



# Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

**8708**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 29 January 2020, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Dang . . . . .	(Viet Nam)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium . . . . .	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
	China . . . . .	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
	France . . . . .	Mrs. Gueguen
	Germany . . . . .	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Syihab
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. A Barry
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
	South Africa . . . . .	Ms. Goolab
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Baati
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Allen
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Norman-Chalet

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Khawla Matar, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Ms. Matar.

**Ms. Matar:** It is an honour for me to brief the Security Council today. The Special Envoy is in Damascus, where he is seeking to de-escalate the situation in the north-west and to renew progress in the United Nations-facilitated political process. Let me update the Council on where we currently stand.

First, on the political track, the Special Envoy continues to engage the Syrian parties and key international stakeholders to unblock progress on the difficult path out of the Syrian conflict and towards the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). One aspect of that effort is the Constitutional Committee, which has been established and has been convened twice in Geneva. It comprises representatives nominated by the Government of Syria, representatives nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission and a middle third of civil society. As per the Special Envoy's briefing to the Council last month (see S/PV. 8696), disputes between the co-Chairs over the agenda prevented the meeting of the small body during the second round.

The Special Envoy and the Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Al-Moualem, agreed in Damascus today on the importance of strict observance of the agreed terms of reference and rules of procedure. They also discussed all issues related to the overall political process. After communications with the co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission in late December and talks today in Damascus with the co-Chair nominated

by the Government of Syria, the Special Envoy is working to narrow the differences and hopes to be in a position to convene the Constitutional Committee shortly. He hopes that the Constitutional Committee's sessions will continue with a steady rhythm in the months ahead. There is a need to build trust and confidence, which can contribute to opening the door to a broader political process.

Meanwhile, I am pleased to officially inform the Security Council that, for the first time, the working group on the release of detainees/abductees, the handover of bodies and the identification of missing persons — made up of Iran, Russia, Turkey and the United Nations — will convene, as part of an ongoing rotation, in Geneva later in February. We realize that progress on that file is not easy, but it would be of enormous significance to many Syrians to see the pace and scale of releases increase. Special Envoy Pedersen underlined the importance of that issue in his consultations today with the Government of Syria.

Let us recall, however, that there is a grave, and in many ways worsening, situation on the ground. The alarming scale of military operations in the north-west has resulted in devastating humanitarian consequences for the 3 million people in the Idlib area, including hundreds of thousands of displaced persons, reported airstrikes, including on civilian infrastructure, mutual shelling and civilian deaths in and around the north-west. We reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate ceasefire and continue to press all parties for a sustained de-escalation in the entire north-west, along with all other areas of Syria, as well as reminding all parties of their obligations to protect civilians.

Countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups is imperative. It is true that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other proscribed groups, including foreign fighters, are a major force in Idlib. As the Special Envoy has stressed, countering such groups must be done through an approach that ensures the protection of civilians and fully respects international humanitarian law and human rights law, and it is likely to be effective only with genuine cooperation among the relevant players.

In the north-east, the various ceasefires and understandings that were reached continue to provide relative calm. However, the situation remains turbulent, with some impact on civilians. In recent weeks, armed activity has continued, as have other tensions, including between international actors. A sustainable

arrangement inclusive of all actors that respects Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity remains imperative. Protracted tensions in southern Syria also remain a source of concern. The de-escalation of violence leading to a cessation of hostilities across all of Syria is more critical than ever, and the presence of five foreign armies operating in the country is a reminder of the continuing dangers the crisis presents to international peace and security and of the challenges to the restoration of Syria's sovereignty.

The Council is aware of the serious humanitarian challenges in Syria. Let me also stress that the economic situation of all Syrians, in all areas, has continued to sharply decline, with a number of factors combining to increase the economic hardship facing the population. That was impressed upon us by the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which convened in Geneva last month. They shared frustrations and first-hand experiences of the daily suffering of Syrians living with severe shortages of basic commodities. The Syrian Women's Advisory Board spoke of the suffering of Syrian women in that context, many of whom are now primary breadwinners and face hate and risks of violence and exploitation. We believe a broader process must deliver in that regard too.

In all his international engagement this month, including valuable consultations with senior European, United States, Arab and Turkish officials in Rome and in Davos and recent wide-ranging positive talks in Moscow with the foreign and defence ministers of Russia, the Special Envoy has continued to stress the importance of their working together to support a broader process. Indeed, it is apparent from all his consultations that the Constitutional Committee is not sufficient to address the real concerns of all parties. There is a need for a broader process that builds trust and confidence step by step. It could develop with reciprocal and mutually reinforcing actions by Syrians and outsiders alike, delivering tangible improvements for Syrians with a view to establishing a safe, calm and neutral environment. Such an environment would also help give confidence to refugees about the possibility of a safe, voluntary and dignified return and to those who wish to support the reconstruction of the war-torn country. The Special Envoy believes that there are modest openings to further pursue that work, and he will be doing so with deliberation and care. Nevertheless, it still requires genuine dialogue among key international players to deepen.

We continue to prioritize accommodating the full range of Syrian voices in the process. Last week, we had the honour to welcome Syrians from inside and outside Syria to consultations of the Syrian Civil Society Support Room in Geneva. They raised humanitarian, socioeconomic and political concerns and stressed the need for maximum transparency and inclusivity in the political process. For our part, as the United Nations, we will continue to consult widely and build bridges wherever we can. The Special Envoy will continue to press for an end to the violence and work towards a resumption of the Constitutional Committee and further detainee releases. He will also continue to seek to unlock the kind of comprehensive political process that would result in a lasting political settlement that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and respects and restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

**The President:** I thank Ms. Matar for her briefing.

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

**Ms. Norman-Chalet** (United States of America): I very much thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar for her briefing and updates today. We continue to extend our full support to her and to Special Envoy Pedersen. Monthly briefings to the Security Council remain crucial to guiding our efforts to end the conflict; therefore, we appreciate her availability today.

