



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

**8841**<sup>st</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 24 August 2021, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Raguttahalli/Mr. Tirimurti . . . . . (India)

*Members:*

China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Lipand
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kimani
Mexico . . . . .	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
Niger . . . . .	Mr. Aougi
Norway . . . . .	Ms. Heimerback
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. Prince
Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
Viet Nam . . . . .	Mr. Dang

## Agenda

### The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) (S/2021/735)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) (S/2021/735)**

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Khaled Erksoussi, Secretary General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/735, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021).

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Over the past 17 months, I have been informing the Council that, as compared with previous phases of the conflict, there was relative calm in Syria across largely frozen front lines of conflict. I have, however, been highlighting the constant incidents and the dangers they pose to civilians, as well as the fragility of the situation. I have urged all to work towards a nationwide ceasefire.

Regrettably, we have seen a recent escalation in many parts of Syria. Mr. Martin Griffiths will provide

details on the humanitarian situation, and I warmly welcome him in his new capacity.

Let me turn first to the situation in the south-west, and particularly in Dara'a governorate, where we have seen significant deployments of troops, heavy shelling and ground clashes. We have seen civilian casualties and displacement — including a significant number of women and children — and damage to civilian infrastructure. We have contacted all sides and engaged a wide range of Syrians, including on the ground, as well as key international players. There has been an intensification of Russian mediation efforts in recent days. We repeat our calls on all parties to end the violence immediately and to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is needed to all affected areas and communities, including Dara'a Al-Balad. I have requested access for my team to the area, and the United Nations family has requested the same in order to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid. We are urging a sustainable agreement that paves the way to restoring a safe and secure environment, thus alleviating the fears and grievances of the local population, addressing social, humanitarian and economic needs, averting any displacement and allowing the residents of Dara'a to return to their homes in safety and in dignity.

But there is also trouble in other parts of Syria. Turning now to north-west Syria, including Idlib, northern Latakia and Aleppo, as well as western Hama. Recent months have witnessed an intensification in air strikes and shelling, leading to dozens of civilian casualties, including women and children, and the largest displacement recorded since March 2020.

The north-eastern areas of Raqqa and Hasakah have seen further violence involving non-State armed groups, which has resulted in casualties, including among civilians. Meanwhile, humanitarian concerns over repeated water cuts in the north-east remain critical, affecting vital infrastructure, including hospitals, irrigation networks and water stations. I am sure that Mr. Griffiths will return to this in greater detail.

A deadly blast targeted a military bus in Damascus on 4 August. Syria has also been subjected to attacks by Security Council-listed terrorist groups elsewhere in the past month. Those unacceptable attacks remind us that efforts to counter terrorism are essential. In order for those efforts to be effective, we need cooperation,

coordination and actions that are in strict compliance with international law. Such efforts must prioritize the protection of civilians and not lead to new waves of displacement and destruction.

There have been reports of significant air strikes attributed to Israel in recent weeks, including a notable incident in Damascus on 20 August. The sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria continue to be compromised.

Those developments remind us that the conflict in Syria is far from over and that we need a credible political process as well as more sustained international cooperation.

I continue my efforts to facilitate the convening of a sixth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee. I have met twice virtually in recent weeks with the co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Committee, Mr. Al-Bahra. Meanwhile, my Head of Office in Damascus has met with the co-Chair nominated by the Government, Mr. Kuzbari, and I have requested to visit Damascus. We are continuing our efforts to engage to find a way forward, but it is not easy. I strongly appeal for flexibility on the basis of my bridging proposal to overcome the impasse and convene a new session as soon as possible.

The impasse, of course, highlights issues of the lack of trust and lack political will, which have paralysed efforts to advance a political solution. As Council members know, I have long urged that we work on a wider set of issues to try to unlock modest steps and gestures that could build some trust. For instance, action on the crucial file of detainees, abductees and missing persons remains essential.

Let us also remember that the economic crisis continues to present great hardships for Syrians in their daily lives, from serious energy shortages to decreased food supply. I reiterate my concern about Syrian livelihoods against the backdrop of conflict, the various challenges associated with it and the crisis emanating from Lebanon. Let me also repeat that it is vital that any humanitarian effects resulting from sanctions that could exacerbate the plight of ordinary Syrians be avoided, in particular in terms of over-compliance.

