



Security Council

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Letter dated 27 November 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of briefings provided by Ms. Khawla Matar, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium (on behalf of Belgium and Germany), Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on the “The situation in the Middle East (Syria)” convened on Wednesday, 25 November 2020. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Council dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Inga Rhonda **King**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Statement by the Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Khawla Matar**

It is an honour for me to address the Security Council today. The Special Envoy is continuing a set of engagements — he is today in Riyadh — in support of the United Nations-facilitated political process.

I am pleased to be able to inform the Council that plans are being finalized for the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee small body to convene from 30 November to 4 December in Geneva. This was made possible by the agreement of the two Syrian co-Chairs that, in line with the mandate, the Terms of Reference and the Core Rules of Procedure, the Constitutional Committee small body will continue in its fourth session to discuss the agenda of the third session, on national foundations and principles, and in its fifth session will discuss constitutional principles (basic principles of the constitution). The co-Chairs further agreed on the dates for the fourth session, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation permitting, and to hold the fifth session in January 2021.

The COVID-19 challenges in Geneva are considerable right now, and the Special Envoy is very aware of that. We are very grateful to the Swiss authorities for all they have done, and are doing, to enable this meeting to move ahead in these extraordinary times. We will be ensuring that the strictest health and safety protocols are followed, and appreciate that the co-Chairs and Constitutional Committee members have fully committed to the measures that will be in place. We continue monitoring the evolution of the epidemiological situation in Geneva ahead of the meeting.

We all know that the Committee has not yet made the kind of progress that we had hoped. But the commitment of the Syrian parties to the package of two meetings and with agreed agendas presents an important opportunity for Committee members to engage in good faith in a businesslike manner to move forward the political process. If these sessions can proceed in a substantive manner and in a spirit of compromise, we believe it would help to build trust and confidence and make some progress. We also look forward to engaging with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to benefit from their insights and support for all aspects of the constitutional process.

A constitutional track on its own cannot resolve the crisis, and the Syrian-led Committee's work needs to be accompanied by mutual and reinforcing steps by Syrian and international players on the range of issues contained in resolution 2254 (2015).

It is important to note that, while falling short of the nationwide ceasefire called for by resolution 2254 (2015), the fragile and relative calm that the Special Envoy has spoken of in recent months continues broadly to hold. That calm, however, continues to be ever more challenged, raising concerns. This month saw renewed elevated escalation in north-west Syria, with fresh air strikes, mutual shelling and ground clashes between the Syrian Government and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and armed opposition groups. But we also continue to see Russian-Turkish cooperation in the effort to preserve calm and address terrorism. We also saw a spike in violence in the north-east, around the perimeter of Operation Peace Spring areas, new levels of turbulence in south-west Syria, Israeli air strikes and ongoing activity by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the desert — a reminder of the magnitude of the terrorist challenge still confronting Syria.

On this the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, let me stress to the Council that, in recent consultations with us, Syrian women

emphasized that peace and security means ending all forms of violence. Syrian women continue to suffer from sexual and gender-based violence, which has been widely documented. Measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have increased the prevalence of domestic violence, child marriage and sexual harassment. Syrian women have at the same time been at the forefront of initiatives to respond to the crisis.

Meanwhile, Syrian women, men and children are suffering profound economic hardship. The Syrian currency is beginning to experience another depreciation, causing a further rise in prices and diminishing purchasing power. In recent months, bread and energy shortages have affected Syrian livelihoods to an unprecedented degree. And as winter looms, families continue to face difficulties in providing home heating, and farmers suffer from fuel shortages. COVID-19 remains a major challenge and has exacerbated vulnerabilities in all parts of the country. In this context, it is also paramount that any sanctions avoid aggravating the plight of Syrian civilians.

A particular focus of my engagement remains the plight of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Unfortunately, we have not seen the kind of progress we need on the release of the detained and abducted and on information on the missing. We will continue on every occasion to press for this as a humanitarian imperative and as a vital step towards building confidence. Most urgent is the release at scale of women, children, the sick and elderly, and humanitarian access to places of detention.

The plight of millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons continues to deteriorate. The United Nations supports Syrian refugees whatever their choices and seeks to engage all parties in the effort to enable safe, dignified, well-informed and voluntary returns. Higher numbers are likely to be achieved only once the factors that refugees say prevent them from returning are addressed — including personal security, access to livelihoods, basic services and education, as well as restitution, rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction of housing, land and property. Action on these fronts would help create an enabling environment for such returns, something that is anchored in the tenets of resolution 2254 (2015).

Resolution 2254 (2015) contains all the elements that are still commonly understood as required for a political solution: respecting the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria; a Syrian-led and owned political process that includes a constitutional process culminating in free, fair and inclusive elections supervised by the United Nations and that includes the meaningful participation of women; a nationwide ceasefire; countering proscribed terrorist groups in compliance with international law; the protection of civilians; unfettered humanitarian access; the release of detainees and abductees and information on the missing; implementing confidence-building measures; conditions for the safe and voluntary returns of refugees and internally displaced persons; and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

However, five years after the adoption of the resolution, and with the Syrian people inside and outside Syria continuing to suffer deeply, the Special Envoy is taking stock of what has and has not been achieved in the implementation of this mandate. He is consulting widely as he does so, and in the process seeking to identify new or additional ways to move the process forward. He began this stocktaking when he met the now late Syrian Foreign Minister Al-Moallem and in contacts with the opposition Syrian Negotiations Commission. He has met with senior Turkish officials in Ankara, Egyptian Foreign Minister Shokry Selim and League of Arab States Secretary General Aboul Gheit in Cairo, and with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, as well as other senior officials, in Moscow. He met with Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif and other senior officials recently in Tehran and is today in Riyadh,

where he is meeting Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud. During this period, the Special Envoy also engaged by telephone with Jordanian Foreign Minister Safadi and with other senior Arab, American and European officials. He appreciates the counsel and insight of all and seeks their strengthened support for the political process. He will be continuing this engagement in the period ahead with the Syrian parties and international partners. In that process, he will also continue to consult the Women's Advisory Board and seek the views and insights of a wide range of Syrian civil society interlocutors through ongoing consultations with the Civil Society Support Room.

As that wider exploration continues and deepens, we focus in the meantime on facilitating the Constitutional Committee meeting in Geneva next week. We trust that all members of the Committee will approach the two forthcoming sessions in a spirit of compromise and with a determination to engage seriously. They will have our full support in that regard.

Annex 2

Statement by the Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ramesh Rajasingham

I will focus today on five areas: first, the situation of displaced people across Syria as winter approaches; secondly, the humanitarian impact of the economic crisis; thirdly, the protection of civilians; fourthly, humanitarian access; and fifthly, the assistance being provided by humanitarian organizations across Syria.

There are 6.7 million internally displaced people in Syria. Our assessments show that a third of them lack proper shelter. That means they live in damaged or unfinished buildings, in public spaces like schools or in tents that do not provide sufficient protection from the elements. Winter weather is proving to be incredibly hard for those without adequate shelter, not to mention the very basics like fuel for heating, blankets, warm clothes and shoes.

We estimate that more than 3 million people across all of Syria need this type of assistance this winter season. Displaced families are particularly vulnerable, as are communities in elevated areas, such as in parts of rural Damascus.

Already, heavy rains are causing flooding in some areas. Hundreds of tents in displacement sites in Idlib and western Aleppo have been damaged or destroyed by floods over the past month. When sites like this flood, the water ruins or washes away what little belongings people have left; it muddies the ground, preventing water trucks and other assistance from getting through; and it causes sewage systems to overflow.

As the weather gets colder over the coming weeks and with continued fuel shortages, we expect that people will, as they did last year, resort to burning anything they can find to try and keep themselves and their children warm, risking tent fires and poisoning from toxic fumes.

Our colleagues are working hard to supply vulnerable families across Syria with what they need to get through the winter. I want to thank our donors for continuing to support this life-saving effort.

My second point is the economic crisis.

The value of the Syrian pound on the informal market is not as volatile as it was over the summer, but has declined steadily over the past month, as Deputy Special Envoy Matar has also noted. It currently trades at around SYP 2,900 to the United States dollar, compared with around SYP 2,300 in October.

Prices of essentials are at historic levels. The price of subsidized bread, which the poorest and most vulnerable families rely on, doubled last month, while the weight of a bundle was reduced by 15 per cent. The market price of bread increased by 26 per cent between September and October. Diesel went up by 21 per cent; some fresh produce went up by 44 per cent. The price of a national reference food basket increased by 247 per cent since October last year and is now higher than at any point since the World Food Programme started price monitoring in Syria in 2013.

What this means, quite simply, is that people are increasingly unable to feed their families. Today, an estimated 9.3 million people in Syria are food insecure — that is 1.4 million more people than a year ago and more than at any other time during the crisis. About 1 million of them are severely food insecure — twice as many as last year — and we expect this number to increase.

The protection of civilians is my next point.

Deputy Special Envoy Matar has already briefed the Security Council on the concerning rise in violence, including in the north-west. Since the ceasefire agreement in March, some 240,000 displaced people have returned to towns and villages in southern Idlib and western Aleppo. Some of these places are now, again, coming under attack. At least eight civilians were reportedly killed, including children, and at least 15 others were injured as a result of shelling and air strikes in the north-west this month.

Among those killed were two aid workers on their way to a UNICEF-supported child friendly space, where children can play and rest. Over the past two months at least six humanitarian workers have been killed and six others injured in north-western Syria. The risks our humanitarian colleagues are taking every day are simply unacceptable. Humanitarian workers must be able to deliver assistance without fear of attack.

Across the country civilians continue to be exposed to additional serious violations and abuses, including arbitrary detention, abduction and extrajudicial execution. Reports continue of kidnappings and killings in the south.

We are also seeing an alarming increase in the use of improvised explosive devices. Just yesterday, separate bombings in Al-Bab and Afrin killed eight civilians and injured more than 30, according to preliminary reports.

Explosive hazards are having a devastating impact. Our most recent data show an explosive incident recorded roughly every 10 minutes on average. The vast majority of victims — 85 per cent — are boys and men.

An explosive ordnance assessment in parts of eastern and western Ghouta has surveyed some 68 hectares since August and identified 63 per cent of that as contaminated. 272 items of explosive ordnance have been located and marked.

Survey and clearance are the only solution to the problem of landmines and explosive ordnance in Syria, but this work is not sufficiently funded. The United Nations Mine Action Service requires another \$18 million, of which \$5 million is urgently needed to launch clearance operations in eastern and western Ghouta.

Protecting the infrastructure that is indispensable to civilians' survival is equally critical.

In Aleppo's Al-Bab subdistrict an estimated 185,000 people continue to face water shortages as water supply from the Ayn Al-Bayda pumping station remains cut off. Water from local wells is of poor quality and only covers around 15 per cent of water needs in the area.