Every facet of the United Nations-led political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015) is paralysed, and we need to be honest and clear about why. The simple truth is that the Al-Assad regime is determined to pursue a military, rather than a political, end to the conflict. For proof we need to look no further than the more than 350,000 people displaced by the regime and Russia's indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Idlib since December 2019. While Damascus and Moscow deliberately stall the United Nations-facilitated political process and deprive millions of humanitarian assistance, they pursue an illusory military solution in Syria — one that will undoubtedly fail to bring about a lasting resolution of the conflict. The assault on Idlib that is under way represents the largest violation of resolution 2254 (2015) to date, with humanitarian consequences that will prove both devastating and lasting. Attacks on the people of north-west Syria by forces of the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran

and Hizbullah are unjustifiable and will directly lead to life-threatening shortages of food, medicine and other basic necessities.

In the light of those grave developments, our message today is that the Council must be united in telling the Syrian authorities and Russia that we will not abide by their pursuit of a military solution. We must demand Syria and Russia's full, irreversible and verifiable implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). The United States will maintain economic and diplomatic pressure until the day the regime and its sponsors accept such a reform. Actors who obstruct, disrupt or prevent a ceasefire in northern Syria will be further subjected to United States sanctions, and those who work to intimidate or prevent displaced persons from voluntarily returning to places of residence in Syria will not be allowed to do so with impunity.

The United States remains deeply concerned about the escalation of Syrian and Russian military attacks in Idlib, for humanitarian reasons and because of the inextricable link between the security of Idlib province and the fate of the Constitutional Committee. The Al-Assad regime and its allies must end their offensive in north-west Syria immediately because of the grave impact it is having on the United Nations-facilitated political process. To those allies of the regime participating in the assault on Idlib, the United States is fully prepared to level sanctions, in accordance with the recently signed Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, against foreign military contractors, mercenaries or paramilitary forces that are knowingly operating in a military capacity inside Syria for the Governments of Syria, Russia or Iran. The United Nations and the Council must work towards the implementation of a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We must also reject the regime and Russia's tactical announcement of the so-called pauses and ceasefires in north-west Syria to cast themselves as peacemakers. They are ceasefires in name only and are repeatedly followed by deadly attacks on civilians and fresh efforts by the regime to stall the work of the Constitutional Committee. The delays of the Committee are directed by the Al-Assad regime and are accompanied by a military push by the regime and its allies into north-west Syria, killing hundreds and further displacing close to 1 million Syrians.

Moreover, the Russian Federation has publicly threatened to end the United Nations vital life-saving cross-border aid to the very part of Syria under assault

by Syrian and Russian forces by July, when resolution 2504 (2020) expires. Those threats serve to spread even more fear among Syrian civilians and compel the Syrian political opposition to surrender. Instead of spending its dwindling financial resources on a costly and brutal military campaign against its own people, the Al-Assad regime should be spending to provide its people with sustenance and essential services.

While the Al-Assad regime uses massive amounts of fuel in its military attacks against the people of Idlib, Syrian civilians cannot afford fuel to heat their homes or cook their children's food. While the Al-Assad regime forces its people to go without electricity, it spends millions of dollars on expensive rockets and missiles that kill Syrian civilians. And, while soaring prices have put basic goods out of reach for the vast majority of Syrians, Al-Assad-regime elites continue to live lives of luxury.

Critically, the Al-Assad regime and Russia fail to recognize that the military solution will never resolve the underlying reasons for the Syrian conflict. Therefore, if they continue to pursue this solution, instability, insurgency and violent extremism will not abate. Absent a political solution to the conflict facilitated by the United Nations Special Envoy and in line with resolution 2254 (2015), the United States will continue to withhold reconstruction funding from the regime, as should the United Nations in keeping with its stated principles and parameters to withhold reconstruction funding until the political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) is complete.

The Al-Assad regime will not be legitimate in the eyes of the Syrian people until the regime allows for the basic demands of its citizens to be heard through freedom of assembly and elections; until the regime delivers on basic necessities, such as food and water; and until the regime ensures accountability for years of atrocities, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions and torture

The only way to begin bridging those divides is for the Al-Assad regime and its leaders to move forward with the steps outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). The culture of the regime's institutions must change if it is ever to regain the trust of the Syrian people. The United States will maintain forceful economic and diplomatic pressure until the day the regime and its sponsors accept such reform.

**Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia): First of all, let me thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar for her briefing, which, among other things, also mentioned the concerns about military operations in Idlib province in the north-west of Syria. As we said this morning (see S/PV.8707), Estonia joins those countries calling for an immediate ceasefire in Idlib and across Syria. In looking at the Constitutional Committee, it is clear that challenges surrounding its work are growing. Little — not to say no progress — has been made since last month's briefing in this Chamber (see S/PV.8696).

We are four months into the Committee's meetings, but even a proper agenda is yet to be agreed on. Is that really progress that would satisfy the Syrian people or the Security Council? The apparent deadlock is a direct result of the Syrian authorities' unwillingness to commit themselves fully to the political process, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015). Instead, Damascus has gradually distanced itself from the provisions of the Council, despite the continuous efforts of the Special Envoy, who was in Syria just today.

There are those who insist on not setting artificial deadlines to the work of the Constitutional Committee. However, let us be absolutely clear: no deadlines should not mean no results. No deadlines cannot mean no results. We use this opportunity to ask our Syrian colleagues: What can be done to bring Damascus to the negotiations table to actually seek a comprehensive solution? If undermining the work of Constitutional Committee continues, then we must be ready to look at other pending issues. Fortunately, resolution 2254 (2015) is rich in means to enhance the political process.

In that regard, we also want to underline the crucial role of confidence-building measures that can give the political process more substance. Ordinary Syrians, as well as Ms. Matar, have highlighted the issue of arbitrarily detained and missing people. Syrians, both within the country and abroad, want to know the fate of their friends and relatives and are demanding the release of those who have been arrested without any just cause whatsoever.

We recognize the Astana format working group for its efforts in the mutual release of detainees, and we welcome the announcement of a joint committee with the United Nations. However, equal exchanges are not sufficient, owing to the disparity in the number of detainees. The Syrian Government holds eight

times more prisoners than other groups and parties combined — eight times more.