The issues facing Syrians are indeed far from being solely in the hands of the Syrians. Constructive international diplomacy is plainly needed. The Security Council's adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) in July

was an important humanitarian measure. For its part, the United Nations will do all that it can to facilitate the implementation of all aspects of the resolution. Mr. Griffiths will say more about this in a moment. But the resolution also sent a message that key States, in particular the Russian Federation and the United States, could cooperate on Syria beyond the humanitarian track. There is a need to follow up and build on the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) in other areas of common interest and shared concern. That will be essential if we are to make modest, incremental progress. I discussed that in depth with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov when I visited Moscow in July. I have had further contacts with the United States as well and with many other Governments, and that will, of course, continue.

I am asking key States to work with me on exploratory discussions on a package of concrete, mutual and reciprocal steps that are to be defined with realism and precision, implemented in parallel and verifiable. Such steps are needed, above all, to help save Syrian lives, ease suffering, promote regional stability and further the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). These are all interests around which members of the Council and other key international players see eye to eye. But I believe that more buy-in is needed in the form of relevant players being ready not only to identify what they seek, but also what they can deliver on.

I have today touched upon several issues that could be considered as part of such a broader package of reciprocity. I am ready to use the convening power of the United Nations in Geneva if that can help create prospects for accommodations. I will continue my consultations.

My thinking is continuously shaped by my interactions with Syrians inside and outside the country — women and men from all walks of life — through the Civil Society Support Room, the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and elsewhere. A shared sentiment I frequently hear them express is that beyond the urgent needs on the ground today, there is a real fear that the Syrian people are being forgotten.

I therefore appeal to all Council members, who were able to come together on resolution 2585 (2021) in July, to continue working in that same direction to help facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the women and men of Syria and restores Syria's

sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015).

**The President:** I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Ongoing hostilities, economic crisis, water shortages and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are driving humanitarian needs for millions of already vulnerable people to some of the highest levels that we have seen since the start of the conflict.

As a complement to what Mr. Pedersen just told members of the Security Council, I will cover five points today, as he indicated: first, the protection of civilians; secondly, the impact of the economic crisis; thirdly, the water crisis; fourthly, COVID-19; and, lastly, humanitarian access.

Let me begin with the protection of civilians and the critical infrastructure they rely on. Ten years into the conflict, civilians in all parts of Syria continue to endure grave hardship. Of course, it has gone on for far too long. In particular, women and children have suffered immense physical and psychological trauma throughout the years of the conflict. There are reports, for example, of families increasingly resorting to early marriage as a means to provide for their daughters owing to the uncertainty of their circumstances. Such reports are all too familiar.

In June and July, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded at least 153 civilian deaths and 280 civilian injuries, many of them women and children, as a result of hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic. An increase in air strikes and shelling in the north-west killed at least 53 civilians in June and July, damaged critical civilian infrastructure and displaced more than 20,000 people. That is, in fact, the largest displacement since the ceasefire was announced in March 2020. In the north-east, shelling since 18 August around Abu Rasin in Ras Al-Ayn subdistrict and surrounding villages north of Tall Tamr has reportedly displaced more than 8,000 people.

Security problems continue at Al-Hol camp. Sixty-nine murders have been reported since January, as well as 12 attempted murders. Killings of and threats to women and girls in the camp increased in June and July, further contributing to a climate of fear. The dire needs in the camps and the extreme vulnerability and

aid dependence of residents there increases the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Humanitarian workers, including protection volunteers and camp management staff, face regular threats. Some 59,000 people remain in the Al-Hol camp. Most of them are women and children, with one out of five camp inhabitants under the age of five. That makes it even more critical to spotlight the voices, experiences and leadership of women. We must not abandon them to the violence and hopelessness of Al-Hol.

On 5 August, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet sounded the alarm at the plight of civilians in the recent escalation of violence in and around the city of Dara'a, which Mr. Pedersen referred to earlier. Fighting and heavy shelling, which started in late July, killed at least eight civilians, forced more than 35,000 people to flee their homes and damaged critical civilian infrastructure. Mortar shells also hit the Dara'a national hospital, causing its dialysis unit to shut down temporarily.