My next point is humanitarian access.

All United Nations assistance bound for northern Aleppo that previously came through the Bab Al-Salam border crossing point is now being rerouted through Bab Al-Hawa. Road work continues on the main route into northern Aleppo and is scheduled for completion in the coming weeks, before the weather makes such work impossible.

A United Nations cross-border mission into Idlib last month saw first-hand the widespread and acute needs of people in that part of Syria. Cross-border assistance continues to respond to those needs. More than 2,000 trucks of United Nations aid have entered through Bab al-Hawa since July, when resolution 2533 (2020) came into effect.

Efforts continue to bridge gaps in medical assistance in north-eastern Syria. All 17 hospitals and 106 primary health-care facilities in the north-east have been reached with medical supplies on at least one occasion, through one or more delivery modalities. That includes those that previously depended on United Nations cross-border operations. However, it has been inconsistent access. Gaps continue to be reported, and partners continue to explore all available means of addressing them.

But let me be clear: health services are extremely weak across the country and are being stretched to new extremes under the public-health impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Gaps in assistance and shortages of medical supplies and personnel are prevalent everywhere. In Dar'a, in the south, the national hospital had 30 doctors pre-crisis but today has only three, with women giving birth in rooms with other patients owing to the lack of beds.

Turning to Al-Hol, we are monitoring with concern an increase in the number of violent incidents in the camp. Ensuring the safety and security of residents is a priority, and the responsibility for this resides with the local authorities.

Some 64,000 people remain at Al-Hol, more than half of whom are children under the age of 12. Many are unaccompanied; many are suffering high levels of psychological distress. Their situation must be urgently addressed.

Turning to Rukban, an inter-agency mission visited the Wahah transit centre this month as part of ongoing efforts to facilitate departures for those wishing to leave. Meanwhile, the United Nations remains without access to the 12,000 people at Rukban. While efforts continue to support voluntary departures and to find sustainable arrangements for those who remain, humanitarian assistance must be allowed to get through.

My final point is the assistance being provided by humanitarian agencies across Syria. So far this year, this has included the delivery of regular food assistance to 5.4 million people; emergency nutrition assistance to 1.5 million pregnant and lactating women and children under age 5; the delivery of essential non-food items such as blankets, plastic sheets and water containers to almost 3 million people; cash transfers of \$68 million to 1 million people, including 430,000 Palestine refugees; the initiation of COVID-19 PCR testing capacity in nine laboratories in seven governorates; and the establishment of 34 COVID-19 treatment sites with 1,433 in-patient beds for moderate cases and 303 beds for critical cases.

The Syria humanitarian operation collectively reaches an average of 7.4 million people with assistance each month. It is an enormous effort to stave off an even worse situation.

This would be impossible without the extraordinary commitment and endurance of our front-line colleagues, who are overwhelmingly Syrian and are themselves directly affected by the crisis. They are delivering aid under the most difficult of circumstances, at great personal risk. They must be protected.

Annex 3**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Philippe Kridelka, on behalf of the humanitarian co-penholders**

This is probably the last time that Belgium will be making a statement on behalf of Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders. We would like to thank Acting Assistant-Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Rajasingham for his briefing. We also extend our gratitude to all humanitarian and medical workers in Syria. They deserve our respect, assistance and protection.

I will make four points.

First, some claim that the security situation in Syria has stabilized. Indeed, the situation on the ground remains relatively calm compared to the deathly offensives we witnessed in 2019 and early 2020, which were characterized by deliberate attacks on hospitals and schools, and led to the displacement of more than a million civilians. However, serious protection concerns remain. In the north-west alone, 22 civilians, including six children, have been killed as a result of shelling and air strikes since we last met, and those numbers do not include yesterday's attack in Bab and Afrin; during the past two months six humanitarian workers have lost their lives for the same reason.

We therefore reiterate the importance of the effective implementation by all actors of the March ceasefire agreement. We also call for a national ceasefire monitored by the United Nations. As humanitarian co-penholders, we have recalled time and again, throughout our membership in the Council, that counter-terrorism actions have to be in line with international humanitarian law and should not harm civilians or humanitarian workers or compromise the delivery of principled humanitarian aid.

Secondly, 11 million Syrians remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The economic and health crises have added an additional burden to an already dire situation. War, mismanagement and corruption have resulted in an economic and currency crisis without precedent, continuously diminishing the purchasing power of Syrians across the country. Currently 9.3 million people are food-insecure. This food crisis has very tangible consequences for ordinary citizens and even more so for the most vulnerable: children, persons with disabilities, and women and girls.

In addition, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to claim victims across the country. Testing capacity remains low, although since March it has increased in some parts in the country, including in the north-west. Capacity remains woefully inadequate in other parts of the country, however, and health-care workers are paying a heavy price, as they are on the front line in the fight against COVID-19. We know the reason why the Syrian health-care system is in such a precarious state: health facilities were deliberately targeted and destroyed during the years of war, in direct contravention of humanitarian law.

We also listened carefully to what the Under-Secretary-General said about water supply. The parties to the conflict are playing with the lives of innocent civilians. The ongoing problems, in both the north-west and in the north-east, are unacceptable in any given situation and even more so in times of a pandemic, when sanitation is crucial to fighting the transmission of the virus. All parties should consider it a priority to durably restore access to water for all civilians.

Thirdly, I want to draw attention once again to humanitarian access. This is at the core of the humanitarian file. This humanitarian co-penholdership, as the Council knows, has made every effort to maximize humanitarian access for all civilians in need across the country, fully in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Despite our indefatigable efforts, humanitarian access has been severely restricted during the last two years owing solely to political and military considerations, in contravention of humanitarian principles and in defiance of the calls made by the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for more cross-border and cross-line access.

After the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point, many health facilities are suffer shortages of supplies. Although cross-line access to those facilities has improved slightly, significant deficiencies remain. This is indefensible and immoral, and, absent adequate cross-line aid deliveries, the closure of Al-Yarubiyah should be reversed without further ado.

Similarly, during the discussions leading to the closure of the Bab Al-Salam crossing point, the claim was made that the regions it serviced in the north-west would be, from then on, supported through cross-line humanitarian aid via Bab Al-Hawa. The sad reality, here too, is that the closure of Bab Al-Salam has thus far rendered humanitarian operations in the north-west more costly and more risky. It is fair to say that, here too, promises of adequate cross-line assistance to compensate for the forced decrease in cross-border assistance were incorrect, jeopardizing the delivery of sufficient humanitarian aid to all civilians for the cold and dark months ahead.

It is the task of the Council to act as a guarantor of international peace and security. It defies logic how some States members of the Council have chosen to limit humanitarian access in times of tremendous need, rather than guaranteeing it, prioritizing their own narrative over the well-being of Syrian civilians, be they men, women or children.

Fourthly, I would be remiss not to reiterate that only a genuine political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can break the cycle of violence. Only accountability can begin to address the suffering that so many Syrian children, women and men are still subject to on a daily basis. The humanitarian co-penholders fully support the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry; the work of 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 work of the Commission of Inquiry; and justice initiatives at the national and international levels. Refugees will be able to return to live in their country of origin only on a voluntary basis, and they will do so only if they feel they can do it safely, securely and with dignity.

Finally, some deliberately misconstrue Western sanctions as the cause of the medical crisis in Syria and see fit to exploit the COVID-19 crisis to call for the easing of sanctions, in a vain effort to deflect from both the detrimental restrictions on cross-border humanitarian aid and the nefarious and well-documented targeting of health facilities by the Syrian authorities. So for the sake of fact-based debate, allow me to reiterate clearly that European Union (EU) sanctions impede neither humanitarian assistance nor medical supplies. Quite the contrary: the EU is the foremost humanitarian donor to Syria.

Annex 4**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Philippe Kridelka**

I would also like to briefly make some additional points in my national capacity on the political situation in Syria. I should like to start once again by thanking the Special Envoy for his briefing and his lasting engagement.

The situation in various parts of the country, 10 years after the start of the war, remains unstable. Syrian families are still not able to live their lives in dignity, and millions remain as internally displaced persons or refugees abroad.

We call once again for a permanent, verifiable nationwide ceasefire monitored by the United Nations. There can be no military solution to this conflict. The only way to stop the cycle of violence and secure a peaceful future for Syria is an inclusive political transition, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). The Constitutional Committee was launched more than a year ago as a door-opener to a political process but has since then been bogged down in procedural squabbles without making any significant progress. That is simply unacceptable, all the more so in view of the approaching presidential elections in Syria.

In that light, we welcome the fact that the Special Envoy has been able to get the agreement of both parties for the organization of a fourth session of the Committee as soon as possible, as well as a fifth session in early 2021. We must insist that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, take this opportunity to engage constructively. Discussions need urgently to move beyond the topic of first principles and to address constitutional reforms directly. No more procedural dallying is acceptable. No further delays are acceptable. No further obstruction by Damascus is acceptable. The Constitutional Committee must be able to convene at regular meetings that produce substantive outcomes.

This simple demand is not the putting in place of artificial deadlines, as some Member States insist. On the contrary, it is calling out the artificial delays fabricated by the Syrian authorities. As my country has repeatedly underlined, the Committee is Syria-owned, Syria-led and facilitated by the United Nations. If we are to further regard the Committee as a genuine door-opener to the political process, it must deliver on its promises. The Council cannot tolerate Damascus's representatives actively avoiding the real points of contention and instead treating the Committee as a fig leaf. Syria is currently incapable of carrying out elections in a free, fair and transparent manner that would allow for the participation of the Syrian diaspora. Therefore, the Constitutional Committee needs to make progress — quickly.

Finally, beyond the Constitutional Committee, tangible progress must be made on confidence-building measures, specifically the urgent release of political prisoners and missing persons. Access to detainees must be granted in accordance with international regulations. Their legitimate property rights and administrative rights must be restored, in particular those of women, who have borne the brunt of this war. Justice must be done for victims. Belgium fully supports all accountability initiatives, including 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, and supports the referral of the conflict in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Annex 5**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

[Original: Chinese and English]

I thank the Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Ms. Matar, and Acting Assistant-Secretary-General Rajasingham for their briefings. I would also like to mourn the sad passing of Mr. Al-Muallem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria, and to express my sincere condolences to his family. Mr. Al-Muallem was a seasoned statesman in Syria and made a positive contribution to the relations between China and Syria.

The Syrian crisis has lasted almost 10 years. Its early settlement is the shared aspiration of the Syrian people and serves the common interests of the countries in the region as well as the international community at large. In our view, the international community must coordinate its efforts in the political, economic, security and other sectors and take a holistic approach to promoting peace, stability and development in Syria.

