



Security Council

Seventy-second year

8141st meeting

Tuesday, 19 December 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Bessho	(Japan)
<i>Members:</i>	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/1063, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Egypt, Japan and Sweden.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

Against:

None

Abstaining:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China and Russian Federation,

The President: The draft resolution received 12 votes in favour, none against and 3 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2393 (2017).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the voting.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): It is not every day that the Council takes decisions that have a direct impact on the people affected by conflict, but today is such a day. On behalf of the co-penholders, Egypt and Japan, I strongly welcome the adoption today of resolution 2393 (2017), which maintains a vital humanitarian lifeline for 3 million people in Syria. There is no alternative humanitarian route to access parts of northern and southern Syria. Renewing the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014) for a full 12 months will without doubt save lives and alleviate suffering.

Over the past weeks, we have worked very hard with Council members to reach this agreement. The

resolution requests the Secretary-General to conduct an independent review of these humanitarian operations. That will allow the Council to have an even more solid basis for future decisions. On behalf of the co-penholders, I would like to thank the representatives of all delegations for their constructive engagement during the negotiations on the resolution. I would also like to thank the staff of the United Nations humanitarian agencies, their implementing partners and Turkey and Jordan for enabling these humanitarian deliveries to take place, as well as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and his team here in New York. Since the humanitarian situation remains devastating and the needs enormous, agreement on the resolution was imperative. Discussions on Syria in the Council are often difficult. We therefore see today's adoption as a special accomplishment.

The world has been failing the Syrian people for more than six years, and the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution to the crisis. The Council must spare no effort to end the conflict in Syria. We hope that today's agreement can help build momentum for constructive and broader Council engagement on Syria.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): When the Security Council established a regime for cross-border supplies of humanitarian aid through the United Nations, we all assumed that it was a temporary emergency measure that perforce infringed on Syria's sovereignty. It was introduced in 2014 when the armed conflict was in an acute phase during which at times there was no other way to provide the civilian population with the necessary assistance.

It was intended, and as such written into resolution 2165 (2014), that humanitarian supplies transported through specific border crossings would go to residents throughout Syria, a provision that has never been met. The mechanism mainly serves areas controlled by illegal armed groups that dispose of incoming aid at their discretion. The United Nations has not exercised due control in this area, including of the distribution of humanitarian assistance in Syria. In fact the United Nations agencies do not play the leading role in this plan, which essentially belongs to non-governmental organizations. How and what they are supplying, and to whom, continues to be a mystery wrapped in an enigma. The authorities in Damascus are essentially dealing with a chaotic situation that they are powerless to introduce some order into.

At this point, since our guiding light is first and foremost the interests of the Syrians in need of aid, we have not blocked the latest extension of the transboundary regime. But the proposed text did not take all our priorities into account, so we could not support it. We deplore the unnecessary haste with which resolution 2393 (2017) was adopted. We could have continued the discussions for the sake of reaching a consensus.

We expect the Secretary-General to review the transboundary mechanism within the established time frame with the aim of bringing its activities to their inevitable end. We hope to see recommendations on how to improve its monitoring during the current transitional stage, while the Syrian Government's opinion must be taken into account without fail. The Secretary-General must also give the Security Council detailed information every month about where the aid is being sent, what it consists of and in what quantities. We hope the reports will not be a formality. We will double-check all the information that the Council receives.

We are grateful to the delegations of Egypt and Sweden for their careful, honest and constructive work. Unfortunately, thanks to the position taken by various Council members that attempts to present the transboundary mechanism as an ideal plan that needs no improvement, and to freeze it as it is indefinitely, some important amendments that we proposed were not included in the final draft. Within the framework of the planned review, we would like to hear from the Secretary-General as to how the effectiveness and transparency of the mechanism could be improved, as well as some details on the partners of the United Nations in this area. Having given permission for these cross-border shipments, the Security Council has the right to know these things. But it would seem that there is some mystery here involving some kind of carefully guarded extraneous interests. The result is that the people and the sovereignty of Syria suffer, despite the fact that in every resolution we adopt we reaffirm our commitment to those fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The situation in the country is radically different now, and the mechanism for cross-border supplies is a remnant of what is past. In our view, it will be important to work to gradually end this rudimentary plan, based on a divided Syria. The United Nations humanitarian agencies should begin to reorient themselves to traditional ways of working in the country in cooperation