Civilians who remain in Dara'a Al-Balad face acute shortages of bread and water, electricity, fuel and cooking gas. Health facilities are also reportedly running out of supplies. United Nations agencies and their partners are providing emergency assistance to displaced persons and host communities in Dara'a city and surrounding areas, including ready-to-eat rations, health supplies, medicines and other core relief items.

I echo the calls of Mr. Pedersen and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for an immediate ceasefire and urge all parties to end the violence immediately and without preconditions. This is necessary to spare lives and livelihoods. I also recall that all parties to the conflict must respect civilians and civilian infrastructure and take constant care to spare them. I urge the parties to facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to all affected communities, including in Dara'a Al-Balad itself, and to allow safe passage for civilians wishing to leave.

My second point concerns the economic crisis and its impact on civilians. In regular assessments conducted by the United Nations in July, a third of Syrian households interviewed indicated difficulties in accessing markets, which is the highest level recorded since April 2020. One out of five households reported reduced access to medical care, and one out of four households indicated they had lost at least one source of income in the past months.

Loss of income and employment opportunities, of course, have had negative effect on food security. Following a slight improvement in April and May, the food security situation deteriorated again in June and July, with a 15 per cent increase of inadequate food consumption nationwide compared to July 2020. High commodity prices and the widespread loss of livelihoods forced more and more households to reduce meals and adopt negative coping strategies. Female-headed households, as Council members can imagine, are particularly affected. I have referred already to child and early marriage, which are on the rise, driven by this crisis and exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In that context, the early recovery and livelihood activities of the United Nations play a key role in supporting livelihoods and service delivery to vulnerable civilians in such areas as health and education and in the creation of economic opportunities. In July, for instance, the United Nations supported the rehabilitation of health facilities and markets, benefiting more than 24,000 patients and shop owners and creating jobs as well as supporting over 6,300 vulnerable people with various opportunities for livelihoods.

My third point concerns the water crisis in Syria. In the north-east, water levels in the Euphrates River, flowing into Syria from Turkey, sank to a critically low point. Precipitation decreased between 50 and 70 per cent compared with the long-term average, while low snow and rainfall also affected water sources in the wider region. In late June, 54 of 73 drinking-water stations along the western bank of the Euphrates and 44 of 126 water stations on the eastern bank had been significantly or severely affected by critically low water levels. Reserves for the main dams in the area have also reached to historic lows, which is a very distressing outcome, and, of course, it is linked to climate change. Over 5 million people rely on the river for drinking water and electricity, as does vital infrastructure, including hospitals, irrigation networks and water stations. Water shortages in the Euphrates, exacerbated by drought, are expected to damage crops, worsen the already dire food situation, exacerbate public health concerns and lead to more loss of livelihoods.

At Allouk water station in Hasakah governorate, pumping remained limited. From 23 June to 30 July, just over a month later, the water station shut down completely, limiting access to safe drinking water for 1 million people, including 100,000 residents at that

time of Al-Hol camp and related settlements. Water levels were insufficient to reach most of the population ordinarily served by the station, and a high-cost emergency water trucking operation, which was put into place, could only cover 20 per cent of daily water needs while that station was out of action. Electricity supply to that station remains inadequate and unreliable, reducing the amount of water that can be pumped and having an impact on its functioning. Technicians from Hasakah water and electricity directorates were able finally to gain limited access to the water station on 30 July, after 83 days with no access at all. That was a critically important impediment.

Since early August, Allouk water station continues to operate, but intermittently. In the past days, no water has reached Al Himmeh reservoir, reportedly owing to discontinued power supply from the Al-Darbasiyah substation. Reliable access to safe water is critical to the hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people in that area, and they are in desperate conditions.

With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, transmission rates remain high and likely far beyond official records, as is the case in many countries, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. Vaccinations are under way across Syria, with priority being given to health-care workers. The first batch of 270,000 doses delivered through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility has been distributed. By 23 August, more than 218,900 people, more or less, had been vaccinated in Government-controlled areas and the north-east, while more than 58,000 people had been vaccinated in the north-west. On 15 August, Syria received the second batch of COVAX vaccines, totalling about 138,000 doses for Government-controlled areas and north-east Syria, and over 36,000 for north-west Syria, administered from Gaziantep in Turkey. However, the available vaccines are sufficient to cover less than 1 per cent of the country's population, so we need to speed up the scale and pace of vaccinations to prevent the pandemic from further devastating the lives of those in need there.

