



# Security Council

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## **Letter dated 22 September 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 the briefing provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-conference on the situation in the Middle East (Syria), convened on Friday, 18 September 2020. A statement was also delivered by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

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

*(Signed)* Abdou **Abarry**  
President of the Security Council



**Annex I****Statement by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria,  
Geir Pedersen**

I begin today's briefing by recalling, as I did last month (see S/2020/823), the deep suffering of the Syrian people, who, in this almost full decade of conflict, have experienced death, injury, displacement, destruction, detention, torture, terror, indignities, instability, de-development and destitution on a massive scale. They have seen the country they love devastated and are now grappling with coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and economic collapse. The Syrian people, both those inside the country and the millions of refugees outside, desperately need that suffering to be eased and to see a path out of this conflict.

Against the backdrop of those hard realities and the deep distrust among the Syrian parties, a faint but real ray of hope shone from Geneva in the last week of August, when, after a nine-month hiatus, we were able to convene the third session of the small body of Syria's Constitutional Committee.

The discussions within the Committee were mostly substantive and on the agreed agenda. The co-Chairs told me they sensed some common ground emerging on certain subjects. There were practical suggestions from members on how to identify such common ground and how to advance discussions. I was pleased with that outcome.

That said, there were very real substantive differences, even at the quite general level of the discussions. Moreover, contrary to what I had hoped, the co-Chairs were not able to agree in Geneva on an agenda for the next session. We need a proposed agenda if the Committee is to meet.

I worked hard in Geneva and ever since to assist the co-Chairs to reach an agreement. The discussions are continuing on a compromise proposal. Given the realities of organizing meetings, we need to finalize the agenda without further delay if we are to meet in early October, as we had hoped. Beyond agreeing on an agenda in line with the terms of reference and core rules of procedure, it is important to remind ourselves of other features of this document.

It provides that delegations are to be nominated by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission, in addition to a middle third civil society delegation; the mandate is to prepare and draft a constitutional reform; the Committee may review and amend the 2012 constitution or draft a new constitution; the constitutional draft must embody the 12 living principles that emerged from the Geneva process and were approved in Sochi; the co-Chairs have a responsibility to promote the good functioning of the Committee, including facilitating and proposing an agenda and workplans that enable all issues to be considered and do not make the consideration of certain issues dependent on agreement on other issues; the Committee is to work continuously and expeditiously, without preconditions to produce results and ongoing progress without foreign interference, such as externally imposed timelines.

I am continuing to urge that the Constitutional Committee proceed in line with those already agreed terms of reference. If we can finalize an agenda and move forward in that way, I remain hopeful that we can deepen this process with a fourth session soon, and a fifth and sixth in coming months, as the COVID-19 situation allows.

Here, let me pause to thank the Swiss Federal and Geneva Cantonal authorities, the United Nations Office at Geneva and its medical services, and the Committee

members themselves, for their support in ensuring a COVID-safe third session, which will be a continuing priority for future sessions too.

Yesterday, I invited the members of the middle 50 of the large body of the Constitutional Committee to a briefing on the work to date and to hear views and suggestions on the process. We will be following up on those discussions.

Let me also note that during the third session, I had the opportunity to consult with members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. They provided useful ideas that conveyed their clear belief in the possibility of finding commonalities and the need to safeguard the rights of Syrian women. Like all Syrians, they wish to see concrete progress. In their view, that must happen in parallel to tangible improvements in the lives of Syrians, who have urgent economic and humanitarian needs, as well as security and health concerns. That is also the consistent message of a broad range of civil society actors with whom we engage. In the coming period, both the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and our Syrian Civil Society Support Room will remain active on all aspects of the political process envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic is emerging as a major challenge for the Syrian people, who are acutely vulnerable after 10 years of conflict. As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock told the Council two days ago (see S/2020/915), reports from inside Syria continue to point to a much broader spread of COVID-19 than the number of confirmed cases suggests. In some areas, existing health-care facilities have been unable to absorb all suspected cases, particularly as health-care workers, already in short supply, are themselves struck with the virus. Syrian refugees, both inside and outside camps, remain at great risk as well.

The pandemic will only add to humanitarian needs, which remain acute. Many Syrians face food insecurity, poverty and deprivation, particularly in the face of unprecedented economic collapse and socioeconomic strain. By way of example, food prices remain at the highest level ever recorded. The World Food Programme shows the price of a standard-reference food basket increased by over 250 per cent compared to last year. Some Syrians even struggled to access water. In the north-east, the supply from the Allouk water station was cut once again in August, before resuming after the constructive intervention of several Member States.

I appeal once again for the Council's support in securing both the necessary resources and humanitarian access for all those in need of relief, in accordance with international humanitarian law. It remains imperative to waive any sanctions or measures that can undermine the capacity of the country to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and COVID-19 medical support.

I continue to appeal for the large-scale and unilateral release of detainees and abductees, especially women, children, the elderly and the sick, and for more meaningful actions on missing persons. I pressed that issue with the Astana guarantors when we met in Geneva. I note their stated intention to resume the meetings of the working group on this issue at the earliest opportunity, but I also note the deep dismay that lack of movement on this issue causes among Syrians of all backgrounds, and internationally as well. I will continue to press the issue with the Syrian parties, including in all forthcoming engagements.

Syria remains a highly internationalized environment, with five foreign armies active in the theatre and Syria's sovereignty compromised. Militarily, however, current arrangements continue to sustain broad calm across Syria, compared to the intense violence of recent years. Indeed, the front lines have barely shifted in the past six months — the longest such period in the Syrian conflict — and a basic military status quo seems to be emerging.

However, while Syria is calmer now, there continue to be worrisome incidents that could destabilize that calm. For example, a vehicle altercation between Russian and United States forces left four American soldiers injured and led to mutual accusations of breaches of existing deconfliction arrangements. We have seen further rounds of air strikes on military positions in Syria, attributed to Israel by the Syrian Government. Moreover, due to local unrest and geopolitical tensions, the south-west remains a theatre for regular security incidents.

The March agreement between Russia and Turkey continues to sustain broad calm in the north-west, but we have also seen escalations on both sides, including rocket fire, artillery fire and air strikes hitting near the front lines, as well as deep into Idlib, killing and wounding civilians in some instances, in addition to increased military reinforcements on both sides of the line.

In addition, there was another attack on a Russian-Turkish joint patrol, claimed by the Khattab Al-Shishani Brigades, wounding two Russian soldiers. We have also seen at least one attack on Turkish soldiers in Idlib, resulting in casualties. There have been improvised explosive device attacks and mutual fire in and around Afrin, Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad, resulting in civilian injuries and deaths. Finally, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is engaged in worrisome activity in the desert, and we saw an attack on a pipeline in areas where ISIL is active, which resulted in a nationwide electricity cut in late August.

I appeal to all relevant actors to contain violent and destabilizing incidents like these, build on the current relative calm and, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), establish a nationwide ceasefire to protect civilians, maintain international peace and security and support the political process. In accordance with the resolution, we must counter the threat of internationally proscribed terrorist groups active in some parts of Syria through a cooperative approach that is in line with international humanitarian law.