First, the political settlement must be adhered to. China remains committed to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. The future of Syria must be determined by its people independently. We call upon all parties in Syria to narrow their differences through dialogue and consultations, advance the substantive work of the Constitutional Committee and hold the next round of talks when conditions permit. The work of the Constitutional Committee must be independent and free of external interference. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be safeguarded. China commends Special Envoy Geir Pedersen on his frequent visits to and good offices in the region recently. We also encourage the Astana process and the relevant countries to play an active role.

Secondly, terrorism in Syria must be eradicated. Terrorists in Idlib have launched numerous attacks recently, kidnapping, detaining and even executing civilians, journalists, health workers and humanitarian workers. Such acts have seriously undermined the overall calm situation in the north-western part of the country and posed a threat to the security and stability in Syria and the Middle East at large, causing concern in the region and the international community. By no means can ceasefire arrangements be interpreted as a laissez-faire attitude towards terrorism. In line with international law and Security Council resolutions, the international community must strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation, adopt a unified standard and vigorously combat terrorism in Syria, with a view to creating a sound security environment for the political process in the country.

Thirdly, the economic and humanitarian situation in Syria must be improved in a comprehensive way. The Syrian Government has been actively developing the economy, creating job opportunities and promoting reconstruction. Such efforts should be recognized. The international community must scale up its assistance to support Syria in its efforts to rebuild key infrastructure, provide basic living conditions and fight against coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Such work will facilitate the return of Syrian refugees. China supports United Nations cross-border and crossline humanitarian relief work. To that end, the role of the Syrian Government must be fully leveraged. Through bilateral and multilateral channels, we have provided Syria with assistance worth \$130 million, and we will continue to do our best to help the Syrian people.

Fourthly, unilateral coercive measures against Syria must be lifted. The COVID-19 pandemic in Syria is worrisome. The country is short of resources to

combat the pandemic. While the total number of confirmed cases is rising sharply, unilateral coercive measures have severely undermined Syria's capacity to mobilize resources to combat the pandemic and help its economy recover. On many occasions, Secretary-General Guterres and Special Envoy Pedersen have called for the unilateral sanctions against Syria to be lifted. China strongly urges the United States and the countries concerned to effectively respond to this appeal and lift their UCMs against Syria and other countries immediately.

This afternoon, China, the Niger, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will jointly hold an Arria Formula meeting on unilateral coercive measures. Council members are welcome to attend.

Annex 6**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We thank Acting Assistant Secretary-General Rajasingham and Deputy Special Envoy Matar for their briefings. We recognize the tremendous efforts they have made to fulfil their respective mandates and to achieve a genuine peace in Syria — a peace that will once and for all enable the country's rebirth as the resilient and vibrant nation that it is.

Today we are filled with hope as the Chairs of the Constitutional Committee have agreed on the agenda for their fourth and fifth working sessions to begin next week and continue in January 2021. We congratulate the Special Envoy and all those involved in this important step and call on the parties to come to these discussions with the greatest possible commitment and constructive spirit. This reminds us once again that the help of everyone is required if a sustainable peace in Syria is to be achieved and if the suffering of the country's stricken population is to be alleviated.

At the outset, we would like to express our concern about the growing violence and insecurity in the north-west of the country. This increase in attacks, which have taken the lives of hundreds of civilians, including children, is unacceptable. Furthermore, the violence and insecurity also present serious challenges to the protection of the civilian population, many of whom are displaced and living in very poor conditions, on the eve of winter. To make matters worse, the country's minimum level of preparedness to deal with the current pandemic is obvious.

We take this opportunity to express our deepest condolences to the families of the thousands of Syrian health workers who have died from the coronavirus; in so many of these cases, the deaths have been the result of a lack of necessary protection. With equal regret, we take this opportunity to address the issue of rampant food insecurity in the country. Owing to the critical economic situation, Syrian families are increasingly unable to have access to the basic food basket. Added to this is the fuel-supply crisis, which we find to be a truly unbearable scenario to which no human being should be subjected.

Once again, we join the calls of many participants at this meeting today — and of humanitarian organizations on the ground — for humanitarian access in Syria to be facilitated in a sustained manner, reaching all Syrians in need, no matter where they are. We call for a review of the current modalities of providing assistance on the basis of neutrality, impartiality and independence and ask whether they are in fact sufficient. The Dominican Republic calls for an urgent solution to the existing gaps in assistance, particularly medical assistance, in the north-east of the country, which Mr. Lowcock previously described.

We reiterate that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria, that only political consultation and dialogue will make it possible to respond to the aspirations of its population, both inside and outside the country. We must continue to make progress towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) as a road map for political transformation and as a precondition for the voluntary and dignified return of the millions of displaced Syrians and refugees spread throughout the world.

Finally, as today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Dominican Republic takes this opportunity to express its total repudiation of acts of violence against the civilian population, including women. We urgently call on the parties in conflict to observe the current ceasefire agreements. There will be no progress amid violence, nor is there a future without peace.

Annex 7

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson

I thank the briefers for their overviews of the political situation and of the many humanitarian challenges Syrians are facing before the upcoming winter.

Looking at the political process, Estonia welcomes the announcement of the holding of the next round of Constitutional Committee talks at the end of this month in Geneva. Estonia calls on the parties to engage actively in these discussions, as this fourth meeting is already long overdue.

We are cautiously optimistic about the overall political process, as there is also a preliminary agreement for the fifth round in January. The Committee's meetings must become regular in order to build trust between the Syrian regime and its legitimate opposition.

I reiterate Estonia's position that resolving the issue of detainees and missing persons is a cornerstone for national reconciliation and for ending the conflict. More than 100,000 people remain detained or missing in Syria, largely at the hands of the Syrian regime. Releasing arbitrarily detained people and identifying those who have lost their lives is at the core of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2474 (2019).

The Russia-Turkey ceasefire agreement from March seems to be holding. This truce gives local populations a break from violence. This break is much needed in the light of the growing numbers of coronavirus disease infections around the country.

Nevertheless, instability prevails in many parts of Syria. Estonia condemns in the strongest terms yesterday's bomb attacks near Al-Bab and Afrin, which wounded more than 40 people. We are also concerned that attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are steadily increasing. ISIL's propaganda continues, targeting vulnerable populations, including those living in overcrowded refugee camps.

In this regard, efforts by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs aimed at providing aid to millions of Syrians every month are crucial. Ahead of winter, preserving humanitarian access must be an imperative for the parties on the ground.

Annex 8**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Ms. Matar and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings.

First of all, I would like to commend the efforts of the Special Envoy, who is working in a particularly difficult context. France has taken note of the announcement that an agreement was reached for an agenda for the next two meetings of the Constitutional Committee. This agreement was long overdue, and we hope that it will be fully respected. Nevertheless, more than a year after the establishment of the Constitutional Committee, it is high time it finally moved forward on constitutional reform. Unfortunately, we note that the regime refuses to participate in the political process in good faith. Clearly, it is seeking to challenge the mandate of the Constitutional Committee, which it itself had endorsed. We therefore call on the United Nations to keep the Security Council informed of any new obstacles and identify those responsible.

The lack of progress on the political front is appalling in the face of the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation. France is concerned by the ongoing hostilities in the north-west of the country, the increasing instability in the south and the entrenchment of Da'esh in the *badiya*. The civilian population continues to pay the price for this. There is an urgent need to respond to the appeal of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy to implement a lasting cessation of hostilities in accordance with resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2254 (2015). We call on all parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, must remain the top priority.

The humanitarian situation continues to worsen. The number of cases of coronavirus disease has more than doubled in a month, and we all know that this figure is much lower than the real number of cases. Food insecurity is worsening day by day. More than 2 million people do not have adequate shelter and are preparing to face another harsh winter in inhumane conditions.

The increase in humanitarian needs makes full access to humanitarian assistance more essential than ever. Shortcomings in the delivery of medical aid in the north-east are particularly alarming. In this context, priority must be given to relaunching a credible political process.

We call on the Special Envoy to move forward on all elements of resolution 2254 (2015), in parallel to the work of the Constitutional Committee. I refer to the release of detainees, the establishment of a safe and neutral environment and the preparation of elections in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) — and under United Nations supervision — in order to give a voice to all Syrians, including those in the diaspora. We welcome the intention of the Special Envoy to review the implementation of this resolution. France is ready to contribute to that process.

We repeat the following every month: unless there is a credible political solution, France and its partners will not deviate from their position on sanctions and reconstruction. This is a pragmatic position: there can be no stabilization in Syria without a political solution to the conflict. Organizing a conference on the return of refugees cannot change the reality: the conditions for the return of refugees and

displaced persons have not been met, which is why France and its European partners have refused to participate.

It is time for all members of the Security Council to understand that no one can emerge victorious from the Syrian crisis through military means. In the face of this impasse, there is an urgent need to resume dialogue and for all parties to show a spirit of compromise. I call in particular on Russia to hear this message and get the Syrian regime, which owes its survival to Russia, moving on it.

Annex 9**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Günter Sautter**

I join others in thanking Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar for her briefing. I thank her and Special Envoy Pedersen for their tireless efforts.

Those efforts have been largely futile, which is not their fault. The Constitutional Committee has not produced any real progress to date. This, we believe, is due to the persistent and systematic obstruction by the Syrian regime. The aim of the regime is clear: it wants to delay and obstruct the Constitutional Committee until the presidential elections in 2021. We must not and will not let them get away with this. The international community will not be fooled. It will not recognize the results of elections, which are not free and fair and which are not conducted pursuant to a new Constitution under the supervision of the United Nations and with the participation of all Syrians, including the diaspora.

We have taken note of the agreement on the dates and the agenda of the fourth and fifth rounds of meetings of the Constitutional Committee. These meetings must at long last discuss substantial issues in order to achieve meaningful progress towards drafting a new Constitution. We call on the Syrian regime to finally engage seriously and constructively in the Constitutional Committee, and we call on Russia to use its influence on Damascus in this regard.

The political process under the auspices of the United Nations in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) is the only sustainable way out of the Syrian catastrophe. Pretending the conflict in Syria is over and that the situation is moving towards peace and normalization is frankly absurd. This is why the recent conference on refugee returns was a cynical propaganda stunt. It is outrageous to claim that alleged intimidation by Western countries, sanctions against the regime or lack of reconstruction assistance would hinder the return of Syrian refugees.

If we look at the facts on the ground, it immediately becomes clear that it is the Syrian regime's war against its own people, abetted by its allies, Iran and Russia, and its system of brutal oppression, together with the serious threat of indiscriminate detention, forced disappearance, torture and physical and sexual violence, that are the main reasons why millions of Syrians have fled their country. They are also the biggest obstacles to a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin in Syria, in line with international law and the Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugees Return to Syria issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Let me reaffirm that there will be no lifting of European Union (EU) sanctions unless the Syrian regime changes its brutal behaviour and ends its grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Let me also make clear that Germany and the EU will only assist in the reconstruction of Syria once a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is firmly under way.