In that light, it is clear that equal prisoner exchanges are not sustainable for the long-term. What is instead required is a unilateral release of arbitrarily detained people, especially political prisoners, women and minors. Such an act of unilateral release would help to restore the trust of Syrians in State institutions, send a positive message to Syrians abroad and support the political process, as well as the work of the Constitutional Committee.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Ms. Khawla Matar, for her briefing. This morning we had an opportunity to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.8707). We can only reiterate our call on Western donors to reject the practice of double standards with regard to whether to the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Despite the trend marked by the stabilization of the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, much work remains to be done on a number of fronts. The political process requires the most attention. Russia remains committed to the principle of reaching a peaceful settlement to the Syrian crisis through political and diplomatic means. In the interests of advancing that process, the Constitutional Committee was established under the auspices of the United Nations and began its work in Geneva on 30 October 2019. Its establishment was made possible through the critical help of the Astana format.

We value Special Envoy Pedersen and his team's approach to creating the necessary conditions for the negotiators to develop a culture of dialogue and mutual trust, which is an important and indispensable component for achieving success. Constructive and useful meetings among the Special Envoy, Minister for Foreign Affairs Lavrov and Minister of Defence Shoygu took place in Moscow on 24 January. Discussions focused on how to step up joint work both in Geneva and through the Astana format, in which Russia, Turkey and Iran are successfully working together. We expressed our full support for Mr. Pedersen's efforts. The visit by Mr. Pedersen currently under way in Damascus also seems very important to us, as there he will have an opportunity to discuss the prospects for another round of Constitutional Committee consultations.

Like the Special Envoy, we are not dramatizing the fact that just a couple of months after the establishment of that body, no momentous results have been achieved. That is absolutely natural. We believe that it is counterproductive to dramatize the situation and designate the guilty parties. We will do all we can to help create the conditions necessary to enable progress at the next session of the drafting commission, to be held at the earliest opportunity.

Combating terrorism in Syria is also a priority, and Idlib remains one of terrorism's last strongholds in the country, with civilians being held hostage there. The Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham fighters and their subordinates are not honouring the ceasefire agreements. In early January, a ceasefire was announced upon the proposal of Russia and Turkey. However, terrorists violate it daily. They attack and shell the Syrian army and civilian facilities, as well as the Russian air base in Khmeimim. Naturally, such armed provocations cannot go unanswered.

We have long pointed out the need to expeditiously separate members of the armed opposition, if any remain in Idlib, from the terrorists. At the same time, we are concerned about the spread of terrorists from Idlib into other parts of Syria and their infiltration into other countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

We would also like to draw attention to the note of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, as well as media reports, regarding the plans of terrorists to organize yet another round of provocations and to use chemical weapons in Syria. We find those signals very disturbing, since we know full well how such actions are used for military and political purposes.

Another very important area of work in Syria that affects both the political process and efforts to improve the humanitarian situation is the cooperation between Moscow and Ankara on the implementation of the 22 October memorandum in order to prevent armed clashes in the north-east of the country. Russia continues to assist in establishing contacts between the Kurds and Damascus and mitigating the damage caused by the illegal occupation of the area and the dangerous experiment in demographic engineering that was staged there.

In conclusion, I would like to briefly touch upon the following story. Yesterday, Washington, D.C., published its vision for a Middle East settlement. I

will not go into details, as the document requires further review and warrants separate discussion in the future. However, we cannot fail to note that the maps contained in the plan show the Golan Heights as Israeli territory. In that connection, we would like to remind the geographers who crafted the map that neither we nor resolution 497 (1981) recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights is illegally occupied Syrian territory.

**Mr. Heusgen** (Germany): I too would like to thank the Special Envoy and the Deputy Special Envoy, who is here today, for their work and the report.

I would like to begin my statement where the Deputy Special Envoy began — with the Constitutional Committee. For us, it is no surprise that, starting with the second round of talks, the Syrian regime decided to obstruct and delay its work. We must recognize that no agreement has been reached. I am not as complacent as my Russian colleague, who said that this was to be expected. I disagree; this should not have been expected. The conflict should have a political rather than a military solution. I have said before that if our Russian friends would stop providing military support to the Syrian regime for only two or three weeks, the Syrians would run to the Constitutional Committee, be constructive and come to a political solution. The real reason is that there is still the belief that peace, security, stability and the well-being of the people in Syria can be achieved by military means. That is why we see the military advance by the Syrian and Russian forces in the north-west of the country, where the city of Maarat Al-Numan was taken — very triumphantly, we hear.

What does that mean in practice? It means that since the conflict in Idlib started, more than 1,500 civilians — including 430 women and 290 children — have died. Over the past two months, an additional 400,000 have been displaced. The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross said that we are just taking this for granted and that the international community no longer raises its voice in protest. We must look at the fate of the Syrian children, who have suffered immeasurably. The latest report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic shows that their lives have been cut short by bombs and torture. They have suffered the consequences of detention and schools have been destroyed. Some children in Syria have never had any formal education. An entire generation threatens to be lost. At this very

moment, children in Idlib are dying and being displaced and, in some cases, recruited to join armed groups.

The Russian Ambassador just spoke about provocations from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which may be true, but that does not warrant the indiscriminate attacks that we have been witnessing. A look at the area shows hospitals attacked and destroyed, markets destroyed and many civilians killed. That is why, in our view, the only solution is a political solution. We need to focus on one aspect that my colleague from Estonia just mentioned — the question of detainees. The Syrian regime has arbitrarily detained tens of thousands of innocent Syrians merely because they dared to make use of their freedom of expression. It has tortured thousands of innocent Syrians to death — and we have seen horrible pictures — merely because they dared to ask for political reforms and freedom in Syria. The Syrian regime has called ordinary citizens terrorists in order to create a pretext for their arrest and torture.

Since last August, when we dedicated a Council meeting to the issue of detainees and missing persons (see S/PV.8593), there has, unfortunately, been no progress on ending those gravest of human rights violations. To the contrary, those violations continue throughout Syria, even in so-called reconciled areas. We must therefore push the Syrian regime to release the prisoners and ensure that families are informed of the fate of the tens of thousands of missing persons and that the United Nations or the International Committee of the Red Cross has unconditional access to all detention facilities under the control of the regime.

Lastly, I wish to reiterate a point that I make here regularly and one which it still does not seem that our Russian friends understand. If we want to have lasting peace and reconciliation in the country, we need accountability. We need to establish responsibilities for the horrendous crimes that have been committed and we need accountability. Only that can serve as a basis for reconciliation in Syria.