As we seek to consolidate calm, we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to build a more meaningful political process. The realities on the ground remind us that only by focusing on a political settlement can we meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and restore Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. A political process is also vital if we are to address Syria's socioeconomic challenges and ensure the necessary conditions to enable millions of refugees to return to Syria in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner.

It is clear that no one actor or group of actors — Syrian or international — can determine the outcome of this conflict. In that regard, I believe there is growing acknowledgement among many key actors that there truly is no military solution and that the only way forward is a negotiation and a political settlement, however difficult that may be.

That is why I believe there is a common desire from all sides to move beyond a complete stalemate and see some movement. There is a readiness for steps to beget steps, for goodwill to beget goodwill and for us to move slowly but steadily along a path out of this conflict, supported by mutual and reciprocal measures and based on resolution 2254 (2015).

In that regard, I have received strong support from key players for United Nations efforts to facilitate the Constitutional Committee through a Syrian-led and -owned process that can act as a door opener.

Beyond the Constitutional Committee, it is too early to say whether the increasingly shared assessment of the realities will turn into common diplomatic

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pathways for the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That potential may be slow to materialize, but I will continue to nurture and support the process.

I welcomed the recent presence, in Geneva, of senior representatives of Russia, the United States, Turkey and Iran for consultations on the margins of the Constitutional Committee. I have since remained in close contact with them and other European and Arab interlocutors. I particularly welcomed the opportunity to visit Moscow recently for substantive and wide-ranging discussions with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and Defence Minister Shoygu, in advance of the Foreign Minister's high-level visit to Syria last week.

I encourage Russia and the United States to pursue further dialogue and for them and other key players — including the Astana guarantors, those who meet in the Small Group and the members of the Council — to work with me to advance our common goal in Syria: a political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The immediate priority is for the co-Chairs to agree on an agenda so that we can resume the Constitutional Committee soon, and for the Committee to proceed in accordance with its terms of reference. Meanwhile, we must continue to work to bring about positive and mutually reinforcing steps among Syrian and international players and a wider political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). With relative calm on the ground and with the urgent need to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, now is the time to press ahead.

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

I will make this statement on behalf of Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders. We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. We would also like to thank the humanitarian workers in the country for their lasting engagement. They are at the forefront of every humanitarian disaster, and that is no different in the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis. Their protection should be, and is, our constant concern.

I will make three points.

First, some claim that the situation in Syria has stabilized. Indeed, we are relieved to see that the situation in the north-west remains relatively calm, despite ongoing violence, and we — Germany and Belgium — call for the continued implementation of the Turkish-Russian ceasefire agreement.

However, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains alarming. Eleven million Syrians remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Moreover, the economic crisis and COVID-19 have added an additional burden to an already dire situation, and winter is coming.

The war, mismanagement, corruption and oppression have resulted in an economic crisis without precedent, sharply limiting the purchasing power of Syrians all over the country. That has led to food insecurity for an additional 1.4 million people over the past six months.

COVID-19 is claiming victims across the country. The number of cases has grown exponentially. That is alarming. Statistics are unreliable. The identified cases are only the tip of the iceberg. Testing capacity remains far too low everywhere in the country, including in the north-east and the north-west. Prevention therefore falls short. Treatment options are inadequate as this crisis is once again acutely showing the limitations of the Syrian health-care system. Health-care facilities that were deliberately bombed and destroyed during years of war are unable to cope with the current crisis. The shortage of health-care workers further prevents an adequate response.

The coming of winter adds to the challenging humanitarian circumstances, especially for the 2.7 million internally displaced persons, including 1 million children, in the north-west. We remember the deeply dehumanizing circumstances last year under which many of them fled their areas of origin en masse and arrived in camps. We, Germany and Belgium, encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Syria's humanitarian partners to make every effort to prepare for winter. We know that, with limited access, that will not be an easy exercise.

That brings me to my second point.

Humanitarian access remains limited, which is intolerable and defies humanitarian logic. We, the penholders, call upon all parties to allow neutral and non-political access to all parts of the country, without limitations and fully in line with humanitarian principles. Administrative hurdles are not acceptable. Accordingly, Secretary-General Guterres and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock have consistently called for more cross-line and more cross-border access to all Syrians in need throughout this year.

While the majority of the Security Council was in favour of supporting this request in the interest of the Syrian people, some members have chosen to deny it.

They have blocked draft Security Council resolutions seeking adequate access to the north-east, via Al-Yarubiyah, and the north-west, via Bab Al-Salam. They claim that cross-line deliveries from Damascus and deliveries passing conflict lines from Bab Al-Hawa would compensate for the closure of cross-border posts.

However, the sad reality is that the non-renewal of Bab Al-Salam has so far resulted in a more costly and riskier humanitarian operation in the north-west. So far, no crossline delivery has taken place, and we still have to see if the current planning transforms into reality. At the same time, access from Damascus to the north-east seems to have recently become further complicated, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock mentioned, and gaps in medical access to this region are still far from being filled. What is also clear is that we cannot accept Damascus deciding who is to receive aid and who is not. Humanitarian action has to be neutral, independent and impartial.

Thirdly, humanitarian access is not limited to the delivery of food or shelter. All parties should facilitate access to those who need protection, for instance, those in arbitrary detention. Access should also be guaranteed to those who are located in hard-to-reach locations, such as the Rukban camp. This access should be urgently and unconditionally guaranteed so as to keep civilian infrastructure fully functioning, for example, the Allouk water station, which provides the essential water supply to over half a million people, including to the Al-Hol camp.

Each of these points illustrates the immeasurable human suffering that Syrian children, women and men are undergoing on a daily basis. We, Germany and Belgium — the humanitarian penholders — therefore once again call for sustainable, durable and unconditional solutions.

Finally, to change the situation for the Syrian people for the better, action will be needed, and we reiterate our call for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and for accountability. We fully support the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry and 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 and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as justice initiatives on national and international levels.

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

I would like to start by thanking the Special Envoy for his briefing and enduring commitment.

I will make three points.

We are relieved about the relative calm that has held in the north-west since the Russian-Turkish ceasefire arrangement in the beginning of March. This is important, especially as many internally displaced persons remain in the region, following the continuous military attacks at the end of last year. Renewed military action would further jeopardize the situation of those who are already vulnerable and who are preparing for a difficult and long winter ahead. We are therefore worried at the various reports of continued attacks, which illustrates the fragility of the situation.

Any counter-terrorism activity should respect human rights and international humanitarian law. In the south, the situation continues to be volatile, as a result of kidnappings and targeted killings. We ask that all parties anywhere in the country refrain from violence, reduce tension and exercise maximum restraint. The United Nations should play a central role in the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire, and in the monitoring thereof, and we support the call of the Secretary-General and of the Special Envoy to this end.

Since the start of the Special Envoy's mandate, the Syrian-owned, Syria-led and United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee has been one of his priorities and constitutes a door-opener to a wider political process. Recent developments, including the third round of negotiations that took place in Geneva last month, leave us both hopeful and worried. We welcome the fact that a third round of talks could take place in a climate that was, overall, constructive, despite many challenges. We also welcome the continued engagement by the Special Envoy with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, especially in the context of the meetings of the Constitutional Committee. This is positive news indeed.

