' by both sides. However, in this case, this would be inaccurate. Diplomatic pressure needs to be applied most forcefully upon the aggressor.

THE ORIGIN OF CURRENT VIOLENCE

The government attacks began with assaults on civilian Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo on 6th January. This assault, which involved tanks and artillery in civilian areas, was totally unprovoked and

came without warning. In addition to the deployment of heavy weapons, drones conducted air strikes on civilian areas. These attacks resulted in 107 civilian deaths and 322 injured civilians. 35 thousand household civilians were displaced and are now refugees in eastern Syria.

In order to prevent further bloodshed, and upon the advice of the US, we agreed to withdraw SDF forces from Aleppo and from other areas west of the Euphrates River. After further negotiation with the government, we then agreed to withdraw from Deir ez Zor and Raqqqa governorates. These concessions however did not end the government's aggression. STG forces attacked SDF soldiers across eastern Syria and pushed towards the major towns of Hasakeh and Kobani. At the time of writing, both towns remain under siege. All water and electricity has been cut off to Kobani, causing significant civilian suffering. The president's announcement of a 'ceasefire' also contained, it must be noted, an explicit threat to attack towns and villages of the North East if the government's terms were not accepted.

STG forces have been accompanied by other armed groups, including remnants of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Syrian National Army (SNA), and assorted jihadists, including former members of Al Qaeda and ISIS – known members of both terrorist groups have been identified alongside government forces. Both STG forces and these extremist groups have committed atrocities both against civilians and SDF soldiers, both men and women. SDF soldiers have been tortured and summarily executed, their corpses desecrated or thrown off buildings. Videos of these criminal acts are then gleefully shared online by the jihadists, accompanied by religious chanting celebrating the murder of non-believers (i.e. Kurds), acts which are reminiscent of ISIS terrorism in years past. The religious and ethnic character of the STG campaign was underlined by the government's denoting of its aggression as 'Anfal', a Koranic verse cited by Saddam Hussein for his genocidal campaign in northern Iraq in 1988 which killed 100,000 Kurds.

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

There is a broader history which must be understood.

We, like other Syrians, welcomed the fall of the dictator Assad, who was responsible for systematic repression of Kurds in Syria, including the denial of citizenship and other human rights. When power was seized by President al-Sharaa in December 2024, we repeatedly pledged our willingness to partner with him to build a new, unified Syria. For example, the commander of the SDF signed an agreement with President al-Sharaa on 10 March 2025 committing the SDF to become an integral part of the Syrian army. There were several meetings to take this agreement forward, including with the transitional president himself. We made multiple proposals for military integration, including handing over a list of SDF personnel, an act of significant good faith and trust, and proposing that the SDF join the army as three distinct divisions, in order to preserve their regional character. President al-Sharaa accepted this proposal, his agreement witnessed by several officials from the government, SDF and US. However, since that meeting, there has been no response to our proposals. At a meeting in Damascus on 4 January, the government delegation abruptly terminated the meeting without explanation.

Despite the clarity of this history, today we face accusations of ourselves blocking the process of integration. This could not be further from the truth.

On the political future of Syria, it should be emphatically noted that President Al-Sharaa has never been elected as president. He took power by force. At the parliamentary 'elections' that took place in November, the president appointed a third of the 'elected' representatives and the other two-thirds were appointed by committees appointed by him. Most notably, there were no elections in the North East or coastal regions. Therefore there is no democratic mandate to claim the rule of Syria. We have been however, and remain, prepared to work with the STG to establish a stable long-term constitutional settlement for Syria.

Instead, the president made a 'constitutional declaration' in March 2025 which granted extensive and unaccountable powers to the president, including the power to suspend the representative assembly i.e. democracy itself, in wholly undefined circumstances and without restraint by any other institution, such as the assembly, or courts. Power was concentrated in Damascus ie. the presidency, with no devolution of power to the regions. Islamic law was named as the only source of national laws. Democratic elections were postponed for five years, an inexplicably long period. In short, therefore, Syria now has an unelected president governing by decree and announcement. In our opinion this is not dictatorship – yet – but it is not democracy either.

Meanwhile, there have been bouts of ethnically driven violence against the Alawite and Druze minorities in western and southern Syria, and now against Kurdish communities in the North East. Hundreds have been killed in this violence, which has involved massacres, torture and summary executions. The involvement of government forces and the extremist groups which operate alongside them in these killings has been well documented, including by international human rights organizations. After these events, it is unsurprising that there is little confidence among Syria's minorities that they will be protected by this government.

THE WAY FORWARD

It is unconscionable in this circumstance for the international community to permit the violent and militarized imposition of central government rule in the North East. Our region has been self-governed with stability and peace since 2012. It is a direct democracy, where the people themselves make decisions. It is a unique women-led and multi-ethnic government, and should not be essentialized as 'the Kurds' which is a lazy (and, frankly, 'Orientalist') way to reduce a multi-ethnic dispensation built over many years, involving Arabs, Yazidis, Syriac communities as well as Kurds. This depiction and resulting policy are typical habit of arranging the affairs of the Middle East without consulting the people themselves, and without taking account of the complexities and history on the ground.

To reflect the needs and protect the rights of the many ethnic and religious groups present in today's Syria, we have proposed a decentralized government structure, with significant powers devolved to the regional governorates. We have never proposed that the North East be governed separately or that it should secede from Syria, as some have claimed. Along the lines for instance of the German Basic Law or Swiss constitution, is the best, in fact the only, way to guarantee the rights and safety of Syria's minorities and thus provide peace and stability for the country as a whole.

Council members should be aware that the current state that the transitional government is building in Syria is not a rights-respecting 'democracy'. It is a highly centralized and Islamist government which prioritises the rights of the majority ethnic group and Islam itself over other religions and ethnic

groups which are instead to be dominated by force and coercion, usually outside the gaze of the international press. This manner of governing is a recipe for instability. Note for instance the naming of the Syrian army as the 'Syrian *Arab* Army' – an overt choice to exclude Syria's Druze, Yazidi and Kurdish communities. At the same time, legitimizing the fight against the SDF by falsely depicting the SDF as 'terrorist', a description that flies in the face of the SDF's long history – and huge sacrifices – in combating ISIS terrorism for the last 12 years, at a cost of no less than forty thousand casualties, and our long-standing commitment to joint operations against ISIS under the international auspices of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR).

THE NECESSARY ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

In the circumstances we have described, there is a clear need for impartial international engagement to ensure peace and security – and democracy - in Syria. We would welcome the establishment of a formal negotiation process, convened by the UN Special Envoy, attended by other states with an interest, to discuss both military and political integration in Syria. This process would be the most constructive and, we trust, peaceful way to arrange the integration of the SDF with Syria's existing army and to agree the fundamental elements of a new constitutional settlement, one that with substantive measures (and not mere declarations) protects all minorities, and women as well as men. Negotiations to date have been sporadic and sometimes chaotic, with no accountability for decisions made – such as President Al-Sharaa's explicit agreement in October to our proposals for SDF integration.

Syria should not be governed and dominated by a single individual or group. This is a recipe for civil war and repression. Syria's future should be for all the regions and minorities of Syria, its women and men, to decide. We call on the UN to enable and lead such a process of discussion and decision. A statement to this effect from the Council's deliberations on 22 January would be a good start.

Signed:

Ilham Ahmed, Head of the Office of External Relations, Democratic Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (DAANES)⁴

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ilham', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the left.