with its official authorities and in accordance with the universal principles of humanitarian assistance. We hope that the Secretariat will start making plans for the gradual abandonment of the cross-border shipments. A year from now, the question of whether to extend the mandate of resolution 2165 (2014) will loom.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): Today, the Council came together on an issue of critical importance. Our adoption today of resolution 2393 (2017) enables the United Nations to continue to provide vital, lifesaving cross-border assistance to millions of Syrians who need it to survive. Thanks to its mandate, more than 1 million Syrians receive assistance from the United Nations and its partners every month. This includes clean drinking water, medicine and food. Since resolution 2165 (2014) was first adopted in 2014, nearly 17,000 trucks delivering aid have rolled into Syria. Each of those trucks was fully vetted by the dedicated United Nations monitoring mechanism. It is no exaggeration to say that this cross-border authorization for humanitarian assistance has saved lives in Syria. We reaffirm our commitment to supporting the delivery of cross-line and cross-border humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people.

While the unfettered provision of cross-border assistance is crucial to reducing the suffering in Syria, it is no substitute for a political solution to the conflict. The United States remains committed to resolution 2254 (2015) as the sole legitimate blueprint for a political resolution to this conflict. We call on all the parties to reaffirm support for the Geneva process as the only framework for a viable Syrian political process.

The United States was proud to vote in favour of resolution 2393 (2017) today, and we will continue our robust support to the people of Syria in the days to come.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China is deeply concerned about the current humanitarian situation in Syria and attaches great importance to efforts to mitigate it. With the implementation of the de-escalation areas in Syria, the overall situation has improved, which has in turn created favourable conditions for such operations. The international community should make concerted efforts to ensure that progress in this area continues.

In our view, the international community's humanitarian operations in Syria must be based on the guiding humanitarian principles of the United Nations

and relevant international law. We must ensure that all Syrians in the de-escalation areas receive timely help. The cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance is a special measure taken in special circumstances, and it must be carried out on a basis of full respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and in strict compliance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The associated operations should be subjected to United Nations monitoring, whose transparency should be improved, while efforts must be made to strengthen coordination with the Syrian Government.

Against that backdrop, China participated constructively in the negotiations on resolution 2393 (2017), which extends the mandate for cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance. China has on many occasions underscored its hope that the parties will continue their patient consultations in order that consensus may be achieved. China commends the sponsors, including co-penholders Egypt and Sweden, for their efforts to promote consensus on the resolution. We note that the sponsors took on board recommendations by some members to enhance monitoring over the delivery of cross-border deliveries. We also note, however, that some of members' legitimate concerns were not fully included. We believe there is still room for improving the resolution. Council members should have been allowed more time to carry out consultations to reach consensus. In those circumstances, China had to abstain in the voting.

The political process in Syria has entered a critical stage. The international community must be firmly behind the United Nations so that the Organization can play a role as the main channel for mediation in order to help the parties in Syria to find a settlement acceptable to all through peaceful negotiations. That is the only possible way to alleviate the suffering of Syrian people and once and for all find a comprehensive, just and proper solution to the question of Syria.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017), which extends for a year the mandate of the cross-border relief system for Syria. We thank the co-penholders in that regard. In spite of differences in approach, the members of the Security Council were able to move forward given the humanitarian imperative. This renewal is in fact vital in every sense of the word, for the provision of cross-border assistance is a matter of life or death for

millions of Syrians. This one-year renewal is crucial so that humanitarian actors can enjoy a minimum degree of predictability in their work. Continuing the functioning of the mechanism, which to date has shown its value on the ground, was also necessary. Lastly, the changes made to the text — which, to tell the truth, not everyone found appropriate — did not change the structure of the text. In that way, the resolution makes it possible for the United Nations and its partners to continue to work as they have done up until now in order to respond to the crisis and the humanitarian situation.