Nevertheless, the way ahead is fraught with obstacles. We are very concerned about the seemingly slow dynamics of this process. The Committee was set up over a year ago, thanks to the Special Envoy's personal commitment and efforts. However, by now, only three rounds have taken place and the Committee has yet to discuss the more difficult subjects related to constitutional principles. An urgent agreement on the agenda for the next round is crucial. We hope that this round can take place by the beginning of October.

We encourage all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, to fully engage in upcoming meetings of the Committee. We also call upon all actors to exert their influence over the parties so that they fully engage on this track, which is crucial, and to engage closely and cooperatively in order to reinvigorate the wider political process. Urgent progress must also be made on other tracks, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The time for positive actions and confidence-building measures is now. Tangible progress must urgently be made with respect to political prisoners and missing persons. The Syrian authorities must urgently move beyond one-for-one prisoner exchanges, release those arbitrarily detained and share information on all missing persons. In line with international regulations, access to detainees must be ensured. Women, the de facto heads of households, should be actively supported on an administrative level, wherever necessary. We encourage the sustained engagement of the Special Envoy in this regard.

Victims must be fully acknowledged and receive the assistance they need in their quest for justice. This is an absolute necessity in order to break the cycle of violence. Belgium therefore 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 its support to criminal proceedings in national and international courts.

Finally, Belgium will not accept the groundless accusations that the current state of the Syrian economy is a consequence of European Union (EU) sanctions. EU sanctions have targeted those who ordered or carried out human rights attacks or built their personal fortune on the war economy. The sanctions should not have any adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons who are not targeted. On the contrary, the EU and its member States have continuously supported the Syrian people and remain Syria's most important humanitarian donor.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. China appreciates and supports the Special Envoy's efforts aimed at promoting the implementation of Security Council resolutions and advancing the Syrian political process.

China welcomes the third round of meetings of the small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, which were held in Geneva in late August. We are pleased to note the areas of commonalities agreed by the two sides and their political will to participate in the next session. We hope the parties concerned will maintain close contact with the Special Envoy and cooperate with him to advance the political dialogue on the basis of existing consensus, so as to achieve positive progress as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee must remain independent and free from foreign interference. Only by adhering to the principle of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process and by respecting the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, can we achieve a lasting peace in the country.

The international community applauds the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. It is hoped that all parties in Syria will heed this appeal and seize the window of opportunity afforded by it to enhance mutual trust and stabilize the security situation at an early date. Since March, the situation on the ground has been, by and large, calm. The Astana process has played an important role in settling ceasefire arrangements. China supports the Astana guarantors in strengthening coordination with the United Nations, including Special Envoy Pedersen, in order to produce synergy.

The main threats to Syria's security lie in foreign occupation and terrorist activities. Foreign occupation violates international law and causes instability and unrest in the country and in the region as a whole. Terrorists are exploiting the pandemic and aggravating security risks in many parts of the country. It is Syria's right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, combat terrorism and safeguard its national security. The international community should adopt uniform standards in counter-terrorism, in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions, and support the efforts made by the Syrian Government.

To promote the political process and restore peace and stability in Syria, the relevant parties and the international community must enhance dialogue, build consensus and improve collaboration. Unilateral sanctions will not solve problems; rather, they only impose suffering on the people. Unilateral sanctions make it more difficult for the Syrian people, who have already suffered immensely from the conflict, to fulfil their livelihoods. In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, unilateral sanctions have severely weakened Syria's economic foundation and capacity for mobilization and hindered the Syrian people's access to medical supplies and services. Vulnerable groups, including women, children and internally displaced persons, bear the brunt of the impact of COVID-19. China once again urges certain countries to respond to the Secretary-General's appeal, heed the call of the vast majority of States Members of the United Nations and immediately lift the illegal sanctions against Syria.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing on the recent political and military developments in Syria, as well as on the most recent Syrian Constitutional Committee session of meetings, which was held in Geneva last month.

Like many other members of the Security Council, we are cautiously optimistic about the Turkish-Russian ceasefire agreement from March, which seems to be largely holding. We believe that six months of relative peace can pave the way for renewed dialogue between the Syrian opposition and authorities in Damascus.

In the light of that, we also welcome the latest round of Constitutional Committee talks. We appreciate the fact that despite the challenges posed by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease, the parties are still engaged in the political process. We thank the Office of the Special Envoy for facilitating the dialogue between Syrian parties.

The legitimate claims of the Syrian opposition must be taken into account when looking to the future and rebuilding Syria. Estonia believes that, in order to allow genuine exchange of ideas among parties to the conflict, the next important step is to make Constitutional Committee meetings regular. Delaying tactics of any sort cannot be accepted.

Nevertheless, we wish to emphasize that, by itself, a new Constitution is not enough to solve Syria's problems. Releasing arbitrarily detained people, respect for human rights, and the holding of free and fair elections are the cornerstone of national reconciliation.

Estonia and the European Union remain committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria. Accordingly, we encourage all international actors to support the parties in achieving these aims, which are also implicit in the road map for peace set out in the resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

**Annex VI****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nathalie Broadhurst Estival**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing.

France takes note of the holding of the third session of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. The convening of that session teaches us above all that it is possible to continue the political process in the context of a pandemic if the necessary precautions are taken. However, France once again expresses regret over the limited progress made in these discussions and the lack of agreement on the date of the next meeting and its agenda. Nearly a year after the Constitutional Committee was formed, its record to date is nil.

It is important that the regime finally agree to engage in good faith in the negotiations. All those who have influence on the regime, especially those who are members of the Security Council, must use it to this end. The regime's procrastinating tactics deceive no one; they are aimed at buying time, with the prospect of the 2021 presidential election in mind.

For its part, France will not accept that the United Nations political process becomes a façade designed to relegitimize the regime. The credibility of the United Nations and the Security Council is at stake. In this context, we must clearly recall that the criteria for credible elections in Syria are set forth in resolution 2254 (2015): free and transparent elections under United Nations supervision and with the participation of all Syrians, including from the diaspora. France and its partners will not recognize results of elections that do not meet these criteria. It is essential that the United Nations address the election issue as soon as possible, so that it is ready to act as soon as the work of the Constitutional Committee is completed.

The political process cannot be reduced to the workings of the Constitutional Committee alone. After nearly 10 years of conflict, it is our duty to bring about concrete improvement in the lives of millions of Syrians. This will first of all require that the ceasefire in the north-west be sustained and that a nationwide cessation of hostilities be implemented, in response to the Secretary-General's appeal as endorsed by the Council in resolution 2532 (2020). The current truce is fragile and reversible and offers no guarantees to the Syrian people. In this regard, France is concerned at intensification of hostilities south of the M4 motorway and warns against the resumption of an offensive by the regime and its allies, including a limited one.