All elements of resolution 2254 (2015) must be fully implemented. In addition to a complete nationwide ceasefire without delay, we need to see the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. We deeply regret that there has been no meaningful action on the fate of detainees and missing persons, which would be so important for building confidence and trust among the Syrian parties. Germany continues to be convinced that the Security Council should express a unified position and request all parties, in particular the Syrian regime,

which holds the vast majority of detainees, to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, starting with the most vulnerable. The Council should also call upon all parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to allow immediate, unconditional and unhindered access for relevant humanitarian organizations to all prisoners and detention facilities. And the Council should urge all parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to inform the families of the fate and whereabouts of the tens of thousands of missing and disappeared persons.

Finally, the Council must live up to its responsibility. It must join the fight against impunity and ensure that those responsible for torture and killing in Syrian prisons and for the crimes and atrocities are held accountable. The evidence for serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Syria has been well documented in various reports, but also in the Caesar photos. Those photos have been introduced as evidence in the trial against two former Syrian intelligence officers before a German court in Koblenz. We must not tolerate impunity for the most serious crimes in Syria. Whoever commits crimes against humanity or war crimes must not feel safe anywhere and will be held accountable. Without this, reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will not be possible.

On the humanitarian situation, I would like to add a few words in my national capacity. Our support for the Syrian people will continue. Winter is coming. Germany will therefore allocate another \$24 million to the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund. In 2019, Germany pledged and allocated more than \$1.6 billion in support of the people in need inside Syria and refugees in host countries in the region. Since 2012, Germany has given more than \$10 billion, and let us not forget that more than 700,000 Syrian refugees live in Germany. Our approach to this is purely humanitarian, because we truly care about the people of Syria and we will continue to do so.

Annex 10**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Muhsin Syihab**

My delegation would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar and Acting Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Rajasingham for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. We once again would like to express our appreciation to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to provide life-saving assistances to the Syrian people, despite challenging circumstances on the ground. Indonesia also commends Special Envoy Pedersen and his team's strong commitment to pursuing peace in Syria. I wish to highlight three points.

First, humanitarian responses must be scaled up urgently, particularly with the increasing cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the onset of winter. On top of the economic crisis and the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Syrian people must also deal with the harsh and challenging winter season. Many people in Syria are already displaced, with millions of families living in inadequate and crowded shelters. We can only imagine the hardships they are facing during winter in displacement. In addition, the winter rainfall has damaged internally displaced persons' sites across north-west Syria, which has worsened the already dire situation.

It is therefore crucial to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need. In this context, my delegation believes that the combination of cross-line and cross-border humanitarian access is important to guarantee that humanitarian assistance reaches people in need throughout Syria through the most direct routes and in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Secondly, we welcome the agreement by both co-Chairs with regard to the next sessions of the Constitutional Committee. We are pleased to hear that the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee is scheduled to be held next Monday in Geneva and to be followed by the fifth session in January 2021.

Indonesia sincerely hopes that all relevant parties will continue to engage in a constructive manner in order to achieve substantive and concrete progress under the auspices of the United Nations and in line with resolution 2254 (2015). That will be a significant step in ensuring a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

It is also essential that all parties to the conflict and those with influence over them reach an inclusive agreement so as to resolve the conflict peacefully, as well as to avoid further suffering of the Syrian people.

Thirdly, it is imperative to protect civilians and cease hostilities. We are particularly concerned about the intensifying hostilities in some areas in Syria. Indonesia urges all relevant parties to cease hostilities and immediately comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. Maintaining calm in Syria and respecting the ceasefire agreement are key. The Syrian people cannot afford any more tensions or conflict in this already very difficult situation. A military solution is not the answer to resolving the conflict in this country.

Let me take this opportunity to express our condolences on the passing away of the former Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moallem.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the importance for the Council to unite around that common humanitarian goal to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and to support the mandate of the Special Envoy to assist the country in achieving a comprehensive political settlement.

Annex 11**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: French]

I thank Ms. Khawla Matar and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings.

At a time when, in other theatres, we are beginning to see very encouraging signs that the crisis is being resolved through dialogue, the situation in Syria remains deadlocked. The increase in hostilities reported in recent weeks in north-west Syria, which has cost the lives of several people, including three children and two humanitarian workers, as reported by UNICEF, remains a source of concern. My delegation condemns this resurgence in violence and calls on the parties to immediately cease hostilities, which is a sine qua non for achieving tangible progress in resolving the crisis in Syria.

The resolution of this crisis, as we will never stop saying, must be achieved on a political and not a military basis, in accordance with a process led by the Syrians themselves and through the various components of Syrian society. That is why it is urgent to put the political process back on the right track, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). As Geir Pedersen mentioned last month,

“A political deal to implement 2254 (2015) is indeed the way to restore Syria’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and meet the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians.” (*S/2020/1049, annex I*)

To that end, I would like to call on the actors in the Syrian conflict to exercise greater restraint and to work to de-escalate the hostilities. We also reiterate the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for an immediate national ceasefire in Syria in order to create the conditions for the political process to succeed and mitigate the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is spreading with alarming virulence throughout the country. However, and as my delegation has repeatedly stressed, these calls, the echoes of which we eagerly await, must not distract us from the fight against terrorism, just as it is crucial to prevent criminal groups from taking advantage of the current health crisis.

With regard to the work of the Constitutional Committee, we are pleased to learn that, should the restrictions related to COVID-19 be lifted, the Special Envoy will hold the fourth round of consultations from 30 November to 4 December 2020, and a fifth round in January 2021. To that end, my delegation calls for flexibility on the part of all stakeholders in order to move forward on the political path towards lasting peace in Syria. The parties to the conflict should also take steps to strengthen mutual trust, including through unilateral mass releases of detainees and by providing information to the families of missing persons, as confidence-building measures as requested by the Special Envoy.

The Niger maintains its view that the political and humanitarian issues of the Syrian crisis cannot be dealt with separately, as the continuation of hostilities has a negative impact on the humanitarian situation, which, in turn, affects the peace process.

Indeed, the contamination rate of COVID-19 in Syria remains a major concern, as weakened health infrastructure, insecurity, living conditions and the lack of access to adequate water and sanitation facilities, particularly in the north, hamper the ability to respond effectively. A large number of vulnerable people, including internally displaced persons and refugees, are at high risk of contracting the virus.

That is a major risk factor for a more acute crisis, as social distancing is virtually impossible in overcrowded camps.

From the detailed briefing just delivered by Mr. Rajasingham, it is clear that the humanitarian assistance provided to the Syrian people does not come close to meeting their needs. The delivery mechanism for this aid must be substantially improved throughout the Syrian territory. Therefore, procedures at the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point and between the contact lines need to be streamlined and simplified to speed up the delivery of humanitarian aid, including much-needed medical supplies and equipment for the Syrian health system to deal with the pandemic. At the same time, we call for the easing or suspension of unilateral economic sanctions that could undermine Syria's ability to deal with the pandemic. Those sanctions are a source of aggravation, not only for Syria but also for its neighbours.

In conclusion, allow me to express my delegation's appreciation to the Special Envoy and his team for their tireless efforts to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders in the process, including the Women's Advisory Board and civil society organizations, in Syria and in the region.

Annex 12**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia**

[Original: Russian]

We thank Ms. Khawla Matar and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings today. We are glad to see Ms. Matar in good health.

We would like to convey, through Ambassador Ja'afari, our heartfelt condolences on the passing away of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, Walid Al-Moallem, to his family, as well as the people and the Government of Syria. We will remember him as a wise and principled diplomat. He effectively tackled the foreign policy challenges that he faced during difficult years for Syria. He also significantly contributed to the development of Syrian-Russian bilateral relations.

We welcome the agreement reached by the Syrian delegations to the Constitutional Committee on the agenda and schedule for the upcoming meetings of the Committee's small group responsible for drafting. We trust that it will continue its work without disturbances this year and next. Unfortunately, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and related restrictions must be taken into consideration, since it is important to protect the health and safety of all Syrian representatives, Mr. Pedersen's team and the Swiss side as host. We hope that the pandemic will not disrupt the Syrians' plans. We will continue to support the mediation efforts of the Special Envoy. The negotiations held in Moscow on the 19 and 20 of November were very useful.

Another important element is maintaining a Syrian-owned process, free of external interference. The work of the Constitutional Committee must not be subject to any deadlines. We believe that the role of the international community is to create a constructive environment for Committee's operation.

The situation in the territories under the control of the Syrian Government remains generally calm. The Syrian army is rebuffing attacks by terrorist sleeper cells. Idlib remains a hotbed of tension and a stronghold for terrorists from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. Despite the suspension of hostilities, they continue their provocations and fire at army positions and villages. Clashes among various groups, mistreatment of civilians in Idlib and executions and attacks on humanitarian workers continue. Efforts to combat terrorism will persist despite the attempts of some Western representatives to protect the militants by calling for a ceasefire with them.

The rebranding of terrorists is unacceptable. Nevertheless, it is public knowledge that some Western States have sponsored large media campaigns supporting an overthrow of the legitimate Syrian Government by force. We all saw those appalling and inhumane videos, the filming of which clearly had received funding from external sponsors.

We are deeply concerned by what is going on in the territories where there is still an illegal United States military presence. Foreign occupation is not only provoking separatist tendencies and disrupting the historic ties among various ethnic and religious groups in Syria, but it is also undermining efforts to restore the territorial integrity of the country. Our Western colleagues offer verbal assurances that they "zealously commit themselves to promoting human rights" only when it is expedient. But in fact, they assiduously turn a blind eye when it comes to human rights in that part of Syria and in Idlib. At the same time, there are reports about militants being released from prisons and relocated to Damascus-controlled areas,

and about planned trials, among others, of foreign citizens, but it is not clear what courts. The oppression of the Arab population is silenced and the plundering of oil fields and the polluting of the environment continue in Syria, but the United Nations, unfortunately, says nothing about that.

Russia consistently advocates preserving Syria's unity and respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call for the rejection of plans to divide the country and draw out the armed conflict there. That pertains to both eastern and western Syria, as well as the occupied Syrian Golan, the visit to which by senior United States officials we consider an act of provocation.

We note that the delivery of United Nations humanitarian assistance is sustainable through the cross-border mechanism in north-western Syria. We are convinced that humanitarian workers have enough capacity to prepare for the winter.

We cannot fail to mention an issue that we are already tired of, namely, humanitarian cross-line convoy to the towns of Atarib and Darat Izzah, in north-western Syria. Since April, we have been hearing about a lack of agreement with all stakeholders regarding the organization of this convoy from within Syria. Surprisingly, our colleagues say nothing about the parties' unwillingness to reach an agreement or their violations of humanitarian principles, even though such criticism is constantly heaped upon Damascus, which is actually increasing the number of authorizations for humanitarian convoys to different regions of the country.