Of course, we would have preferred that this assistance would no longer be necessary and that the situation would have sufficiently improved so that cross-line humanitarian aid would have been sufficient to respond to the emergency. However, one must necessarily acknowledge that the situation on the ground continues to be catastrophic. Today more than ever before, more than 13 million people need humanitarian assistance — as compared with 10 million at the time of the previous extension of the mandate.

In that context, I should like to underscore the seriousness of the situation in eastern Ghouta, which is stomach-churning even if, in many respects, it is below the radar of the media. But let us be clear: a tragedy on the scale of that in Aleppo is taking shape in eastern Ghouta. Four hundred thousand people are under siege, practically without access to food or medical assistance. Approximately 500 people, including 137 children, still await emergency medical evacuation, as requested by the United Nations weeks and weeks ago but never authorized. The regime is starving the population to cause the collapse of all remaining opposition, which is unacceptable. That is a grave violation of international law, in addition to being a moral violation. It is essential that all those with influence over the Syrian regime should pressure it to put an end to that totally unacceptable situation. That scenario makes it all the more crucial to keep in place the United Nations mechanism for providing cross-border assistance. Today's resolution also makes clear reference to the situation in eastern Ghouta and calls for the lifting of all sieges.

We all know that the only way to put an end to the humanitarian crisis in the long term is through a return to stability, which requires a political solution. As President Macron said yesterday, we must develop a political solution that leads to lasting peace and ensures that all minorities will be protected. It is

just such an inclusive political solution that we want promote together, as it is the only one that can put an end to the Syrian tragedy once and for all. There is no other legitimate framework to achieve that than the intra-Syrian talks being held under the auspices of the United Nations at Geneva. In that regard, we reiterate our full and unrestricted support for Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, to whom we shall listen with great interest later this morning (see S/PV.8142).

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) today for a further 12 months. Resolution 2393 (2017) will allow us to continue to deliver urgently needed humanitarian aid across conflict lines and borders to reach the people of Syria. We thank the co-penholders for their work, and we regret that the adoption was not unanimous, especially since the penholders ensured, over many weeks, that they listened to concerns of all members of the Security Council and took on board proposals from many of us, including Russia.

The renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) gives the people of Syria a small ray of hope. The delivery of cross-border aid provides a lifeline for millions of Syrians who would be impossible to reach in a sustained manner from within Syria. However, we must take stock. It is three years since resolution 2165 (2014) was adopted. Despite the intention to ease the suffering of the Syrian people, the situation for them has worsened: 13 million people are still in need of humanitarian assistance, which is 2 million more than when we adopted 2165 (2014). On top of that, an additional 2.3 million people have fled Syria, countless others have been killed and, in some areas, malnutrition has increased fivefold during this year alone.

Yes, the renewal of the resolution will ensure that aid will continue to reach some of the millions who depend upon it. But, despite the resolution, the vast majority of the 420,000 people in 10 besieged areas will be denied access to aid because of blockages imposed by the regime — 94 per cent of those people are in eastern Ghouta, a so-called de-escalation zone. Such zones are meant to ensure a cessation of hostilities and an increase in the amount of humanitarian aid. In reality there is little or no actual de-escalation taking place in eastern Ghouta.

The regime has used the de-escalation designation to cut off access to life-saving medical and food aid. The regime is starving the people of eastern Ghouta to

death, in contravention of international humanitarian law. The situation has now reached a critical point: more than 10 per cent of all children under the age of 5 suffer from acute malnutrition, which is the highest rate recorded since the conflict began. Medical facilities are overwhelmed. Five hundred and seventy-two people urgently need medical evacuation, including 65 who are under the age of five. Eighteen children are at imminent risk of death.

Therefore, once again I urge Russia to use all its influence over the regime to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance and to ensure that those in urgent medical need can be evacuated. It is just a 30-minute journey from eastern Ghouta to Damascus to receive treatment. It really is a matter of life and death. We call on Russia to use its influence over the regime so that one more person does not die waiting for treatment — 15 is already too many — and so that another child does not die for want of a 30-minute journey — six is already too many. Those who require treatment must be allowed to leave now. The people of eastern Ghouta have suffered enough. Karim is a two-month-old baby. His mother was killed by regime artillery bombardment. He lost his eye and had his skull broken in the same attack. We must stand in solidarity with Karim. The siege must be lifted immediately.