It is also high time to achieve parallel progress on the issue of detainees, which is stalled despite repeated calls from civil society and members of the Security Council. There is an urgent need for action in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic, with the regime authorizing the large-scale release of detainees, particularly political prisoners, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

It is equally urgent, all the more so in the context of the pandemic, that the regime finally put an end to obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid and allow access for humanitarian actors to meet the needs of its population. We are not fooled by attempts to attribute the humanitarian tragedy in Syria to sanctions. I recall in this regard that the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic concluded in its latest report (A/HRC/45/31) that the regime has committed crimes that may amount to crimes against humanity.

In conclusion, I would like to call on the Council to set aside its differences and unite its efforts to implement resolution 2254 (2015). In particular, I appeal to

Russia's sense of responsibility. Without a credible political settlement, France and its European partners will not deviate from their line on sanctions, reconstruction and normalization.

No one will benefit from the deterioration of the situation in Syria, of which the Syrians are the first victims. The stability of the region and international peace and security are at stake. France is ready to play its full part in relaunching an ambitious political process that produces results on the ground. At the same time, we will continue to lend our full support to the fight against impunity in Syria.

## Annex VII

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

The third round of the Constitutional Committee took place in Geneva despite the challenges due to the coronavirus disease. We welcome the fact that these talks were held in a constructive atmosphere, but unfortunately, that is the only positive news. I am glad to hear from Special Envoy Geir Pedersen that some common ground emerged, but we are afraid that this is not enough. Yet again, there was no real substantive progress. This is disappointing, but not surprising, given that the Syrian regime demonstrated once again that it is not serious about the Constitutional Committee. The regime instead wants to engage in endless procedural and general discussions. These delaying tactics must finally end. We need to see serious discussions around a meaningful political process with a view to implementing resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), including a complete, immediate, nationwide ceasefire.

The regime must end its obstructions and it must finally engage. The first step would be for the Syrian regime and the opposition to agree on a date, preferably very soon, and on the substantive agenda for the next session.

We hope that Foreign Minister Lavrov used his visit to Damascus last week to firmly underline what is obvious. The conflict in Syria can come to a sustainable end only when the Syrian regime at long last engages seriously and constructively with the Constitutional Committee and the wider political process.

On the release of detainees, this point has been made repeatedly by Germany and I will raise it again today. A key element of resolution 2254 (2015) is the call for the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons by all parties. We need more and meaningful action on this crucial issue. The members of the Council have a responsibility to protect civilians, defend human rights and seek justice and accountability. Releases from detention are essential for creating the environment necessary for the Syrian parties to make progress in bringing this conflict to an end. Three points are important.

First, the Council should request all parties, in particular the Syrian regime, which holds the overwhelming majority of detainees, to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, starting with the most vulnerable: women and children, the sick, wounded and elderly.

Secondly, the Council should 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.

Thirdly, 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 missing and disappeared persons. We will continue to make this point as long as it is necessary.

I would also make some remarks on accountability. National reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will not be possible without truth, justice and accountability for all crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict. We are deeply concerned by the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/45/31). The report concludes that the practice by Syrian regime forces of enforced disappearance, torture, sexual violence and death in custody amounts to crimes against humanity. According to the report, the Syrian National Army may also have committed war crimes such as hostage-taking, rape, cruel treatment and torture in Afrin and the surrounding area. There must be a follow-up to the findings of the report and other

reports, such as those of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team or the Board of Inquiry, which came to similar conclusions with regard to violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Syria. We must not tolerate impunity for the most serious crimes in Syria, and whoever commits crimes against humanity or war crimes must not feel safe anywhere and must be held accountable.

The evidence for these crimes in the Syrian conflict is overwhelming, and it should be heard where it belongs — at the International Criminal Court. In the meantime, national jurisdictions in Germany and elsewhere are starting to fill the void caused by the vetoed referral to the International Criminal Court. Two former officials of the Syrian regime's repression apparatus are currently being tried before a German court in Koblenz. We have reported about this trial repeatedly in the Council. One witness, who was an undertaker in Damascus from 2011 until 2017, recently testified that he had been recruited by the Syrian regime to transport and bury victims of torture killed in prisons, security branches and military hospitals to huge mass graves outside Damascus. He reported that many bodies were mutilated and disfigured. One killed a woman who was still carrying a baby in her arms. What else do we need to hear for the Council to finally unite behind the fight against impunity in Syria? How is Syria ever to return to sustainable peace if the most serious crimes are not addressed?

In this regard, we welcome the initiative made public today by the Netherlands to hold Syria accountable under international law for gross human rights violations and torture, in particular by invoking Syria's responsibility for torture under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Netherlands has initiated the legal procedures foreseen in article 30 of the Convention Against Torture.

## Annex VIII

### **Statement by the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani**

We would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing on the Syrian political process. I take note of what he mentioned at the start of his briefing, namely, that there is a ray of hope shining from Geneva. We hope that there will be more sunlight and a clearer sky for peace in Syria.

In September last year, during the Council's meeting on this issue (S/PV.8628), we welcomed the Secretary-General's announcement regarding the agreement between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiation Commission for a credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee, facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva.

We note that since then there have been 3 rounds of sessions in Geneva, including the small body meeting few weeks ago. We have to continue the momentum and more meetings are needed with clear agenda. Clearly, more needs to be done.

In this context, while reaffirming Indonesia's commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, my delegation would like to highlight the following points on the Constitutional Committee.

First, concerning the importance of a substantive engagement, it is critical for the Syrian parties to continue and maintain their substantive coordination in a constructive manner. A serious political path, with strong commitment on the part of all relevant parties, is needed in order to achieve a sustainable and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis.

Secondly, all divergences must be addressed through dialogue. We are all aware that there are concerns and sensitivities among every Syrian party in this entire process. However, we believe that diverging views must always be addressed through diplomacy and other peaceful means. Dialogue is key. This might sound like a broken record, but when dialogue is off the table, the result will be less likely to benefit the future of the Syrian people.

Thirdly, we need an intensification of efforts aimed at moving the constitutional process forward, under the facilitation of the United Nations. Indeed, flexibility and strong commitment are needed. We fully support Geir Pedersen in his efforts to bridge differences. We hope that there will be a next round soon, with an agreed agenda, and note that much still needs to be done, taking into account health protocols during these times of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

As many have said, the Constitutional Committee is not an end in itself but a part of a broader Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). And the Constitutional Committee is indeed a work in progress, for which genuine support from the international community is required.

Besides the work of the Committee, Indonesia would also like to reiterate the call for a nationwide ceasefire and the urgent need for all parties to respect the ceasefire agreements. Although we have seen relative calm in some areas in Syria, tensions and the risk of escalation remain. Indonesia believes that continued measures must be taken to reduce the level of violence on the ground, encourage and promote confidence-building among the Syrian parties, and alleviate the dire humanitarian situation.

Significant progress on the issue of detainees and missing persons is also needed, as is a waiver of sanctions in order to ensure the capacity of Syria to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In closing, my delegation sincerely hopes that at the Council's meeting next month, we will be able to see progress on this particular issue.