We already heard today — and will most likely hear more — about the utterly humane principles of the sanctions that the European Union (EU), the United States and other countries have imposed on the Syrian people. We recently familiarized ourselves with the latest version of the guidance note entitled “Commission guidance note on the provision of humanitarian aid to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in certain environments subject to EU restrictive measures”. This time the guidance addressed Venezuela, Nicaragua and Iran, while the previous issuance had been dedicated to Syria. If one reads this document carefully, they will soon understand that all this humanity is not worth a dime — the guide stipulates such conditions for interaction with Syria that will scare away any prospective humanitarian actor.

Despite external pressure and ongoing tightening — even amid the coronavirus pandemic — of illegitimate unilateral sanctions that target ordinary Syrians, the Syrian Government still makes efforts to reach a post-conflict settlement. Among its pivotal tasks is the restoration of housing and infrastructure for Syrian refugees who voluntarily return to their homes on a daily basis, no matter how our Western colleagues may dislike it.

On 11 and 12 November, Damascus hosted an international conference to facilitate the return of refugees, which brought together representatives of more than 20 States and international organizations. Russia rendered assistance to the Syrian side in convening this event and took an active part in it. Unfortunately, the United Nations was represented only as an observer, which cut its ability to engage in the conference meaningfully. We hope the United Nations will participate in this purely humanitarian process more actively, without reference to political goals of some Member States.

These goals of Western colleagues — in the first place of the United States, which boycotted the conference and called on others to do the same — are very self-explanatory. They once again demonstrated the double standards applied to Syria and its people, or rather, those Syrians perceived by the West as the “bad” ones, who basically just want to live on in their country without overthrowing the Government. Thus, concrete efforts have been taken to undermine the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) — the resolution they relentlessly call for upholding and that directly

states that refugees need to return to Syria. I am afraid I will have to disappoint our colleagues: the conference confirmed the need for substantive work on this track and gave start to this systemic and targeted process.

Russia has set forth its efforts aimed at repatriating the children of our citizens from Syria. On 13 November, another group of 27 Russian children returned home. In total, 133 Russian minors have been repatriated from Syria since 2017. Taking into account plans of the administration of north-east Syria to disband the Al-Hol camp, we draw the attention of our colleagues to the growing need for them to repatriate their citizens. At the same time, we should pay closest attention to the dire humanitarian situation in this camp. Also, we remind of the responsibility of the United States, as an occupying Power, for everything happening in the Rukban camp.

We welcome the decision to hold a joint meeting on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria, as it optimizes the work of the Security Council and provides an opportunity to address the situation in the country in a comprehensive manner. We hope this practice will continue.

Annex 13**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Halimah DeShong**

I thank Mr. Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Matar, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for their briefings.

A complex and inextricably linked relationship exists between Syria's humanitarian and political situations. Lack of progress on the political track gives rise to further deterioration of the already dire humanitarian situation. This deterioration subsequently impedes efforts at attaining a political resolution to the protracted conflict. As such, it is necessary to have a holistic and pragmatic approach.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms its support for the efforts of the Special Envoy and the work of the Constitutional Committee. We welcome the announcement of a fourth session of the small body of the Committee at the end of November, and we encourage all members to participate in good faith for the benefit of all Syrians. The work of the Committee remains a critical step in the wider political process.

Addressing the outstanding issues of detainees and missing persons is also essential to the advancement of the wider process and will undoubtedly contribute to confidence building and reconciliation within Syria. We urge renewed and purposeful action in this regard.

We take note of the "International Conference on Return of Syrian Refugees", which took place earlier this month in Damascus. We welcome and encourage constructive engagement and cooperation by key stakeholders and the wider international community, in an effort to make meaningful progress on this critical issue. The creation of conditions necessary for the safe, voluntary, dignified and well-informed return of refugees and internally displaced persons includes the reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. We yet again appeal to the international community to contribute to this effort.

We are extremely concerned by the reports of sporadic violence in the north-west, in violation of the March ceasefire agreement. All parties must exercise maximum restraint and adhere to the agreement to ensure the protection of civilians, civilian infrastructure and the sustained provision of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, counter-terrorism and other military activities must comply with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and we remind all parties, as has been said many times over, that there is no military solution to the conflict.

Syria's socioeconomic deterioration persists and is made worse by the global pandemic. Food insecurity is a constant threat, and basic necessities remain out of reach. We are especially concerned for the millions of Syrians residing in various camps and other informal settlements that lack the means to implement the necessary protective measures against the coronavirus disease pandemic. We echo the call for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria, to assist the country in meeting its pressing humanitarian needs, especially as winter approaches, and to allow it to successfully respond and emerge from the pandemic.

We reiterate our steadfast support for the cross-border mechanism, which continues to be a lifeline for millions of Syrians. It is therefore imperative that cross-border and cross-line assistance be scaled up to meet the vast humanitarian needs, in line with humanitarian principles.

The only path out of the Syrian conflict is through a political process that puts the Syrian people at the forefront and demonstrates respect for the country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, through the withdrawal of all unauthorized foreign forces and the consideration of the perspectives of all Syrians.

After enduring the effects of a decade of war, the Syrian people deserve peace and stability. The international community must lend all the necessary support towards the achievement of this goal.

Before concluding, we wish to express our condolences to the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing away of His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem. We also congratulate His Excellency Mr. Bashar Ja'afari on his appointment as Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Annex 14**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matjila**

I thank Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar and Acting Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. South Africa would also like to welcome our colleagues the Permanent Representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to today's meeting.

I will be addressing three elements in my statement today, namely, the political, security and humanitarian in Syria.

First, on the political situation, South Africa welcomes the recent package of agreements agreed to by the Co-Chairs of the Constitutional Committee on the agenda and dates for upcoming meetings. The progress made in agreeing on an agenda of national principles during the fourth round of talks, starting on 30 November, and on constitutional issues in the fifth round of negotiations is commended. We hope that this spirit of cooperation continues during these important discussions. South Africa calls on the parties to build on this momentum and engage in a constructive manner to further the political process. Real and tangible progress in the Constitutional Committee, as well as with regard to a cessation in hostilities, requires the withdrawal of all external interference, including in terms of support provided to armed groups. The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria must be respected.

The second element that I would like to address is the security situation in Syria. Let me start by expressing my deep concern at the continuing violence, which has seen an increase in ceasefire violations and hostilities in the north-west of Syria. This has led to the death and injury of a number of civilians, including humanitarian workers. Reports of the deaths of eight civilians, including two aid workers, on 4 November in southern Idlib due to a number of airstrikes are truly alarming. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the dedication and strength of all humanitarian workers, who continue to deliver essential services in the face of these challenges.

The use of improvised explosive devices, landmines and unexploded ordinance, in addition to the increasing reports of airstrikes and shelling, all contribute to the growing number of civilian deaths and injuries. When will enough be enough?

South Africa urges the parties to fully adhere to the Idlib ceasefire agreement and to refrain from any actions that may escalate tensions even further. In this regard, South Africa fully supports Special Envoy Pedersen's call for a complete and immediate ceasefire nationwide, in line with the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in the face of the ongoing global pandemic. In this regard, we appreciate the cooperation between Russia and Turkey in ensuring relative calm in the north-east.

The third, and last element, that I would like address is the humanitarian situation in Syria. The severe economic difficulties, compounded by the continuing hostilities, the increasing spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the onset of harsh winter conditions, have created a unique set of circumstances that have contributed to the humanitarian situation in Syria. It is of great concern that the number of positive COVID-19 cases have more than doubled in the last month.

South Africa reiterates its position that all those who require humanitarian assistance should be provided with it, no matter who or where they are. And, as we have heard here today and in previous briefings, millions of Syrians are in need.

In this regard, the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and support, in line with international humanitarian law, is more important than ever. That includes using all available methods of aid delivery, including cross-border and cross-line assistance. We call on the Government of Syria to continue to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations and its partners towards the improvement and enhancement of cross-line humanitarian deliveries, particularly in areas where cross-border assistance is limited. Without this crucial assistance, the Syrian people will continue to face growing food insecurity and the long-term effects of malnutrition, particularly with the harsh conditions of winter setting in.

South Africa once again requests the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to include in their reports to the Council the effects and impact of both direct and indirect unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Many Council members have previously stated that it is Syrian civilians who are bearing the heaviest impact of the humanitarian situation. Surely, this should not be worsened by the additional weight of unilateral economic measures.

An important aspect in making progress on the political process is the need for confidence-building measures, including the release of civilians, particularly women, children, the elderly and those with disabilities, from detention. These steps can assist in building trust and encourage the compromises that are necessary in any negotiation process.

As we have said many times before, the situation in Syria can be resolved only through dialogue and negotiations and the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the combined briefings on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. Discussing these two important aspects of the Syrian conflict together provides a comprehensive view of the situation on the ground in Syria and offers Council members an opportunity to be briefed on and discuss holistic options to make progress towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous Syria.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Tarek Ladeb**

[Original: Arabic]

I thank Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Khawla Matar, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for their briefings.

Since the Council held its meeting last month (see S/2020/1049), there has been no clear indication that a breakthrough has been made in the political process aimed at ending the Syrian crisis or that the humanitarian situation of Syrians has improved, as we have just heard in the briefings of Mr. Rajasingham and Mr. Pedersen.

In that regard, Tunisia reiterates its position that there is no sustainable alternative to a political solution to address the deep roots of the crisis and end the human suffering of Syrians on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015), in order to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, end foreign interventions, expel terrorist groups and restore peace and stability to Syria and the region.

We remain hopeful that the Syrian parties will put the interests of the Syrian people first and demonstrate flexibility, seek common ground and engage constructively without preconditions, with a view to reaching an agreement as soon as possible regarding the agenda and date of the fourth meeting of the Constitutional Committee, and ensuring that its talks continue.

We also stress that it is important for the Committee's work to be accompanied by confidence-building measures in order to consolidate the expanded political process, leading to the organization of free and fair elections under United Nations auspices, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), that meet the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians.

The living conditions of Syrian are a major concern, in view of the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the inability of the Syrian health-care system to address it, the deterioration of food and water security as a result of the fragile economic and security situation, and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will be necessary to address vulnerability, fragility and the drivers of instability in order to bridge existing gaps and avoid even worse humanitarian crisis scenarios. In that connection, we would like to emphasize the need to prioritize the following:

First, ensuring a sustainable ceasefire throughout Syria is an urgent priority. Although we have seen the overall security situation in Syria improve in recent months, the prevailing calm continues to be punctuated by tensions and violence. Therefore, there is an ongoing risk that conflict and large-scale clashes might resume and undermine the understandings reached to date.

We once again call on all parties to exercise restraint, comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and de-escalate, and to ensure that civilians, civilian facilities and medical and humanitarian workers are protected.