By the way, with regard to allegations of Germany applying double standards on the humanitarian front, my country is among the largest humanitarian aid donors to Syria. All efforts related to 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 Commission of Inquiry have

to be supported to ensure that none of the crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict goes unpunished and that all perpetrators are held accountable. That is what we need if we are to achieve national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar for her briefing this afternoon.

It has been said many times before in this Chamber that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The only solution is through a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, credible, balanced and inclusive political process. We reiterate those sentiments again today.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines appreciates the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen as he continues to work assiduously to support the wider political process. We must also applaud the commitment to ensuring the full engagement of all segments of society in the Constitutional Committee and that the representation of women who are involved remains at the minimum threshold of 30 per cent. It is our sincere hope that the next session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee will be convened soon and will yield positive results, and we encourage all parties to remain committed to working together in a spirit of mutual respect and compromise.

The security situation in the country is vital to the progress and the eventual success of a wider and meaningful political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We remain concerned about the most recent reports of violence in the north-west. Without lasting and sustained peace, the political process will be severely hampered and the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate. We therefore implore all parties to abide by the ceasefire agreements in place and we remind them of their obligations under international law. We cannot stress enough that civilians must be protected and civilian infrastructure, particularly health services, must be preserved.

On that point, I must note that accountability for acts committed should remain a high priority. Atrocities cannot be ignored and impunity cannot be encouraged. As such, we welcome the board of inquiry established by the Secretary-General to investigate a series of incidents that have occurred in north-west Syria.

Confidence-building measures are a critical element for the success of a wider political process. We

therefore urge the Syrian Government to address the issue of missing and detained persons. Furthermore, conditions must be created for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Such expressions of goodwill will undoubtedly help the parties to develop trust and promote active participation in the political process.

The political situation cannot be discussed independently of the current humanitarian crisis. While work on the political process is ongoing, we must ensure that the immediate humanitarian needs of the Syrian people are met. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines supported the renewal of the cross-border mechanism earlier this month (see S/PV.8700) and we will support optimal access arrangements going forward. The suffering of one person is too many and we emphasize the need for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access in all areas of the country.

Syria is undoubtedly one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time and it is the Syrian people who continue to pay the highest price. The Council cannot be an onlooker while a dark cloud of despair settles over the country. That said, we must remain mindful that our actions should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We must take into consideration the perspectives of the Syrian Government, as it is for the Syrian people to determine their own future.

Without a political solution, the suffering of the Syrian people will continue and, without commitment and dialogue, the wider political process will no doubt fail. The Council has a responsibility to ensure that the Constitutional Committee and the wider process are adequately supported so that the goals may be realized. Reconciliation within Syria, the protection of civilians and the overall stability of the region are dependent on that.

**Mr. Singer Weisinger** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Ms. Matar for her briefing. As always, we reiterate the Dominican Republic's support for the collective efforts to strengthen the long-standing political process in the Syrian Arab Republic — one that opens the door to lasting peace.

This year, 2020, is the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015). Its full implementation remains pending. As the guarantor of that resolution, the Council bears the sole responsibility

for the implementation of all its provisions through facilitation, mediation and inclusive dialogue.

In that regard, we regret the lack of progress in the dialogue between the Syrian Government, the opposition and civil society within the framework of the Constitutional Committee, which was seen as the first major step in opening the way for a broad political process. Only a real and meaningful dialogue between the parties, with a negotiated political solution as the outcome, will lay the basis for meeting the aspirations of the Syrian people, inside and outside the country, to live in peace and to move forward in building their own future.

The continued and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the political process is not only conducive to achieving sustainable peace but vital. The needs of and solutions regarding displaced and refugee women must be at the centre of that process if we are to call it a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process.

However, that dialogue, like any political solution, is threatened every time there are attempts to resolve the conflict through military means. It is at risk every time there are indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population and every time hundreds of thousands of people have to flee in search of protection and security. There is no military solution that can bring about a future reconciliation in Syria. The basis for reconciliation is trust, mutual respect and the political will of the parties to comply with international law and respect the human rights of the entire population.

We ask ourselves if the military approach creates or destroys trust. That is why the situation in the north-west of the country fills us with concern. The ongoing violations of international humanitarian law, resulting in the suffering of the civilian population, are simply unacceptable and require a response by the Council. In that regard, we would like to say the following.

It is essential to achieve a lasting ceasefire. Humanitarian access to vulnerable populations must be ensured on a safe, sustained and unimpeded basis, not only in the north-west of the country but throughout Syria, wherever there are needs to be addressed. That is the least that the parties should do to protect those who have been so devastated and traumatized by nearly a decade of conflict.

We reiterate that today, more than ever, any international effort to end this terrible conflict must

be accompanied by measures on the ground that will build confidence not only in the process but among the parties and the population. The Dominican Republic would like to see more progress with regard to the release of detainees, secure access to basic services, the facilitation of civil documentation and, not least, the provision of credible information to the families of missing persons.

Similarly, we wish to reiterate that any movement or return of displaced persons and refugees must be safe, dignified and respectful of people's willingness to return to their places of origin, or wherever they decide. We call on all the parties concerned to focus every effort on a negotiated political solution, facilitated by the United Nations and in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We urge all members of the Council in a position to do so to honour the commitments undertaken in the resolution. Let us match our actions with words.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar for her briefing. The first meeting of the large body of Syria's Constitutional Committee and the 45-member small body in October last year marked a good start for the Syrian political process. Yesterday Special Envoy Pedersen arrived in Damascus to engage in talks with Syrian Government officials on issues relating to the Constitutional Committee. China applauds the good offices of the Special Envoy and the constructive participation of the Syrian parties. We support the Special Envoy in stepping up communication with the Syrian Government with a view to listening to its legitimate requests.