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

[Original: French]

I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his briefing. I would like once again to express our appreciation to him for his tireless efforts to bring together the stakeholders in the Syrian conflict, including the Women's Advisory Board and civil society organizations in the search for a lasting solution to this crisis.

I would also like to welcome the representatives of Syria and Turkey.

On Syria, a question that the Security Council considers regularly in its three aspects, everything or almost everything has already been said. Mr Pedersen has on occasion shown optimism when indications warrant, but he has often expressed his pessimism to us as the political process in Syria struggles to get on the right track.

Again today, we have listened to him with great attention, leading me to make the following remarks.

First, my delegation welcomes the resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee, with the holding of its third meeting after several months of hiatus. We hope that this time, all members of the Committee will engage in negotiating in good faith and make the compromises necessary to give Syria momentum towards peace and security. In this regard, it is also important that the United Nations provide all the necessary support to this process, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Secondly, my delegation supports the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for an immediate national ceasefire in Syria. That will help, on the one hand, to create the conditions for the success of the political process that I mentioned earlier and, on the other, to enable an effective fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Obviously, like any other State, in the exercise of its sovereignty Syria must relentlessly pursue the fight against terrorism, all the more so as criminal groups are trying to exploit of the current health crisis to rebuild themselves and resume control. lost ground. However, it is also evident, as everywhere else, that the fight against terrorism must be undertaken with respect for humanitarian rights.

Thirdly, the Niger remains concerned about the fate of the many detainees in both camps, and reiterates the need for the belligerents to heed the Secretary-General's call to share information on the fate of those detained and to guarantee respect for their rights. Likewise, my delegation supports Special Envoy Pedersen's appeal of 18 May, encouraging a massive and unilateral release of detainees, as well as meaningful action on missing persons cases. That would undoubtedly help ease the overall situation and thereby promote the progress we all expect on this complex Syrian issue.

To conclude, my country, the Niger, recalls that in dealing with this issue, we must be sure to respect the sovereignty of Syria and the interests of its people, because, ultimately, it is the interests of the Syrians that we are discussing, and they should benefit from the decisions we make here.

In addition, despite the differences of view that exist on the issue within the Security Council, we remain of the opinion, alongside the Secretary-General, that the sanctions imposed on Syria, the consequences of which are more damaging to innocent Syrians innocent than to the authorities in place, should be suspended. In

this time of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, all countries, including Syria, must be able to access basic necessities and essential medical supplies, the lack of which aggravates the already extreme situation facing these populations.

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

We thank Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Mr. Geir Pedersen for his briefing.

We welcome the third round of the small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee held in Geneva last month. The most important achievement of that meeting was the constructive approach of the Syrian delegations. The credit for this belongs to the United Nations team working on Syrian settlement, led by the Special Envoy, as well as to all international players who are interested in stabilizing the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Syrians showed their readiness to continue working together to find common denominators and establish principles for discussing the future of their country.

We highly appreciate the level of preparation of the event against the backdrop of the coronavirus restrictions. At the same time, it is important to ensure safety and health of the Syrian delegates, as well as Mr. Pedersen's team and the host country officials when planning next rounds. The Syrians, with the help of the Special Envoy, should agree on the agenda and dates for the next meetings. It is important to help them lead this political process on their own without external interference. The work of the Constitutional Committee does not and should not have artificial time restrictions or be synchronized with any events, including electoral process within Syria. The latter is an internal matter of the country.

The guarantors of the Astana format — Russia, Turkey and Iran — held a meeting on the sidelines of the Syrian dialogue in Geneva. This is symbolic; the Constitutional Committee itself was formed thanks to our effective trilateral cooperation, as well as the decision of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, held in Sochi in 2018. The Astana participants also met with Syrian representatives and the Special Envoy. We circulated the joint trilateral statement that was adopted in Geneva as an official document of the Security Council. Its key elements are reaffirmation of commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, determination to confront the terrorist threat, rejection of the illegal seizure of oil fields, condemnation of unilateral sanctions that undermine the socioeconomic situation in the country, and the need to increase humanitarian aid to all Syrians without politicization or discrimination. Russia will continue to provide the Special Envoy and the Syrians with all necessary support, including within the framework of the Astana format.

As for the situation on the ground, it can be described as generally calm. Instability has been registered in Idlib, controlled by terrorists from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, and territories in the north-east. In the Idlib de-escalation zone, militants sabotage Russian-Turkish patrols. The shelling of positions of Government troops and nearby settlements continues, causing civilian casualties and deaths. Terrorists are also active in other parts of Syria. All attacks by militants will be resolutely suppressed. It is obvious that the achievement of lasting calm in Idlib and other Syrian areas is possible only if the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and their affiliates are neutralized and their support from abroad is stopped.

The implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), adherence to which is asserted by all members of the Council, provides for respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We urge our colleagues not to be selective in this regard. The illegal occupation of a part of the Syrian territory by the United States and the policy

to isolate the Kurdish regions from the rest of Syria lead to ethnic and sectarian hatred, and this is a factor in the delay in the political settlement in Syria.

The plundering of oil resources, secured by exemption from United States sanctions, as well as the illegal unilateral sanctions themselves, which are used as an instrument of collective punishment and aimed at inciting social discontent, also hamper the efforts of those who want peace in Syria. We heard recently about plans to assassinate a head of a sovereign State, President Al-Assad. What is this if not a policy of regime change? We call on all who preach respect for international law to abandon these practices and even their designs for political assassination and interference by military or economic means in the internal affairs of sovereign countries — even those that they do not like.

We have long heard calls from our Western colleagues for the establishment of a nationwide ceasefire in Syria. We would like them to clarify what exactly they mean. First, the ceasefire in Syria holds. Secondly, who should sign such an agreement? The information coming from Syria, including through the United Nations, proves that only terrorists provoke violence in the country. Do we have to sign an agreement with them? Must we legalize them? We also see Israeli strikes at Syria. In this regard, we call on our Western colleagues to stop exploiting these calls but rather exert their influence on those who really continue to wage war in Syria.

Unilateral coercive measures negatively affect the stabilization of the situation, suffocate the economy and cause suffering for ordinary Syrians. Humanitarian exemptions do not work, according to humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) themselves. The Secretary-General has called for the lifting of sanctions, specialized United Nations structures talk about the negative impact of sanctions, humanitarian NGOs and Western journalists write about this. Unilateral coercive measures also impede the return of refugees, as they block the efforts of the Syrian Government to rebuild homes and infrastructure for the benefit of the people. The Syrian Government is ready for the return of citizens who fled the war; neighbouring countries are also interested in this. Resolution 2254 (2015), by the way, provides for the return of refugees and the rehabilitation of the affected areas for this purpose.

In this regard, we are disappointed that during the Security Council's meetings on Syria, primarily on the humanitarian situation, we have heard no United Nations assessment of the negative impact of sanctions, including on the Syrian Government's fight against the pandemic; nor we hear any analysis of the environmental threat to Syria and Iraq in light of the barbaric oil extraction methods in the north-east.