We also stress that it is necessary to combat terrorism collectively and in a coordinated manner, in accordance with international law, in order to defeat the terrorist organizations on the Security Council lists. Those organizations continue to

pose a serious threat to Syria and the broader region, despite the successes achieved in targeting their leaders.

Secondly, there is a need to strengthen humanitarian access. We express our support for the efforts of Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, at the helm of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in coordinating humanitarian relief in Syria. We reaffirm the importance of providing basic assistance and expanding its scope, raising the level of preparedness and stepping up preventive efforts as winter approaches, in order to meet the growing humanitarian and medical needs and respond effectively to the pandemic, using the various means available, including across conflict lines and across borders.

We reiterate that it is necessary for all parties to cooperate in order to facilitate secure, sustainable and unobstructed humanitarian access, in line with international humanitarian law and international law. We call on all parties to facilitate the efforts of humanitarian relief organizations, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to gain cross-line access, while taking into account the sovereignty of Syria and ultimately ensuring that the country's unity and sovereignty over all its territory is restored.

Thirdly, improving such aspects of Syrians' lives as access to food, health care and education in a more sustainable manner. The way to do so is to bolster early recovery efforts and foster resilience in Syrians by maintaining the infrastructure of basic services and providing decent livelihoods for the most affected and vulnerable groups.

The work done by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in Syria in relation to the maintenance of hospitals, schools, roads, water, electricity and sanitation is critical. It makes the response to the humanitarian crisis more effective and comprehensive, safeguards the best interests of vulnerable groups and ensures that future generations are protected.

Annex 16**Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, James Roscoe**

I thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Rajasingham for their briefings and for their continued tireless efforts to resolve the conflict and help Syrians in need.

Unfortunately, as we have heard today, both the process for achieving peace and the situation across the country remain in a precarious state. We welcome the news of the formal plans for the fourth and fifth rounds of the Constitutional Committee talks. However, it is now well over a year since the Security Council expressed its determination that this should be the beginning of a political process to end the conflict, and we remain concerned at the lack of substantive progress made by the Committee. While talks to resolve an almost 10-year conflict will be difficult and potentially lengthy, there is no excuse for the regime's obstructionism, which has artificially prevented the talks from discussing matters of substance.

Resolution 2254 (2015) was explicit on the order of steps towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition to end the conflict, designed to allow the Syrian people to decide the future of their country. Only once agreement has been reached on a new constitution can free and fair elections, as part of the political process envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), take place. Elections that do not meet those requirements, that are not held pursuant to the new constitution and that are not administered under the supervision of the United Nations to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate, would serve only to delegitimize and subvert the political process agreed by the Council and the wider international community. Surely a Syrian Government, confident of its prospects in a free and fair election, would not want elections to happen on such terms.

The United Kingdom also calls for substantial progress to be made on the other facets of resolution 2254 (2015). Confidence-building measures are sorely needed in order to contribute to the viability of the political process. And progress on the release of those persons arbitrarily detained should be moving swiftly, but instead it remains stuck.

We once again highlight the continuing shocking human rights violations in Syria, including the treatment of prisoners by all parties outlined in the Commission of Inquiry's September report (A/HRC/45/31). Particularly harrowing are accounts of detainees being beaten with sticks and cables and bound around tyres by the regime.

The humanitarian situation across the country remains dire and is worsening, as we have heard today. Three million, one hundred thousand people require additional support to get through a harsh winter, and inclement weather is already having an impact. Only a few weeks ago, 10 internally displaced persons sites in north-western Syria suffered flooding, which destroyed 345 tents, impacting 1,733 individuals. As we heard today, when that happens, everything — people's possessions and people's lives — washes away.

Nine million, three hundred thousand people are food insecure, with a further 2.2 million at risk. As Ramesh Rajasingham said, that is 1.4 million more people than a year ago and more than at any point during the crisis. Reports of three-hour queues for bread are deeply concerning. The consumption of bread exceeds production by approximately 1 million metric tons. There are some 25,000 confirmed cases of the

coronavirus disease (COVID-19) across the country. That number has doubled since the Council last met on this agenda item in October (see S/2020/1049). Given that 92 per cent of cases are not traceable to a known case, the actual number of cases is undoubtedly much higher.

To address all these acute needs, it is essential that the United Nations and other humanitarian actors be given unimpeded access. The granting of access permissions in a timely manner is essential, and we reiterate the importance of a holistic humanitarian response.

Cross-border access, which was unnecessarily cut by other members of the Security Council earlier this year, remains of prime importance to Syrians faced with another harsh winter. We need to see the issue of refugee returns in the context of these continuing dire conditions — a food crisis, a COVID-19 crisis, an access crisis for humanitarians and the complete disregard of the regime for the rights of detainees. While the need to build the conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons remains, it is clear that these conditions are not even close to being achieved.

All that illustrates what a sham the recent Russian-hosted refugee conference in Damascus was — motivated by a desire to promote the normalization of the Syrian regime over the interests of Syrian refugees and Syrian people.

The issue of refugee returns is of the highest priority, but it must be discussed in a neutral location under the auspices of the United Nations. As resolution 2254 (2015) makes clear, the process needs to take into account the interests of those countries hosting refugees, as well as the views and interests of the refugees and internally displaced persons themselves.

Indeed, if the regime and Russia were genuinely serious about facilitating returns, they would make genuine efforts to address the conditions in Syria of their making that make such returns unrealistic at present. In parallel, if they were serious about resolving the crisis that causes those conditions, they would have engaged in the discussions in Geneva over the past year in a more constructive and meaningful way.

Annex 17**Statement by the Acting Political Coordinator of the United States of America to the United Nations, Trina Saha**

I thank the Deputy Special Envoy and the Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

The Al-Assad regime and its allies, including permanent members of the Security Council, would greatly prefer that the world ignore their briefings, pretend that resolution 2254 (2015) is obsolete and believe somehow that the political and humanitarian conditions in Syria are stabilizing and that the conflict is over. Sadly, the realities cannot be obscured and must not be ignored.

Lasting peace will come about only when the Al-Assad regime and its backers, including Russia, China and Iran, accept a United Nations-brokered political settlement to the conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015) — when the Al-Assad regime shelling and Russian warplanes no longer destroy Syrian communities, families and futures; when Iranian support for terrorist forces in Syria ceases; and when Chinese and Russian obstruction on the Security Council finally comes to an end and humanitarian assistance can reach every last one of the 11 million Syrian women, children and men in need.

The preposterous refugee conference hosted earlier this month in Damascus is a prime example of how Russia and the Al-Assad regime continue their attempts to perpetuate a false narrative about the situation in Syria. Russia and the regime have repeatedly and spectacularly failed to convince the international community, including those countries generous enough to take in high numbers of Syrian refugees, that Syria is ready for large refugee returns and that the regime genuinely wants them to return.

Rather than end their depraved military campaign, enact political reforms and further a political process to create an environment conducive to voluntary, safe, dignified and informed returns, Russia and the regime are using refugees as a public relations tool. To add insult to injury, Russia has the audacity to ask the international community to provide the Al-Assad regime with reconstruction funding after the brutal leader plunged the country into a civil war and continues to kill his own people.

The United States does not oppose the idea, in principle, of a conference centred on Syrian refugees to take stock of the actions needed to ensure that Syria's 6.6 million refugees can return safely, for those who choose to do so. However, a legitimate conference on refugee returns can be successful only if it is coordinated with the United Nations, the United States and other relevant countries, hosted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and held in a neutral location, not Damascus.

Such a conference certainly would affirm that Syrians should not be pressed to return to their country until it is safe to do so, and that those living outside Syria should be able to participate in free and fair elections. As long as the Al-Assad regime effectively ignores or undermines every aspect of resolution 2254 (2015), Syrians will not be able to return safely.

The United States welcomes the Special Envoy's plans for the fourth round of the Constitutional Committee talks later this month. That latest round is long overdue, and we urge the Committee members, in particular the regime and Syrian opposition co-Chairs, to make immediate and substantive progress. Furthermore, we encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to take any measures that he thinks appropriate to facilitate the parties' efforts, consistent with United Nations parameters

and principles, and identify to the Council any participants who continue to obstruct progress.

Beyond the work of the Constitutional Committee, we ask the United Nations to facilitate, and the parties to undertake, confidence-building measures. These measures should include the unilateral release of arbitrarily held detainees, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015), and the provision of information on the whereabouts of more than 100,000 Syrians who remain missing, including women and children.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, it is abhorrent that humanitarian workers continue to face threats as they endeavour to deliver life-saving aid to the Syrian people. We offer our condolences to the families of the two aid workers killed in north-western Syria earlier this month as they were on their way to work in a child-friendly space run by UNICEF. United Nations humanitarian operations, including cross-border operations, remain essential for the more than 11 million Syrians. The loss of three cross-border operation access points in the past 10 months has only worsened the suffering and the vulnerability of the Syrian people, and there are increasing reports of shortages at hospitals and medical facilities and delays in food delivery.

We call the Security Council's attention to the draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Syria that was adopted overwhelmingly in the Third Committee last week (A/C.3/75/L.33). The draft resolution, which was co-sponsored by the United States, highlights the regime's egregious denial of humanitarian aid and urges the Council to reauthorize the opening of previous crossing points or open new ones to ensure that aid gets into Syria through the most direct routes.

We are closely monitoring the recent spike in violence in Syria's north-west. The Al-Assad regime, Russia and Iran must ensure that the nationwide ceasefire for which the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy have called throughout this year is implemented, and no military offensive should resume anywhere in Syria.

Winter is approaching, and we urge all Council members and States Members of the United Nations to support efforts to quickly scale up assistance efforts to meet the growing needs of the 4.2 million Syrians in Idlib. Last year, the world was rightly horrified by reports of children freezing to death. We must not allow that to happen again. In addition to such needs, the Syrian people also face another long winter, compounded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We are increasingly alarmed by reports of hospital intensive-treatment-unit beds for COVID-19 patients already filled to capacity in north-western Syria, straining the region's already fragile health system. According to the official numbers, cases have risen by 250 per cent since September. Sadly, we know that the official numbers are only the tip of the iceberg of Syria's COVID-19 crisis. The actual rates of infection are much higher than those reported. Yet the limited ability to test and trace makes it impossible to know the full extent of the spread of the virus. The Syrian people face the same risk from COVID-19 as all the rest of us. Yet the shortages of medical supplies and the lack of testing raise concerns that the virus can spread unchecked and inflict damage on already vulnerable populations.

Every month the Security Council meets on the crisis in Syria, and every month the briefings reveal worsening human suffering. The United States once again calls on the Al-Assad regime's supporters and abettors to alter the course and join us in pushing for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That is the only path that will lead to peace and security in Syria and a more hopeful future for the Syrian people.

Annex 18**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

At the outset, I would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar and Acting Assistant Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham for their informative briefings on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. I would like to welcome the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran to the meeting today.