The United Nations should continue to advance the Syrian political process in accordance with the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned principle and resolution 2254 (2015). It is important to maintain the independence of the Constitutional Committee's work, so as to create the conditions to bridge differences and build consensus among the Syrian parties. The protracted Syrian conflict means that the parties inevitably have some differences when it comes to the work of the Constitutional Committee, which will require time to be resolved. It is up to the Syrian people themselves to find a way out. The process should not be subjected to any external interference or arbitrary timelines. We hope that the parties will maintain political dialogue through the Constitutional Committee to deepen mutual understanding and trust. Syria should not be divided or fragmented. Members of the Constitutional Committee should demonstrate political will, commit to the spirit

of compromise, stay actively engaged in talks and jointly safeguard Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

Since Syria's political, security and humanitarian situations are intertwined, I wish to reiterate China's position on Syria's counter-terrorism and humanitarian issues. Idlib has turned into a breeding ground for terrorism. The issue of foreign terrorist fighters within Syria is significant and has resulted in serious spillover effects. All countries must combat all forms of terrorism, with uniform standards, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions and international law. Otherwise, Syria, as well as the regions of Western Asia and North Africa, will enjoy no peace.

The international community should both move forward the political process and help improve Syria's economic and humanitarian situations. It is essential to secure the conditions of survival for the Syrian people, lift unilateral sanctions and support post-conflict reconstruction. Civilians are directly and negatively impacted by such unilateral sanctions. Reconstruction is an important step to provide better social services for the people. The provision of humanitarian supplies by relevant parties should not come with any political preconditions. China stands ready to play a constructive role in the early restoration of peace, stability and development in Syria.

**Ms. Goolab** (South Africa): Let me begin by thanking Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar for her briefing on the political situation in Syria.

South Africa is encouraged to hear that Special Envoy Pedersen is continuing his efforts towards finding a political solution to the situation in Syria. His ongoing engagements with all the parties are welcome, particularly during these uncertain times. My delegation also supports the Special Envoy and his Office in his work to promote confidence-building measures to build trust among the parties. Such measures will go a long way in showing the commitment of the various parties to the work and the purpose of the Constitutional Committee, which is an essential component of the Syrian political process. In that regard, South Africa urges all segments and groups of the Constitutional Committee to recommit to making a constructive contribution to the constitution-building process.

In addition, South Africa calls on the various parties to make every effort to work together, with the support of the Special Envoy, to find agreement on an agenda

before the start of the next round of talks, to guide the work of the Committee. South Africa encourages members of the Constitutional Committee to be flexible in agreeing on an agenda, given that all issues will ultimately be on the table as discussions advance.

The work of the Constitutional Committee is but one aspect of the larger process in Syria, as laid out in resolution 2254 (2015). As has been stated many times in the Council, the situation in Syria cannot be resolved through military means. The only sustainable solution to the current crisis is through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which calls for an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue that reflects the will and voice of the Syrian people. In that regard, we welcome the participation and representation of women, as well as the different religious groups, at the various levels of the talks in order to ensure the widest possible representation in the process.

**Mr. Syihab** (Indonesia): My delegation would like to welcome the Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, Ms. Khawla Matar, to the Chamber and thanks her for her briefing.

Indonesia remains committed to the full implementation of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in order to end the conflict in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). However, the unfortunate reality on the ground is of grave concern. The continued hostilities in north-west Syria have worsened the humanitarian conditions, with more than 350,000 people displaced. We urge all the relevant parties to respect the ceasefire agreements. We also remind them of their obligations to protect civilians under international humanitarian law. I wish to focus on three main points.

First, my delegation believes that the number one priority must always be the Syrian people. The foundation of the whole political process in Syria needs to be based on the interests and aspirations of the Syrians. In that regard, Indonesia reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. In the context of sovereignty, Indonesia also wishes to reiterate its position in recognizing the occupied Syrian Golan, occupied by Israel in 1967, as an inalienable part of the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. We strongly reject the recognition of the occupied Syrian Golan as part of Israel. Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied

Syrian Golan is null and void and without international legal effect.

Secondly, on the work of the Constitutional Committee, we are hopeful that the third round of negotiations will soon materialize in Geneva, facilitated by the United Nations. Indeed, a lot of work has been put into that process. We encourage the Syrian parties to display genuine and concrete efforts to advance the work of the Constitutional Committee. Flexibility and strong commitment are needed in order to be able to move forward. Indonesia is also of the view that the work of the Constitutional Committee must be administered by consensus and constructive engagement. A substantive discussion is necessary to achieve positive outcomes that will serve the aspirations of all the Syrian people. Any gaps or divergences among the Syrian parties must be addressed through continuous dialogue, without external interference.

That leads me to my third point — the urgent need to prevent further escalation, which would disrupt the efforts to reach a political settlement. Indonesia appeals to all parties involved to cease hostilities and create an environment conducive to the successful conduct of political talks. We cannot move the process forward with hostilities as the background. The international community needs to fully support that.

Indonesia strongly supports the work of the United Nations, in particular the mandate of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, in facilitating the process. We appreciate Special Envoy Pedersen's intensive coordination with all relevant parties and encourage those parties to continue to support his work.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the international community to be fully supportive of the genuine efforts to reach a political settlement in Syria and to avoid provocative rhetoric and actions that would undermine the ongoing work of the Constitutional Committee, facilitated by the United Nations.

**Mrs. Gueguen** (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to thank Ms. Khawla Matar for her briefing.

I would like to address three points.

First of all, I would like to return to the issue of the tragedy taking place in Idlib, which we addressed earlier today (see S/PV.8707). It is a humanitarian disaster affecting 3 million civilians in north-western Syria, who are exposed to daily attacks by the regime and its allies. They endure hunger and cold. Nearly

400,000 of them have fled since early December in an attempt to find refuge near the Turkish border. The relentless and brutal war is at odds with the goal of the ceasefire and the quest for a political solution.

As I said earlier today, France strongly condemns the intense and indiscriminate bombing by the regime and its allies, which target, inter alia, populated areas, medical facilities and camps for displaced persons, in deliberate violation of international humanitarian law. France reiterates its call for a cessation of hostilities. As the majority of Council members reiterated earlier today, ending the deadly offensive must now be the main priority.

As we have said time and again since the start of the conflict, the fight against terrorism cannot be used as a pretext for an outbreak of violence. Ongoing hostilities on the ground serve only to strengthen terrorist organizations and threaten the gains made by the international community against such organizations, at the cost of heavy sacrifice over the past five years. In that regard, the efforts of the Global Coalition against Da'esh must continue in order to end the threat once and for all.