**Annex XI****Statement by the Counsellor of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Diani Jamesha Prince**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines once again expresses our support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy in facilitating Syria's political process. We are pleased that, despite the challenges presented by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the small body of the Constitutional Committee was able to meet at the end of August and that the discussions were characterized by respect and a commitment by the parties to working together. We look forward to the convening of the fourth session and we hope that an agreement on the agenda will be arrived at soon. We also remind parties of the importance of women's participation in the work of the Committee in order to ensure fair and balanced outcomes for all Syrians.

The success of the wider political process is dependent on the cultivation of trust and confidence. In this vein, we reiterate the urgent need to address in a meaningful way the issues of detainees, abductees and missing persons in a demonstration of goodwill and to promote reconciliation within Syria.

Resolution 2254 (2015) acknowledges the close linkage between a ceasefire and the parallel political process. The perpetuation of hostilities therefore denies an environment conducive to the fulfillment of the process and the restoration of stability. For this reason, the continued reports of sporadic violence are concerning. Maximum restraint must be exhibited and the preservation of the ceasefire in the north-west is critical. Above all, the implementation of a complete and immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities is essential.

The country's stability is also tied to its economic recovery. Syria's rapid socioeconomic downturn is alarming and threatens the well-being of millions of Syrians. We yet again appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria to assist with the country's rehabilitation, especially in consideration of the current humanitarian situation, which is made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity are endangered by the continued occupation of unauthorized foreign forces and the prevailing threat of Security Council-designated terrorist entities. Respect for Syria's independence necessitates the withdrawal of these forces and the eradication of the scourge of terrorism.

On the point of counter-terrorism, we reiterate that such activities must comply with the fundamental principles of international law. The protection of civilians and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population must remain paramount.

An inclusive, credible and sustainable Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, which is free from interference, is the only solution to end the current conflict. It is the only path towards restoring peace and stability to the Syrian people. The international community must therefore continue to support all efforts to realize that goal.

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## Annex XII

### **Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing today and congratulate him and his Office on having successfully held the third round of discussions of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva.

South Africa believes that the Constitutional Committee plays a pivotal role in enabling political discussion among various sectors of Syrian society which can pave the way towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

We urge the parties to engage in open and frank dialogue to foster a culture of cooperation and compromise, which is vital to any sustainable peace process. In this regard, we call on the parties to capitalize on the momentum gained from this most recent meeting, to work together, in good faith, on finalizing the agenda and date for the fourth round of Constitutional Committee discussions.

While we all know that this process has not been easy, particularly due to the delay caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, momentum in the right direction towards long-term peace and stability must be encouraged.

From South Africa's own national experience in negotiating constitutional drafting, we do acknowledge the challenges of such a process. Ultimately, trust between the parties must be developed and the external interference by outside parties must be mitigated. The responsibility therefore lies with us as Council members to continue to support the work of the Constitutional Committee and the role of the United Nations in the mediation process.

South Africa welcomes the relative calm in Syria. However, the precarious air of volatility that persists in parts of Syria is worrying. Reports of the resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other armed groups are particularly disconcerting and have the propensity to lead to further conflict.

We must be clear that States have the sovereign right to address the threat of terrorism in their own countries and any action taken in this regard must be in line with international human rights and international humanitarian law obligations.

Additionally, South Africa remains concerned at the continued presence of external armed forces in Syria and their undue influence in the areas in which they operate. Their continued disregard for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence raises tensions and makes the prospect of sustainable peace more elusive.

The cessation of violence and hostilities is important in order to allow the work of the Constitutional Committee to continue towards long-term peace in Syria. A permanent ceasefire would, in this regard, create an environment conducive to the holding of an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue. In this context, South Africa continues to support the Special Envoy's call for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a disturbing impact on the people of Syria, who are already under severe humanitarian strain, as we heard from Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock on Wednesday (see S/2020/915). The exponential increase in positive COVID-19 cases is greatly concerning; therefore, South Africa calls on the international community to continue to support the United Nations and its partners in ensuring that Syria is able to combat this virus with the necessary medical equipment and supplies. That includes the lifting of all unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on the Syrian Government. Syria's unique circumstances, including the after-effects of a nine-year conflict on health and social

services and infrastructure, the deteriorating economy and the increasing need for humanitarian assistance, have been further impacted by the imposition of unilateral sanctions. This is impacting the efforts of the Syrian Government to effectively respond to this devastating pandemic. These additional burdens exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation, including those who so desperately need humanitarian aid and assistance.

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its position that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The conflict can be resolved only through an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Additionally, South Africa firmly believes that the political and humanitarian tracks in Syria are interlinked and calls on the international community to promote progress in both tracks so as to ensure a sustainable and peaceful settlement to the conflict.

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**Annex XIII****Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

I thank you, Mr. President, and let me also thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his continuing efforts to facilitate the reaching of a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

Along with nearly all Council members, we have for many years emphasized the need for dialogue and the fundamental importance of finding a political solution to the crisis. For this reason, we welcome the convening of the third meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva at the end of August. We are pleased to note that some discussions took place, despite cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) emerging among the delegates.

But almost a year since the Security Council welcomed the launch of the Constitutional Committee in its presidential statement of 8 October 2019 (S/PRST/2019/12), there appears to be very little substantive progress. For tangible progress to be made, all parties, including the Syrian regime, should be ready to make concessions and commit to outcomes to help deliver a lasting end to the conflict.

As we all determined in that 8 October presidential statement, the launch of the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led Constitutional Committee should be the beginning of a political process to end the Syrian conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians. The United Kingdom continues to stand behind its commitment to resolution 2254 (2015) and calls for parallel progress to be made on all aspects of the resolution.

Crucially, this requires a nationwide ceasefire. The Russian Ambassador asks "Why?" Well, it was called for in resolution 2254 (2015), which the Russian Federation voted for. It has been called for repeatedly by Special Envoy Pedersen, including just today. Russia's approach is to say that anybody who objects to the Al-Assad regime's barbarism and brutality is a terrorist. But I think it would be better for all of us and for our debate if we stuck with the United Nations definitions.

We are pleased that the ceasefire in Idlib continues broadly to hold, but we have concerns about the recent increase in air strikes. We call on all parties to respect the agreement of 5 March between Turkey and Russia and to work with the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy on the implementation of a full nationwide ceasefire.

In resolution 2254 (2015), we expressed our support for free and fair elections, administered under the supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate. This means that all those entitled to vote have the right to be registered and must be free to make their choice, that all registered political parties have an equal right to contest the elections and campaign for voter support, and that all votes be counted and the announced results reflect that vote count.

The United Kingdom was clear the Syrian presidential elections in 2014 fell far short of these standards. We would therefore welcome further clarification on how elections will be conducted next year and how they will meet the standards envisaged by the Security Council. Resolution 2254 (2015) is clear that a new constitution should be in place before those elections take place. As such, recent Russian statements that suggest elections and the Constitutional Committee could be decoupled are deeply concerning. They are damaging to the political process and to the unanimous opinion of the Security Council.