Ultimately, the suffering of the Syrian people will only end when the conflict ends. There must be a political settlement. We must all unite to support Staffan de Mistura. The Geneva talks represent the only sustainable path to peace, and all international efforts must support that process. We commend the opposition, which has maintained their commitment to direct negotiations without preconditions and have engaged constructively in the talks. The opposition's efforts presented a perfect opportunity for real progress to be made in the last round of talks with respect to the substance of a political transition. Those hopes were dashed by the regime. They showed their utter contempt for the talks. They arrived late. They took a long weekend in Damascus. They refused to engage in direct negotiations with the opposition.

The Al-Assad regime has made aid a weapon of war. It is restricting humanitarian access to the besieged populations. Blocking aid convoys from the United Nations and other impartial humanitarian organizations after approving them is abominable, and it must stop. The renewal of the resolution today is a clear signal to the regime that the international community is united in

its determination to ensure that aid must not be used as a weapon. Aid must be delivered at speed, unhindered, to those who need it.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): Italy welcomes the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017), and should like to thank the three penholders, Egypt, Japan and Sweden, for the tireless efforts that made it possible for us to adopt this important resolution today.

Italy voted in favour of resolution 2393 (2017) because it authorizes the continuation of life-saving cross-border assistance in Syria. Such activities continue to be complemented by other modalities of assistance and are indispensable for the survival of civilians living in areas serviced by them. Significantly, the resolution we have just adopted renews the authorization for these operations for a period of 12 months, thereby giving both beneficial humanitarian actors a predictable and sustainable time horizon going forward. Given the volatility of the situation in Syria and the continued high level of humanitarian needs, such a time frame represents the necessary minimum extension for the meaningful renewal of the measures authorized by this resolution.

As we have repeatedly heard in this Chamber, the true limit of humanitarian access in Syria lies in the persistent low level of cross-line delivery to rebel-held areas within the county, which are not being reached by cross-border assistance. Sadly, several previous Council resolutions regarding the obligation to provide timely, unhindered and unfettered access for humanitarian aid have not been implemented. That is due notably to the obstacles set up by the Syrian regime, which have led to the humanitarian tragedy we have heard of month after month in this Chamber.

Eastern Ghouta is where this humanitarian tragedy is currently being played out. It is there that the civilian population, despite the de-escalation agreement, is being besieged and bombarded by the regime. It is there that while humanitarian convoys are prevented from reaching those in need, the staples that are entering Ghouta through commercial flows have seen their prices increase by up to tenfold, and the profits thereof line the pockets of those who control such flows. It is there that children and women die due to the lack of medications and the regime's denial of emergency evacuation to hospitals just a few kilometres away. We would have therefore liked to have seen in this resolution a clear commitment to reviewing not only the cross-border

operation but also the cross-line operation, due to the repeated failure to deliver.

We welcome the renewal of this resolution and the continuation of the cross-border assistance that is so greatly needed on the ground. We reiterate the call to lift all sieges so as to ensure that cross-line assistance is promptly delivered, to allow urgent medical evacuation and to ensure that nationwide humanitarian access is rapid, safe and unhindered.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we should like to highlight the work carried out by the penholders, whose substantial efforts resulted in a text that all members could support. Nevertheless, Bolivia abstained in the voting due to changes in the situation on the ground.

As a result of the Astana agreements, it was possible to establish four de-escalation zones, reduce violence on the ground and thereby provide better humanitarian assistance to certain areas. However, we believe that the text does not fully reflect the changes on the ground. Some proposals made during the negotiation process were not reflected in the final text, such as regarding the transparency of the monitoring mechanism, the management of information and control over those non-governmental organizations involved in humanitarian operations, including beneficiary reports, distribution sites and all other aspects of their work. That is why today Bolivia abstained in the voting.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We voted in favour of resolution 2393 (2017), on cross-border assistance in accordance with the following points. We thank everyone who took an active part in the process of drafting this important document, and we would like to thank the penholders for humanitarian issues — the Missions of Sweden, Egypt and Japan — for their excellent work. We express our gratitude to all delegations that have made important compromises in this matter. That is a demonstration of the fact that by showing unity we can do much.