My second point pertains to the political process, which remains indispensable to efforts to stabilize Syria over the long term. It is essential that the Constitutional Committee finally begins its work, as the Secretary-General recalled last week. However, after nine years of conflict, Bashar Al-Assad is maintaining his systematic obstruction. That is unacceptable and serves only to exacerbate the situation. We expect those who support the regime to encourage the Syrian leaders to see reason. We expect the United Nations to give an accurate account of the obstacles in the process and clearly identify those responsible for them.

It is obvious, but must be recalled, that the political process goes above and beyond the Constitutional Committee. France calls on the Special Envoy to move the process forward in parallel with the implementation of all elements of resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has our full support with regard to developing confidence-building measures that would create the safe and neutral environment called for in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). That includes two elements in particular: first, achieving results on the issues of detainees who must be released and missing persons; and secondly, making progress on the reform

of property rights, which is one obstacle to the return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes.

A safe environment, in which Syrians must no longer live in fear of bombs and arbitrary arrests, is essential to the holding of credible elections. To be fully legitimate, elections must be held under United Nations supervision and allow for the participation of all Syrians, including refugees and internally displaced persons.

Thirdly and lastly, I would like to conclude by reiterating the consistent position held by France and its close partners with regard to the issues of refugees and reconstruction. The return of refugees must be conducted in strict compliance with international law — in a safe, dignified and, above all, voluntary manner. Only a credible political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), will allow, when the time comes, for a mass voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees.

In conclusion, France and its European partners will not fund reconstruction until a political settlement is firmly in place. The same applies to the lifting of sanctions. In that regard, we call on Russia, which has the means to exert effective influence, to work with the Council and all international partners to achieve a credible political solution in Syria. Damascus's ongoing quest for confrontation is a dead end whose costs will not be assumed by us. France, for its part, will pursue its efforts to find a way out of the violence and onto the path to peace. If such peace is to be genuine, it must be just and inclusive.

**Mrs. Van Vlierberge** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Matar for being here and for her briefing. Ms. Matar and Mr. Pedersen enjoy our full support.

We all know that a political settlement is the only solution to the conflict. Without the political commitment of the Syrian authorities, the cycle of violence will continue unabated and instability will persist in the region. The Constitutional Committee, established in September, raised cautious hopes for a new dynamic. Those hopes are in danger of being dashed. We call on Damascus to re-engage in the political process and not to obstruct agreement on the Committee's agenda. We also call for the holding of the next session of the Committee. To that end, we encourage all Member States with influence on the parties to exercise that influence. The good faith of the

Syrian authorities will be assessed on the basis of the outcome of the process. We take this opportunity to support the Special Envoy and his team in their work and commitment. We also reaffirm that Belgium, in line with European policy, will not participate in the reconstruction process without a political solution that is firmly in place.

Let us not forget that the political process is not limited to the Constitutional Committee. Nearly a year ago, in his first briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8475), the Special Envoy prioritized the release of those who were arbitrarily detained and abductees. We echo his call for an increase in the number of releases. That is of utmost humanitarian importance and an essential element of confidence-building. We encourage the Special Envoy to intensify his contacts with the parties on the issue. Greater significant progress must be made. Detainees must be released. Families must again be able to embrace their loved ones or, at the very least, receive information on their whereabouts and their well-being. That is their right. It is a right that is enshrined in international humanitarian law. The behaviour of the Syrian authorities in the matter is unacceptable.

Lastly, the situation on the ground is worrisome. Earlier today, Belgium provided details about the humanitarian situation in the north-west (see S/PV.8707). We are deeply concerned about the military escalation. We call on the Syrian authorities and those who provide them with military support to establish, as a matter of urgency, a ceasefire in the north-west.

I will conclude by saying that, for Belgium, the Syrian conflict can be resolved only through a negotiated political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Resolution 2254 (2015) contains all the elements for a political solution: a nationwide ceasefire, a political process, the drafting of a new constitution and free and credible elections, with the participation of the Syrian diaspora, in an environment that protects the rights of Syrians.

**Mr. Abarry** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Deputy Special Envoy for her briefing on the political situation in Syria. I also commend the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy that led to the establishment of the Constitutional Committee.

We support the Special Envoy in his efforts to facilitate dialogue between the parties. The creation

of a secure climate, through the signing of a ceasefire to put an end to the spiral of violence, will help to establish the conditions necessary for the political dialogue we eagerly await. I urge the parties to support the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), including through the return of refugees, the release of detainees and clarification on the fate of missing persons. No effort must be spared to secure the de-escalation and thawing of the political climate. The involvement of women and young people in the process should also be strongly encouraged.

In considering the situation in Syria, it is essential, in our view, to take into account all aspects of the challenges that the country is currently facing. Whether it is the political aspect that we are addressing this afternoon or the humanitarian aspect that we discussed this morning (see S/PV.8707), a solution to the crisis must be inspired by the Syrians themselves, from all segments of society. The international community and the Security Council, for their part, must encourage and support the process by closing the gap between divergent analyses and interpretations and instead taking into exclusive account of Syrian interests in their decisions. The Syrian people have given the world so much and yet they continue to wait, during this difficult time in their history, for the help they need to recover.

**Mr. Allen** (United Kingdom): The Security Council has met month after month for over four years to support the efforts of the Special Envoy to find a political solution pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). The success of that process depends on the genuine will of all parties to find a solution, as well as efforts to make progress on all aspects of the process in tandem.

Yesterday, the United Kingdom hosted envoys from the Syria small group, alongside Mr. Nasser Al-Hariri. We were all in agreement that a genuine political settlement remains the only solution to the Syrian conflict, but it is clear to the United Kingdom that the key ingredient to such a solution — the genuine will of the Syrian regime — is missing. After years of hard work by the United Nations Special Envoy to negotiate the composition and rules of the Constitutional Committee, in November we all welcomed the announcement that an agreement had been reached and that the Committee would convene in Geneva. It was a historic moment that would open the door to the entire political process, and yet it is with deep disappointment — despite the best efforts of the Special Envoy — that, after two meetings, the regime is yet again refusing to engage.