On detainees, the release of political prisoners and vulnerable persons, particularly in the context of a nascent political process and an ever-worsening COVID-19 outbreak, should not be a controversial priority. The very least the Syrian regime and other parties can do in the interests of humanity is to grant independent organizations access to detention facilities and to provide loved ones with information as to the whereabouts or the fate of detained or disappeared family members.

The mistreatment and torture of detainees must stop. We take note of the harrowing accounts of torture and detention presented in the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/45/31). This is people being beaten with sticks and cables, bound around tires, hung from ceilings and walls and lashed. These crimes are clear evidence of a breakdown in respect for human life by the regime and others, as well as a lack of will on the part of the regime to engage with resolution 2254 (2015).

The Syrian regime continues to drag its feet on the political track, perhaps in the mistaken hope that it and its allies will succeed in the brutal military suppression of their people. The Syrian authorities have serious questions to answer. How are they taking forward implementation of resolution 2254 (2015)? What steps will they take to unlock progress? What approach are they taking with regard to making the Constitutional Committee a success? What do they have to say to Syrians all around the world who want to return home but are too terrified to do so? What are they willing to do on issues such as detainees and missing persons? We hear from the Syrian regime about everything except its own responsibilities.

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**Annex XIV****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

I thank you, Mr. President, and I also thank Geir Pedersen for his briefing. He and his team did an exceptional job navigating the uncertain and challenging circumstances during last month's third round of Constitutional Committee meetings. The United States appreciates his hard work and also thanks the Swiss hosts for helping safely address the challenges posed to the meetings by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

During the Council's last Syria political meeting before the start of the Constitutional Committee, I outlined three specific benchmarks that we had hoped the Committee would reach during the third round of the meetings (see S/2020/823, annex XIV). Those benchmarks were: a substantive discussion among the Syrian parties on specific constitutional reforms; meeting for longer than a few symbolic days, to ensure a substantive discussion of reforms could occur; and a schedule of future meeting rounds for the remainder of the year.

Unfortunately, the latest round did not result in a substantive discussion of the constitutional reforms; nor did it produce an agreement on a schedule for future meetings. This was a missed opportunity to advance the political process. We acknowledge that the respective Syrian delegations travelled to Geneva in good faith to participate in the meetings. This is a positive step. Moreover, we understand the constraints faced by the United Nations and the Syrian delegations due to COVID-19.

But now is not the time for inaction or to lose hope. It is time to redouble our efforts to support Special Envoy Pedersen to ensure that progress is achieved at the next round, when the parties must move beyond previous discussions of first principles and directly address constitutional reforms. This is the clearest path to the new Syrian constitution that the international community, including the Russian Federation, agreed to in 2015 when we voted in favour of resolution 2254 (2015). A new constitution is the clearest path to any free and fair elections in the country that the international community can embrace.

We encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to take all measures to facilitate the parties' efforts, consistent with the United Nations terms of reference, and we urge the Syrian delegations to agree on the agenda and timing of the next session and continue regular meetings until the end of the year.

Although the parties have a long way to go in realizing a legitimate political process facilitated by the United Nations, we must have progress in the immediate term. These efforts will provide the basis for a new, post-war Syria characterized by a nationwide ceasefire, a new constitution, and United Nations-monitored elections that represent the will of the Syrian people.

The calls by the Secretary-General and Special Envoy Pedersen for the declaration of a permanent nationwide ceasefire in Syria are key to lasting peace in Syria, but such a ceasefire is yet to be achieved. A key component of the 5 March Turkish-Russian ceasefire arrangement, and of ceasefire arrangements for Idlib before it, was a commitment to reopen the M4 and M5 international highways to commercial traffic. Since 5 March, the joint Russian-Turkish patrols concluded three full patrols along the M4 highway out of 25 attempts, and the road is still not open to civilian or commercial traffic. This important step towards implementation of the 5 March ceasefire arrangement should move ahead as soon as possible.

There is a de facto ceasefire now in place in Syria, apart from internationally supported operations against United Nations-designated terrorists. It is crucial for

the political process that all parties acknowledge formally and publicly this reality and endorse a nationwide ceasefire.

Five years ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2254 (2015) as the road map for a peaceful political transition to address the underlying causes of the deadly conflict. This remains the central goal of the United States of America and the reason we are deeply committed to the United Nations-led political process for a political transition.

The Syrian people will not know peace and Syrian refugees will not willingly volunteer to return to Syria and fulfil their legitimate aspirations until they are assured that the Al-Assad regime has changed its behaviour towards the Syrian people.

The policy of the Trump Administration is not dependent on Al-Assad as a person. The Syrian regime is more than that one person; it is a vast network of security services, the military and corrupt businessmen, all of whom contribute to the suffering of the Syrian people. Without fundamental reform, the regime will continue this bad behaviour regardless of who is in charge.

This also extends to changing the regime's relationship with Iran — a relationship that destabilizes the security of Syria's neighbours and threatens Syrian civilians as Iran sends soldiers, weapons and money to prop up the Al-Assad regime. The United States triggered the resolution 2231 (2015) snapback mechanism to keep the existing arms embargo in place and reimpose sanctions. With fewer United Nations arms restrictions, Iran will be emboldened to transfer even more weapons to Syria, putting more civilians and the Syrian political process at risk.

The United States will be unrelenting in our pursuit of a credible political process that addresses the root causes of the Syrian tragedy and fundamentally changes the Al-Assad regime's behaviour. Our pressure campaign will continue until the Al-Assad regime makes the strategic shift from its goal of a military solution, at the expense of the Syrian people and in defiance of the international community, to engaging constructively in a political solution.

There will be no reconstruction funding, no diplomatic recognition and no sanctions relief from the United States of America until the full implementation of the political process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) is irreversibly under way.

There is only one way forward for the Al-Assad regime to escape total collapse and instability. Al-Assad and his supporters must heed the calls of the Council, must adhere to a nationwide ceasefire and must engage seriously on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). If the process does not work out the way it should, in which all of Syria's citizens are properly represented, Syria will only know a future of conflict and the region will continue to suffer.

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**Annex XV****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Pham Hai Anh**

I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his informative briefing today.

At the outset, my delegation welcomes the holding of the third session of the small body within the framework of the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led Constitutional Committee at the end of last month.

It is not an easy task to achieve significant progress within a few days of meeting. However, it is crucial that the parties sit together in an effort to find a solution to the decade-long conflict. While substantial differences may remain, we take note with encouragement that the Syrian parties are working hard towards identifying some common ground and the way to move the process forward.

Viet Nam calls on all parties to continue to actively engage in constructive dialogue and negotiations. It is important to further exchange views and to finalize and agree upon an agenda for the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee.

We would like to reiterate our belief that the only viable path towards sustainable peace and security for the people of Syria is through an inclusive political solution, led and owned by the Syrian people, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015), in full conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and non-interference in its internal affairs.

Regarding the security situation, we believe that only when a period of calm is sustained will the concerned parties have a chance to make tangible achievements on the political track.

Insecurity incidents continue to occur in different parts of Syria, including in the north-west, even though the ceasefire agreement there is largely holding. We are concerned about the resurgence of terrorist activities in some areas. The protection of civilians and critical infrastructure continues to be a great challenge. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, unrest or explosive devices have caused great loss of life, injuries and damage during the recent period. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and to refrain from violence, as well as to continue efforts to counter terrorism, in line with their obligations under international law, including humanitarian law.