Kazakhstan remains committed to all Security Council resolutions aimed at resolving humanitarian issues in Syria. We believe that it is very important to preserve all possible humanitarian access modalities, including cross-border systems, which are indispensable in bringing humanitarian aid to millions of people in northern and southern Syria. Cross-border assistance, as authorized under resolution 2165 (2014)

and subsequent resolutions, remains a critical element of the humanitarian response in Syria. However, we urge United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners to closely monitor the management of cross-border aid in order to benefit those in need. Kazakhstan supports all international efforts aimed at finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We hope that agreements reached within the frameworks of the Astana platform and the Geneva process will be fully implemented.

Lastly, we are convinced that only full compliance with the ceasefire agreement will directly improve the humanitarian situation and reduce the level of violence. However, we stress that no initiative aimed at establishing peace in the world's conflict zones can be successful without the support of the Security Council.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): As we see from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1057), as from previous ones, the key negative trends that characterize the Syrian humanitarian track continue. Despite the appearance of active political engagement, we have not seen any steady progress in the area of sustainable humanitarian access.

The situation with respect to the delivery of humanitarian aid remains basically the same as last year. There are still nearly 420,000 people trying to survive in conditions of total siege. That is unacceptable. Eastern Ghouta stands out particularly, with drastic food shortages and a lack of basic services. That area accounts for nearly 96 per cent of all the besieged population of Syria. There needs to be an immediate lifting of all sieges. Humanitarian access should never be employed as a war tactic.

Against that backdrop, the preservation of the mechanism of cross-border humanitarian assistance delivery is a matter of life and death for thousands of Syrians. In fact, as has already been pointed out here, the mechanism constitutes a vital humanitarian lifeline for 3 million people in Syria. In such circumstances, Ukraine strongly supported and wholeheartedly welcomes the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017) by the vast majority of Council members. It also highly appreciates the efforts invested in that endeavour by the humanitarian penholders. Our sincerest hope is that the cross-border assistance will continue to make a life-saving difference on the ground.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We welcome the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017), renewing resolution 2165

(2014) for one year. We express appreciation to all three penholders — Egypt, Japan and Sweden — for their role in facilitating the negotiations on the resolution. The extensive consultation they held with all members and the extra efforts they exerted to ensure a participatory process made it possible to narrow differences to a large extent. It is our view that they made all the necessary efforts, and that they did so in good faith. We have always felt that it would not be impossible to make progress if we put the humanitarian needs and continued suffering of the Syrians at the centre of our deliberations. We seem to have made some progress in that regard, and we commend Council members for their constructive engagement and flexibility in that regard.

The cross-border programme is a vital mechanism for reaching millions of Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance. The Council's decision today will certainly contribute to saving lives. We hope that the implementation of the resolution will facilitate the delivery of aid to millions of Syrians in need of urgent assistance through the cross-border and cross-line deliveries.

The resolution goes a long way towards addressing the concerns of some delegations by requesting the Secretary-General to conduct a review of the cross-border operations with the objective of further strengthening the United Nations monitoring mechanism, while taking into consideration the views of relevant parties, including the Syrian Government, relevant neighbouring countries, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners. The resolution also provides an opportunity to receive detailed information about cross-border and cross-line deliveries, thereby further enhancing transparency. We therefore saw no weighty reason why we should not support the resolution.

Finally, we all know that it is only through a comprehensive political solution that the suffering of the Syrian people can come to an end. One hopes that all the necessary efforts will be made to achieve that objective, no matter the existing and current difficulties.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation welcomes the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017), renewing for 12 months the mandate of the mechanism for the cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid to thousands of innocent Syrian victims in need. For that reason, the Senegalese delegation congratulates the penholder delegations of Sweden, Egypt and Japan. We also commend all

other delegations that contributed positively to the proposed amendments.

The mechanism, of course, could be improved. In that regard, we await the review to be conducted by the Secretary-General. In the meantime, it is essential that the resolution take into account the fact that millions of Syrians remain victims and in need of humanitarian

assistance. We are interested to hear what Mr. Lowcock and especially Mr. Staffan de Mistura will have to say with respect to the political process, given that resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) are yet to be fully implemented.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.