On other aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), there has been a similar lack of engagement. Despite the Security Council meeting in August to highlight the specific issue of detainees (see S/PV.8593), no progress has been made. At that meeting in August, we set out the immediate steps that the Syrian authorities could take to make an important gesture of reconciliation. We would remind the Syrian authorities of our call for them to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained, to provide lists of detainees and their location to the United Nations, and to grant the International Committee of the Red Cross access to detention facilities.

Speaking of humanitarian issues, I found the earlier comments about Western double standards to be rather strange. The United Kingdom has given over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid since 2012 and the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany fund over 60 per cent of the United Nations humanitarian response plan across all of Syria, including regime-held areas. Instead, I would suggest that a double standard is when one says that they are concerned about humanitarian issues while bombing the country.

The Syrian authorities, emboldened by the support of the Russian Federation, have refused to pursue any course of action other than a military one. They have used the fight against terrorism to justify continued, disproportionate attacks against areas heavily populated by civilians and to justify attacks against civilian objects such as schools, hospitals and marketplaces — a practice of which the Council demanded the immediate cessation in resolution 2254 (2015). Right now, despite the announcement of various ceasefires, air strikes continue in Idlib where, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 358,000 people have been displaced since December. It is outrageous that we continue to talk about attacks against civilian targets in the north-west, despite the repeated concerns expressed by the United Nations, members of the Council and the ongoing investigation of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Kingdom reiterates that all parties, including those around this table, must uphold international humanitarian law and further calls for the Commission of Inquiry's findings to be made public.

The only hope for Syria is for the regime to reverse its behaviour and commit to a political process that promotes reconciliation and avoids further needless

conflict, repression and death. Their Russian protectors must get the Syrian authorities back to the table.

**Mr. Baati** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I salute Ms. Khawla Matar, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and thank her for her valuable briefing.

The launch of the Constitutional Committee during the third quarter of last year under the auspices of the United Nations represented an important step in the course of the political process in Syria towards achieving a comprehensive Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political transition through constitutional reform that paves the way to free, fair and pluralistic elections, under the supervision of the United Nations and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), in a manner that meets the aspirations of all Syrians; preserves the unity, sovereignty and independence of Syria; and ends the presence of external forces and terrorist and sectarian groups.

We call on all parties and the international community to maintain and support this positive development. My delegation believes that as long as the negotiations within this context are based on the principle of goodwill, then it is natural and even healthy to have difference and divergence of views. My delegation supports the Secretary-General's good offices and the efforts of his Special Envoy to bring the ongoing political process to safe harbour. In that context, we welcome Mr. Geir Pedersen's discussions with the Syrian Government in Damascus in order to advance the deadlocked Constitutional Committee's work, and we express our hope that the Committee will resume its work as soon as possible in order to adopt an agreed agenda that is in line with its own benchmarks and internal regulations.

We urge the Syrian parties to give priority to the interests of the brotherly Syrian people, demonstrate flexibility and search for common denominators through constructive engagement in the work of the Constitutional Committee in a spirit of compromise and without preconditions and dictates. Given its specific experience in managing public affairs with various political components and civil parties, Tunisia believes that the transitional stages should be managed not by imposing the logic of hegemony or single opinion, but rather by conducting dialogue between the political parties as a strategic option to defuse political

tension and violence and to consolidate the pillars of democratic architecture.

The political process in Syria, like any transitional political process, cannot flourish without providing an appropriate environment in which security, stability and national reconciliation prevail in order to assist in the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons and pave the way for the drafting of a constitution and the holding of free and fair elections pursuant to that document, with the participation of all spectrums of Syrian society.

We are concerned about the current developments on the ground, which do not contribute to achieving the desired security, economic and community environment as fighting has intensified in north-west Syria in the past few weeks. We recall that resolution 2254 (2015), which represents the political solution, notes the close link between a ceasefire and the political process. We stress once again the need to combat terrorism in Syria, including the Security Council-listed terrorist groups, in order to create the necessary conditions for achieving security and stability in Syria and the region. We are also concerned about reports that terrorists are being transferred from Syria to Libya. We call on the international community to redouble its efforts to end such practices and prevent terrorist groups from again carrying out their criminal activities and expanding into hotspots in the Arab region and beyond.

It is unfortunate that the economic environment in Syria, similar to the security environment, remains unstable. According to a report issued by the United Nations this month, the Syrian economy registered overall growth as a result of an increase in the reconstruction process. However, that growth will slow down quite soon as a result of economic sanctions. We hope that the appropriate economic conditions will be created and reflected in the living conditions of the Syrian people, who are the ones who bear most of the humanitarian and economic brunt of the conflict.

In conclusion, we reaffirm the importance of the ongoing political process being accompanied by confidence-building measures, as stated by the Special Envoy many times. Progress should be made in the areas of releasing abducted and detained persons and clarifying the fate of the missing, so as to ensure the sustainability of the political process and strengthen national reconciliation among the various segments of the brotherly Syrian people, while respecting the

sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, including the occupied Syrian Golan.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Viet Nam.

I thank Ms. Khawla Matar for her briefing and would like to make the following points.

First, the conflict in Syria, currently in its ninth year, has brought about devastation to the Syrian people in the political, socioeconomic and cultural spheres. The humanitarian consequences, with millions of people in pressing need of aid, amount to a severe crisis that has for long plagued the region and the world.

Secondly, the only way to address the conflict is through a comprehensive, long-term and balanced political solution, with full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of Syria in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, in that connection, we commend the progress made in facilitating dialogue among the parties concerned in Syria, including the formation and launching of the Constitutional Committee in September 2019. We support the role of the Committee and look forward to the continued engagement of various parties with the Committee with a view to achieving substantive progress in the months ahead. We urge the Syrian Government and other parties to build on recent progress and engage in dialogue and negotiations, with the broad participation of the relevant parties, in order to find a long-lasting political solution acceptable to the Syrian people. We are concerned about the lack of progress in the Constitutional Committee since last December, despite the tireless efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen, while hostilities in north-west Syria currently continue to devastate the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Fourthly, we stress the importance of unity in the Council so as to find viable solutions to Syria-related issues, including the continued provision of humanitarian support for people in urgent need in Syria. The Council should continue to support all the parties concerned in Syria, as well as Special Envoy Pedersen to facilitate further progress.