As regards diplomatic efforts, we fully support any viable endeavour that could bring hope for a peaceful settlement of the situation in Syria. We would like to take this opportunity to express our support for the work of the United Nations, the Special Envoy and his team, including recent visits and activities, and also for all diplomatic and political engagements of international partners with a view to facilitating a peaceful resolution to the decade-long conflict in Syria.

Last but not least, we would like to stress the importance of continued assistance for Syria in all areas and by all practical means. Without it, the devastating impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic and the socioeconomic and humanitarian crises could undermine the efforts and long-term goals of the political track.

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

[Original: English and Arabic]

A few days ago, on 31 August (see S/2020/870), the Security Council voted on a draft resolution on combating terrorism (S/2020/852). The draft resolution was supposed to contribute to addressing one of the weaknesses and to close an important gap in this field by calling on Member States of our international Organization to repatriate, prosecute or rehabilitate their nationals — “terrorists without borders”, or what some like to call “foreign terrorist fighters” — and by ridding the countries in which these terrorists are active of their evils and crimes.

Unfortunately, the negotiation process on the draft resolution confirmed that some European countries represented in the Council have adhered to their selfish and irresponsible position of refusing to repatriate and hold accountable their hardened terrorist nationals. These countries have also persisted in their unethical attempts to evade their relevant responsibilities, to our great dissatisfaction. It is well known to everyone that my country, Syria, has been targeted in recent years by a brutal terrorist war in which the Governments of known countries have recruited foreign terrorist fighters, provided them with various forms of support and facilitated their infiltration into my country, mainly across our common borders with Turkey, in order to destabilize Syria's security and stability; undermine its sovereignty, territorial unity and integrity, and its role in the region; and pave the way for the perpetration of acts of aggression and occupation under the delusional pretext of fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS).

My delegation reiterates its condemnation and categorical rejection of the selective approach adopted by the Governments of some Member States regarding the issue of confronting the threat posed by terrorism to international peace and security. These very same Governments consider terrorism to be a legitimate tool in which to invest as long as it does not target their countries, and describe the terrorists as the “moderate armed Syrian opposition”, “non-State armed groups”, “revolutionaries”, “jihadists” or “freedom fighters” who do not pose any threat to the peace and security of any country or region of the whole world, provided that they never think of returning to their countries of origin to continue spreading democracy and human rights there.

Consequently, Western countries that have been consistently flooding some poor and developing countries with their nuclear and non-nuclear waste to protect their local environment from pollution are bent on flooding certain countries with their human waste of terrorists, extremists, mercenaries and murderers after they have used them to target certain countries, including my own.

What confirms the relevance of what we say is the fact that some Western Governments still refuse to repatriate their terrorists, together with their families and children. They are also taking illegal and illegitimate measures to evade their responsibility for and duties towards their nationals, including by repatriating, prosecuting or rehabilitating them. For example, in recent years we have seen an effort by but not limited to the United Kingdom to revoke the nationality of British terrorists operating in my country if they should even dare think of going back to the United Kingdom. The same thing has happened in other countries.

The Belgian Government — which shares with Germany the so-called humanitarian penholdership and claims to be concerned about the humanitarian situation in my country — refused to take back the Belgian wives of ISIS fighters

and was content with expressing its readiness to receive children exclusively under the age of 10, despite the decisions issued by the Belgian judiciary demanding that children not be separated from their mothers.

In the reports of the Secretary-General and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, the United Nations has confirmed the existence of tens of thousands of terrorist fighters who came to my country from more than 100 Member States. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in The Hague indicated years ago that there were some 4,300 European terrorists fighting in Syria and Iraq, including 2,838 terrorists from France, Britain, Belgium and Germany — in other words, more than 700 terrorists for each of the four countries that I mentioned, all of which are currently members of the Security Council and NATO. Of course, these numbers have been manipulated and reduced to cover up the practices of the Governments of the four countries. The statistics of the Syrian Government show much higher numbers.

My delegation reaffirms that the success of any political solution to the crisis that would restore security and stability to the entirety of the Syrian Arab Republic and improve the humanitarian situation requires that terrorism be combatted and that the concerned Governments repatriate their cannibalistic nationals from Idlib, which is controlled by the Al-Nusra Front and its affiliated multi-labelled and multifaceted entities. These Governments must also withdraw their monsters from Al-Hol Camp, which is run by the American occupation forces and their affiliated separatist militias, and avoid making this issue the subject of barter or suspicious deals aimed at trying to legitimize or recognize those militias involved in smuggling some ISIS terrorists or children to neighbouring countries, as happened a few days ago when more than 25 children were suffocated and poisoned after consuming excessive doses of sleeping drugs during preparations to smuggle them out of Al-Hol camp in water tanks and boxes.

I do not want to name the Western countries and others that have paid huge sums of money to the armed separatist militias in exchange to take back some of their children or terrorists, in addition to the political statements they have issued in favour of these militias.

As we thank our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Indonesia, for his efforts during the negotiating process related to the draft resolution on repatriating, prosecuting and rehabilitating foreign terrorist fighters, my country demands that the efforts of the Security Council to adopt an alternative and firm draft resolution under the Chapter VII of the Charter be pursued. Such a draft resolution would oblige Member States to cooperate in eliminating the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and to ensure the commitment of the Governments of the countries concerned to repatriate their nationals, hold them accountable for their crimes and take deterrent measures against them in order to assume their share of the international effort to rid the whole world of the scourge of terrorism.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to the availability of information indicating that a number of terrorist members of the White Helmets and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorist organizations, under the supervision of some Turkish officers, are working to prepare for the commission of a new chemical crime in the coming days in the city of Ariha and the Basames area in north-western Syria. They have also prepared the crime scene, kidnapped a number of children and prepared hostages and detainees to use in their crime, in order to lay charges against the Syrian Arab Army and provide a pretext to openly occupy the city of Idlib and its countryside and target all Syrian airports.

The Syrian Government reiterates its commitment to a political solution that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, without any foreign interference, and facilitated by the United Nations, with the indisputable commitment and firm respect of all Member States inside and outside the Council to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Government also reaffirms that it continues to work to combat terrorism and restore all Syrian territories, thereby achieving security, stability and prosperity for the Syrian people.

The Syrian Government also recalls the need to fully adhere to the terms of reference and rules of work of the Constitutional Committee, and that there should be no foreign interference in its work or attempts to impose artificial timetables or deadlines for its work.

In conclusion, we all heard the American President, Donald Trump, confirm days ago that his Administration was planning to assassinate the President of the Syrian Arab Republic. This confirms the level to which that Administration's reckless political thinking and behaviour have descended. Here, I pose a question to the Secretary-General and my colleagues in the Council. When it comes to the United States Administration's claims of support for a peaceful political solution to the crisis in my country that is facilitated by the United Nations, does such a hostile American position directed against the Head of a State Member of the Organization make any sense at all?

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