First and foremost, on the political front, my delegation welcomes the agreement of the parties concerned on the agendas and timeline for the upcoming meetings within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We encourage the members of the Committee to actively engage in constructive dialogue. Like other delegations, we look forward to productive sessions to come in order to facilitate the broader political process in Syria.

The only way to achieve sustained peace and stability is through a political process that is led and owned by the Syrians themselves, facilitated by the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and fully adheres to international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and non-interference in its internal affairs.

Viet Nam commends the efforts of the Special Envoy's team in bringing the parties together. We also welcome the current series of meetings between the Special Envoy and international and regional interlocutors to discuss the advancement of a political solution in Syria. We continue to fully support the facilitating role of the United Nations, as well as all viable diplomatic engagements in that regard.

While searching for a viable political solution, it is regrettable that the security and humanitarian situations on the ground remain a source of great concern, causing millions of Syrians to suffer.

We are troubled by the fact that instability continues to give rise to protection concerns in certain parts of Syria, including in the north-west, even though the ceasefire agreement is generally holding. It is very worrisome to see the recent resurgence of terrorist activities in various parts of Syria. My delegation condemns the targeted attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian objects. We urge all parties to exercise restraint, refrain from escalatory actions and continue counter-terrorism efforts in line with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

As reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the markedly worsening developments related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the impacts of the socioeconomic downturn make the humanitarian situation in Syria extremely precarious. We note that according to OCHA, the area that has the most COVID-19 cases also has the highest infection rate among health workers. Conditions will become more and more critical in the months to come without adequate winterization.

We urge all parties in Syria to create the most favourable conditions possible so as to ensure timely, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access and to facilitate effective humanitarian operations in all parts of Syria. We reiterate our call on the international community to continue its support during this difficult time, with a particular focus on tackling COVID-19 and its impacts by providing adequate assistance in terms of equipment, capacity and the safety of health-care workers.

Food security and winterization support are an immediate necessity. More than 2 million people do not have adequate shelter, and millions of vulnerable people

are living in camps for internally displaced persons. The food insecurity affecting more than half of the population as well as the increasing shortages of fuel and other basic goods are far from having been resolved.

In the light of the impacts of COVID-19, it is vital to ensure that sanctions do not undermine the Syrian people's capacity to respond to the pandemic.

To conclude, we would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the humanitarian and health-care workers on the ground, who are risking their lives to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches the people in need of it.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

After almost 10 years of conflict, the Syrian people continue to suffer from aggression, foreign occupation and terrorism. Through unlawful occupation, inhumane sanctions and the politicization of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and by preventing international support for Syria's reconstruction, certain countries are responsible for the prolongation of the conflict as they attempt to impose their own will on the Syrian people. Such attempts are unlawful and immoral and doomed to fail.

The Syrian crisis can be settled only through political means, and the right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to the Syrians. The international community should assist them in realizing that right. This means that the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all. Any separatist agendas as well as illegitimate self-rule initiatives must be rejected, and all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian Government must leave Syria.

In that context, the full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the United States forces from Syria is essential. Instead of combating terrorism, they continue to support United Nations-designated terrorist groups such as the Al-Nusra Front — Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham — as well as to loot the oil and wealth of the Syrian people.

The combat against terrorists in Syria must be continued until the total elimination of the threat that they pose. Obviously, this must be done with the utmost care for the lives of civilians. Terrorists must not be allowed to continue taking a large number of civilians as hostages or to turn places such as Idlib into a safe haven for themselves.

We strongly condemn Israel's continued acts of aggression against Syria's sovereignty. The occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel is unlawful, and the recognition of its annexation to Israel by the United States is null and void. The recent provocative visit to the Syrian Golan by the United States Secretary of State was designed to legitimize the annexation. The Golan is and will remain part and parcel of Syrian territory.

Underlining the importance of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and United Nations-facilitated political process, we continue to support the efforts of the United Nations and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pedersen for a political settlement of the Syrian crisis. Iran will spare no effort to that end.

In that context, useful consultations, including on the work of the Constitutional Committee, took place during the recent visit of Mr. Pedersen to Tehran, where he met with our Minister for Foreign Affairs and other high-ranking officials.

We support the Constitutional Committee, which must operate without any external interference or pressure or the setting of any artificial deadline for the conclusion of its work, and are hopeful that the true interests of the Syrian people will prevail over all other interests.

Parallel to the political process, international efforts must continue to facilitate Syria's reconstruction and the safe and voluntary return of refugees and IDPs to their original places of residence in Syria.

As an important effort in that regard, we welcome the international conference on the return of Syrian refugees held on 11 and 12 November in Damascus, which, unfortunately, was boycotted by some countries that politicize almost every issue

related to ending the conflict, the return of refugees and Syria's reconstruction. The interests of millions of Syrian refugees must not be held hostage for political gain by certain Powers.

As the Syrian people are facing the challenges of conflict and the coronavirus disease pandemic, failing to assist the return of refugees will only increase and prolong their suffering, which has already been intensified owing to the imposition of inhumane unilateral sanctions by the United States. The international community should not leave the Syrian people alone in their struggle to overcome the threats of terrorism and foreign occupation as well as that of economic terrorism resulting from those unlawful sanctions.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari**

[Original: English and Arabic]

My delegation reiterates its thanks and appreciation, Madam President, for your successful stewardship of the Security Council's work this month. I thank the Secretariat and the Permanent Representatives and members of the delegations that expressed their condolences on the passing away of Mr. Walid Al-Moallem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. I also thank the dear colleagues who extended their warm congratulations on my appointment as Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

Since the most recent meeting on the political and humanitarian situation in my country, held on 27 October (see S/2020/1049), we have witnessed a number of important positive developments. Simultaneously, we have also witnessed, from the United States Administration in particular and from other hostile Governments in general, more violations of international law, of the purpose and principles of the United Nations and of the relevant resolutions of the Council. This is what I will clarify in my statement today.

The international conference on the return of Syrian displaced persons and refugees, held in Damascus on 11 and 12 November, represented a very significant step in the framework of the efforts of the Syrian State and its allies to ensure the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees to their areas of origin and places of residence. It was also a step towards providing a suitable environment for that through cooperation with friendly countries and humanitarian partners to reconstruct what terrorism has destroyed and rehabilitate residential neighbourhoods and public facilities, primarily schools, health-care facilities, power plants and the economic, social, cultural and service infrastructure. These have been among the concerns expressed in this Chamber over the years, with demands made that they be addressed.

The closing statement of the aforementioned conference expressed the participants' firm adherence to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. That statement stressed the rejection of the coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people and demanded an end to the foreign occupation and its crimes, including the plundering of Syria's wealth and resources, as well as the continued combating of terrorism and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams (ISIS) and Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorist organizations and affiliated individuals and entities. All these matters are consistent with the positions of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly related to these core issues.

The participants also affirmed their adherence to a political solution under Syrian leadership and ownership, with the facilitation of the United Nations. They stressed the need for the Constitutional Committee to carry out its work in a consensual and constructive manner, without external interference or attempts to impose artificial timelines, in order to enable the Committee to achieve maximum support on the part of the Syrian people for the outcome of its work. They called on the international community to provide appropriate support to create an environment conducive to the return of displaced persons and their return to normal life. That is consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) and the mandate of the Special Envoy.

In that context, my delegation would like to thank the Russian Federation and the Governments of the countries that genuinely participated in this conference,

whether by attending personally or via video. Furthermore, we would like to thank those Governments that boycotted the conference because, once again, they proved by their own actions the falsehood of what they claim regarding human concern and a constructive role at the international level. Those Governments also proved their desire to prolong the crisis and continue geopolitical machinations at the expense of the security and stability of my country and the well-being of its people.

In that context also, my delegation regrets that the United Nations, the main humanitarian partner of the Syrian Government, yielded to the instructions of former employee of the United States State Department James Jeffrey and breached its mandate and the requirements of its cooperation with the Government of my country. Unfortunately, the United Nations system ended up simply assigning its Resident Coordinator in Syria to attend as an observer instead of engaging in dialogue and discussions as an active partner, supporting efforts aimed at improving the humanitarian situation and the dignified, safe and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees in accordance with international law.

It is regrettable that, at a time when the United Nations was forced not to send its representatives to participate in the international conference on the return of Syrian displaced persons and refugees, a United Nations delegation, including Mark Cutts, who is known as the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, sneaked across our border with Turkey into Idlib governorate in north-west Syria without the consent of the Syrian Government. Cutts was accompanied by a number of so-called security men affiliated with the Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams/Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorist organization, which is on the Security Council's list as the Syrian arm of Al-Qaida. Is this the practical application of the role of the United Nations as an effective partner of the Syrian Government in the humanitarian field?

This condemnable behaviour represents a violation of my country's sovereignty and of the existing cooperation between the Syrian Government and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; support for terrorism; and a violation of the Council's resolutions related to combating terrorism and the principles of humanitarian action set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182. We look forward to the Secretary-General and his Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs taking the necessary measures to ensure an apology and hold the perpetrators accountable for that violation.

My country condemns in the strongest terms the visit of United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to the Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan and the West Bank on 19 November. That visit represents an expression of the current United States Administration's keenness to affirm, until the very last moments of its tenure, its bias towards and absolute loyalty to Israel at the expense of the principles of international law, the provisions of the Charter, the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981), and the security and stability of our region. That visit also represents an encouragement for the Israeli occupying authorities to continue with their aggressions, the latest of which were the acts of aggression launched against my country on 18 November and last night. We assure the Council and Pompeo that his visit will not change the legal, political or geographical status of the Golan as an occupied territory and an integral part of Syria, and we will exert all efforts — using all means provided by international law — to restore it.

On another note, the American occupation and its tools of separatist militias continue their practices aimed at plundering the resources of the Syrian State. In conjunction with their overt theft of Syrian oil and gas, which we have shared with the Council in many of our official statements and letters, the United States occupation

forces recently excavated antiquities in Hasakah governorate, in north-east Syria, unearthing them in the presence of French and Israeli archaeologists.

The American occupation forces also excavated an archaeological site in the Al-Malikiyah, Qamishli governorate, countryside, where they found 12 graves and historical monuments dating back to the Roman era. Those looted Syrian antiquities, which are priceless and date back thousands of years, are being smuggled through Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey in preparation for their transfer to other destinations. The crimes described are an extension of the crimes that ISIS has consistently committed to provide financial resources for its terrorist activities and to enhance the geographical scope of its alleged caliphate. The principal has replaced the agent, in a clear exchange of roles.

Not only that, but the American occupation forces continued their efforts to grant a kind of legitimacy to terrorist organizations, their agent militias and the artificial entities associated with them. Recently an American delegation from the so-called Commission on International Religious Freedom illegally infiltrated the countryside in the Syrian governorate of Deir ez-Zor and the Al-Tabqa area, in Raqqa governorate. The delegation held meetings with representatives of those militias and their affiliated entities. Moreover, the American company Creative Associates International also concluded agreements with the so-called Civil Council in Deir ez-Zor. Is this how the host country of the United Nations defends the provisions of the Charter and the principles of international law?