Finally, we are of the view that all the parties concerned must exercise restraint and refrain from any action that could complicate the current situation. All

parties must comply with and strictly implement their obligations under resolution 2254 (2015) and other related resolutions. Only through a viable political process can we hope for a sustainable road map for peace and progress in Syria.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin my second speech of the day with an important observation following our deliberations this morning concerning the humanitarian situation (see S/PV.8707).

My country's Government sent an official communication a while ago to the Regional Director of the Eastern Mediterranean Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) informing him that the Syrian Government had authorized a WHO convoy of medical assistance and medicine that had been waiting in Iraq to promptly enter the Syrian territories through the Al-Qaim/Abu Kamal crossing at the Syrian-Iraqi border, which is under control of the Syrian State, so as to avoid the expiration of its products. The Syrian Government, in cooperation with WHO and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society, will distribute the assistance to hospitals, health clinics and civilians in need.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs met with Special Envoy Geir Pedersen in Damascus this morning to discuss the political process in Syria and the importance of making every effort possible to achieve the desired progress and ensure the success of that process, which serves the interests of the Syrian people. The outcome of the process should be Syrian-led, while emphasizing respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. Both sides have stressed the importance of upholding the rules of procedure of the Constitutional Committee so as to ensure independent Syrian decisions without any external interference from any party.

Nine long years have elapsed, during which four successive Special Envoys of the Secretary-General have tried to find the magic formula to resolve the so-called Syrian crisis. Unfortunately, they were not successful in their noble task because some in the Council and beyond prioritize the rule of force rather than the rule of law, disregarding the provisions of the

Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law and good-neighbourly relations. All of that has been at the expense of Syria's stability, its regional role and at the cost of its people's blood.

Yesterday we saw a pathetic attempt by the current United States Administration to present a new colonial project in our region, thereby repeating the same major crime committed by Britain over 100 years ago with the fateful Balfour Declaration, which served Israel and its aggressive expansionist schemes. It did so in spite of Syrian, Palestinian and Arab rights and interests and in flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and its benchmark resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 497 (1981) and 2334 (2016), all of which stress the need to end the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, a withdrawal to 4 June 1967 borders and ceasing illegitimate settlement activity, which hampers the peace process. Those are Council's resolutions.

The surreal scene in Washington, D.C., yesterday was that of a unilateral action and an act of aggression against the United Nations itself — one of unparalleled contempt for the relevant United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian question and the occupied Syrian Golan. In 2003, President George Bush announced the road map for peace. At the time, the United States proposal contained 2,218 words. He said that the proposal had been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Following the visit of Mr. Netanyahu yesterday, President Donald Trump launched a road map for peace and prosperity. It contains 49,402 words. Neither the Bush nor the Trump proposal makes any mention of international law — or of human rights, international humanitarian law or the United Nations. Neither proposal included any of those words. Should Council members doubt me, I would ask them to read the proposals for themselves. That is the United States policy. Council members waste their time here, while the United States takes unilateral measures the way it likes. In circumstances such as these, how can we trust United States policy related to any matter concerning the maintenance of international peace and security? We will leave it to Council members to answer that question.

Nine bitter years have elapsed. Some Council members and others have insisted on using internationally prohibited weapons of massive lies to

sow instability in our countries and the Middle East region, rather than reflecting on their own actions and positions and reforming their policies. What is even worse is that some are convinced of their actions and positions. They try to convince us with arguments that lack wisdom and law, while demonstrating their superiority and near-sighted policies that result only in destruction and ruin our countries and peoples. They try to justify themselves and project their anger on others. In the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, “Hell is other people”.

The absolute reality that cannot be denied is that the accumulated old and new big sins of some have brought our region and peoples bitter disasters, bloody conflicts, instability and lack of development. We have assured the Council many times that we cannot base our actions on false pretexts and expect good outcomes. That is a philosophy thousands of year old. Einstein conveyed the same idea when he said,

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.”

We have reiterated that the full restoration of security and stability in my country requires addressing the challenges related to terrorism and stopping the wasting of the Council’s time, efforts and budget with fabricated issues — like determining the gender of angels, demons and everything in between.

Some colleagues try to promote fabricated accusations to obstruct us in our war against terrorism and boost the morale of armed terrorist organizations that are overrunning Idlib and Aleppo under the leadership of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham/Jabhat Al-Nusra — meaning Al-Qaida, Da’esh and other terrorist groups of different names and loyalties.

My Government reiterates that it has remained very patient — as patient as Job. We have chosen political solutions and given them ample time. We have always dealt seriously with every initiative calling for calm, including through the Astana and Sochi processes, as we are committed to safeguarding the Syrian people and ending the pain and bloodshed throughout the country.

Before concluding, I will underscore two points.

First, Idlib and the surrounding areas are Syrian territories that currently are under the control of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is the Syrian branch of Al-Qaida, and its affiliated terrorist groups. It counts among its ranks tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters. Some are trying to genetically modify them by calling them the “moderate armed Syrian opposition”. In the near future, with the collusion of the Turkish regime, they will also call them the “moderate armed Libyan opposition”, which will also be genetically modified. Surviving foreign terrorist fighters will be called “moderate armed opposition” of a third or fourth country — because their masters invest in terrorism. They will progressively continue in that manner in other countries in Africa, such as Mali, Nigeria, the Niger and Kenya, as well as countries of the Sahel and others, in order to spread destruction and the displacement and exodus of their peoples.

Secondly, I once again ask delegations the question I posed before: What would Council members’ Governments do if they saw a terrorist organization occupying a certain region in their country, target civilians and fire rockets? Would they just watch them with their arms folded and provide them with humanitarian assistance while calling them ‘moderate armed opposition?’ I leave it to delegations to answer those questions.

Our message is a message of peace, based on strength not weakness. We strongly believe in the principle of the sovereign equality of States — a principle that was enshrined by the founding fathers of our Organization and on which we rely on in our policies. We also say to all those who entertain repeating what was done in our region after the First and Second World Wars that their plans will not succeed. They will fail by virtue of the will of the Syrian people.

*The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.*