As the Council is aware, the Turkish regime and its terrorist organizations and mercenaries systematically use drinking water as a weapon against civilians by cutting off the water supply from the Allouk water station for about 1 million Syrians in the city of Hasakah and the vicinity. To add insult to injury, the Turkish regime and its tools stole water pumps belonging to the wells of Asfar Najjar and Ayn Al-Kebrit, and Majra Al-Khabur, located in the city of Ras Al-Ayn, in Raqqa governorate, in northern Syria, which reflects the persistent commission by the Erdoğan regime of war crimes and crimes against humanity in my country while enjoying the impunity provided by its allies in NATO.

Furthermore, mercenaries of the Turkish regime in the so-called Sultan Murad and Sultan Suleiman Shah terrorist factions carried out digging and excavation work in several archaeological areas in Afrin and the vicinity to steal antiquities and smuggle them into Turkey. The Turkish regime was not satisfied with that; rather, it stole large quantities of wheat, barley and other agricultural crops and smuggled them into Turkey, similar to what it did with the previously looted oil, antiquities, factories, machinery and property, and burned what it was unable to steal.

Despite all of these undeniable facts, some come to lecture us about the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). I invite them to start with the first sentence of the resolution, which affirms the strong commitment of the Security Council to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Is the Security Council ready to demonstrate its will to implement it? Will the other stakeholders cooperate with the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy in the implementation of this commitment? What about the implementation of resolution 2253 (2015), which was adopted just one day before the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015)?

Resolution 2254 (2015) contains more than 2,650 words. It must be fully respected, instead of being selectively implemented by applying one paragraph and ignoring another. We either respect the resolution in its entirety or consider it not applicable. Preferences and predilections should be avoided in dealing with this resolution. We must start with the first paragraph, which affirms the Security

Council's strong commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. This is the beginning of 2254 (2015).

The fourth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee will take place soon. Here, my delegation reaffirms the Syrian ownership and leadership of the political process, facilitated by the United Nations. We stress that the success of the Committee's work requires respect for its agreed rules of procedures and the rejection of any external interference in its work and any attempt by some Governments to impose artificial timetables. The Constitutional Committee is its own master, and the Syrian people alone have the exclusive right to make their own future.

Second statement by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari

I apologize for asking for the floor again. It is not my habit to follow-up on what my colleague the Turkish representative says, but his statement today is misleading to the members of the Council, to say the least.

I recall some important milestones that the Turkish regime has gone through since the beginning of the Syrian crisis and its sponsorship of terrorism in my country. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Turkey's border with my country has been open to tens of thousands of terrorists from around the world. All will recall that some of the foreign ministers of the permanent members of the Security Council have described these terrorists as jihadists. Some of those ministers and Heads of Governments and republics have even referred to the foreign terrorists who entered my country from Turkey as the "moderate Syrian opposition". Of course, the movement of these thousands upon thousands of terrorists was financed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and the Turkish regime was in charge of transporting them to our common border, where they were trained and then brought into Syria.

The first chemical gas test was conducted in the Turkish city of Gaziantep and publicly carried out by Jabhat Al-Nusra inside Turkish territory, and the link was posted on social media. That post contains audio of a person who conducted chemical gas experiments on rabbits, who can be heard saying: "We have succeeded in using chemical weapons on rabbits and we will transfer the use of the chemical to the Syrian interior." This statement is proven and known.

The Turkish regime has been involved in the bloodshed of Syrians in various forms since the beginning of the crisis, including infiltrating the terrorists and encouraging them to use chemical weapons. We provided the Council with a special message concerning a Syrian terrorist named Haitham Al-Qassab, who transported two litres of sarin from Libya to Istanbul on a Turkish civilian plane. These two litres of sarin were then transported by the same terrorist to the Syrian border and brought into Syria. Obviously, those chemicals were used in the Syrian town of Khan Al-Asal in March 2013, resulting in the martyrdom of 23 Syrian soldiers and civilians. We informed the Council about all this, but unfortunately no one — neither the Council nor its counter-terrorism sub-committees — took any action. But these facts cannot be denied by the Turkish regime. Who served as patron of even this fragile, weak and unpatriotic opposition? It was the Turkish regime. Most of the opposition members are residents of Istanbul.

I also recall a very important issue — the admission by former Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim on France 24, the BBC Arabic Service and the Qatari State Television that Washington has asked Qatar to lead the process of sponsoring terrorism in Syria. That was the United States mandate for Qatar. Washington asked Sheikh Hamad to go to Riyadh to coordinate with the Saudis on who should lead this

operation against Syria. The former Saudi king at the time told Hamad, “With God’s blessing, let Qatar lead the process and we will support you from behind”. All of this occurred with Washington’s knowledge. Hamad then said that Qatar alone had spent \$137 billion to undermine the stability of my country, Syria. Is this a caricature or are these facts to be taken into account in the Security Council? Is this a joke? Who will be held accountable for shedding the blood of hundreds of thousands of Syrians? Now the representative of the Turkish regime comes to lecture us with chastity and purity, even though his regime is known for what it does in Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Libya and the eastern Mediterranean. The closest people to the Turkish regime are today against it, including some Europeans.

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu**

I would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar and Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Rajasingham for their briefings.

People in Syria are trapped in an endless war. They are subject to crimes against humanity at the hands of Al-Assad's ruthless regime. They are striving to survive in lamentable conditions.

The situation at our doorstep in north-western Syria is alarming, with a sharp rise in cases of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Some 1.5 million out of 4 million Syrians in that region live in hundreds of overcrowded camps for internally displaced persons and are directly exposed to COVID-19, without any means of prevention and isolation. Hospitals and health facilities are struggling.

Since the previous Security Council meeting on Syria (see S/2020/1049), the percentage of health-care workers among current cases increased to 15. Half the number of the health-care workers infected throughout Syria are in the north-west.

We have mobilized all our resources in order to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups, especially women and children. In accordance with the recent trilateral agreement on the fight against COVID-19, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization have started to deliver health aid and items in the north-west, which are worth around \$7.7 million.

We will also continue to support and strengthen the resilience of the Syrian people through our own means and by facilitating the cross-border humanitarian operations. The unimpeded flow of humanitarian assistance is essential. With limited cross-border operations, the United Nations is making enormous efforts every month to reach 1.3 million people in northern Aleppo who were previously served via the Bab Al-Salam crossing point.

Since the adoption of resolution 2533 (2020) in July, around 2,500 trucks have crossed into the north-west through Bab Al-Hawa. This figure corresponds to only half of the volume channelled through our crossing points within the same timeframe prior to the adoption of resolution 2533 (2020). If the Council fails to reauthorize the Bab Al-Salam crossing point, it will condone the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. This might have security repercussions for the whole region and beyond.

Preserving the ceasefire in Idlib is a sine qua non for the protection of millions of vulnerable civilians living in dire conditions. Turkey remains fully committed to ensuring a lasting ceasefire in Idlib. We continue to engage with Russia in technical talks and in joint efforts towards the full implementation of the additional protocol.

Unfortunately, there is a worrying increase in ceasefire violations targeting civilians and moderate opposition groups in the Idlib de-escalation Area. These attacks risk triggering a new humanitarian crisis and provide a pretext for terrorist organizations to exploit the situation. All ceasefire violations in contravention of the additional protocol and existing agreements must be stopped.

While we are making every effort to alleviate the human suffering and taking all the necessary measures to preserve the ceasefire in Idlib, we also continue to contribute to advancing the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) (2020). Turkey, in its capacity as an Astana guarantor, played a leading role in the

establishment of the Constitutional Committee. Currently, the Committee is the sole functioning mechanism within the political process.

We wholeheartedly support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to facilitate the Committee's work in a systematic manner. We reiterated our strong support for his facilitation role during his visit to Ankara on 2 and 3 November. We welcome the announcement that the next two rounds of the Constitutional Committee will be held during the course of next week and in January 2021, respectively.

We believe that it is crucial to accelerate the work of the Committee through regular meetings. The next rounds should focus on the substance and the constitutional process should, in due course, yield results that address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. Syrians should not wait another decade for their expectations to be met.

Advancing the work of the Committee and the political process in general will contribute to the common goal of creating an environment conducive to the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians.

With 4 million Syrians living in Turkey and 5 million under our care and protection in Syria, we are aware of the demands and expectations of the Syrian people from the international community. It is a shame that the Al-Assad regime is organizing meetings under the pretext of discussing the return of refugees. These are attempts by that murderous regime to add insult to injury.

Through mechanisms in place not only with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees but also with neighbouring countries, we have been discussing the issue of returns in full compliance with United Nations criteria. We are ready to support any initiative reflecting United Nations parameters on this matter, with agreed modalities and scope. We will continue to oppose any initiatives attempting to support the regime's agenda and its unlawful actions.

Let me briefly touch upon the situation in Al-Hol camp, which has increasingly become a source of concern. Over 63,000 people, 94 per cent of whom are women and children, live in extremely miserable conditions in the camp, where security incidents and reports of deaths continue to be recorded. Family reunification and repatriation remain crucial for long-term solutions to this lasting problem.

In this part of Syria, the actions of the terrorist organization Kurdish Workers Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) threatening the territorial integrity of Syria have been steadily increasing. Yesterday's bomb attacks carried out by the PKK/YPG in Afrin and Al-Bab, resulting in scores of civilian casualties, are the latest testaments to the total disregard which that terrorist organization has for human life. The PKK/YPG continues to release Da'esh detainees en masse through so-called amnesties, when it serves its interest. According to media reports, in the last two months alone PKK/YPG released over 1,000 Da'esh members.

In the face of such brazen acts, it truly defies logic when some Member States still insist on portraying the PKK/YPG as a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism. How can anyone in their right mind trust one terrorist group to combat another? How many more Da'esh members need to be arbitrarily released by PKK/YPG before the international community reacts? The international community can no longer remain silent in the face of these terrorist acts, infiltrations and harassments. Turkey will certainly not remain idle. We will not hesitate to take steps necessary to safeguard our national security and ensure that peace and stability prevail.

To conclude, let us remember how we reached this point. The regime, instead of meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, has employed all instruments of violence in its disposal to prolong its grip to power. The people of

Syria have been punished brutally, including by chemical weapons, barrel bombs, demographic change, sexual violence, arbitrary detentions, torture, starvation and sieges. These are facts. They are all well documented. We all know the blunt reality. The persistent lies of the regime do not change that.

As to the delusional remarks of the regime representative, I would like to emphasize that I do not consider him to be my legitimate counterpart. His mere presence here is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of this regime. Therefore, I will not honour him with a response.