My last point is on humanitarian access. First, let me welcome the Security Council's unanimous decision on 9 July, contained in resolution 2585 (2021), to extend the United Nations cross-border mechanism in north-west Syria. Cross-border humanitarian assistance remains an essential lifeline for millions of people. The reauthorization will help ensure humanitarian assistance continues for over 3.4 million people in

need, including 1 million children. Operations are set to increase in the coming weeks with more food dispatches and the start of winterization activities.

In addition to cross-border assistance, the United Nations continues engaging with partners to increase cross-line assistance. I am pleased to report that progress has been made. In the north-east, between January and July, 1,588 trucks containing humanitarian assistance crossed lines into the north-east, an average of 227 a month, compared to 199 a month in the same period a year before. Humanitarian partners also assisted 791,000 people each month cross-line in the north-east between January and May 2021, compared to 602,000 in the same period in 2020.

In July and August, the United Nations also conducted two inter-agency assessment missions in Al Talae'e and Tweina camps in Hasakah governorate hosting more than 26,000 internally displaced persons. Both camps were established to accommodate people displaced from Ras Al-Ayn and Tel Abyad in November 2019. Other areas, including Manbij and Ayn al-Arab, remain difficult for the United Nations and its partners to reach cross-line. Further progress is important and necessary and essential to expand the overall response as humanitarian needs continue to grow, as they do, particularly for health and medical items. The United Nations and its partners are looking at every opportunity to establish cross-line access into the north-west.

The United Nations humanitarian operation in Syria is one of the largest humanitarian operations worldwide. Each month, the United Nations and its partners reach around 6.6 million people all over the country. Needs are outstripping the response, and much more support is required to alleviate the suffering in Syria. As of 23 August, the United Nations and its partners had received about a quarter — 27 per cent, in fact — of all funding required under the 2021 humanitarian response plan for Syria.

As requested by the Council, we will continue to strengthen reporting on new elements of resolution 2585 (2021), namely, progress on cross-line access, transparency and early recovery activities in particular. I plan to travel to the region — to Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey — in the period ahead to gain a deeper understanding, now in my new function, of the complexities of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, as well as the challenges that lie in the months ahead. I look forward to briefing the Council on my return.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Erksoussi.

**Mr. Erksoussi:** At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and wish Mr. Griffiths every success in his new position.

Reports and analyses presented to the Security Council on the situation in Syria are numerous, but only a few of them come from local organizations working on the ground. For that reason, on behalf of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), I am grateful for the opportunity to share our experience as the foremost first-line responder to the worsening humanitarian situation in the country.

In the north-east of Syria, the water crisis is yet another crisis that the people there have to cope with. More than 1.1 million people are without drinking water because the Allouk water station is out of operation, at times due to a lack of power and at others a lack of political will. We have asked on many occasions for the water station to be neutralized so that our teams and local water engineers can have unhindered access to maintain and operate the station, but that lifeline for millions of people is still being used as a bargaining chip between the parties.

In addition, the water level in the Euphrates River has gone down, with less and less water coming from Turkey. Due to the hot summer weather, the area is now suffering from a severe drought. Even the few pumps we managed to install along the banks of the river cannot reach the water level, which has decreased by more than 10 metres. SARC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNICEF are working day and night to fill water tanks in cities and to truck water from the few sources available, but we are merely scratching the surface of the problem, and there is a need for a more sustainable solution.

In Dara'a, our teams are responding to the continued movement of the population due to the ongoing hostilities. Our teams have manned the humanitarian corridor, managing to secure the exit of more than 38,000 people, mostly women and children, to safety. We have opened six shelters to house some 1,449 people, while the rest have taken shelter with relatives or friends in the surrounding areas. We have also managed to provide first aid to 406 cases and medically evacuated nine cases to hospitals in Damascus. Medical supplies were also delivered to the national hospital by

the World Health Organization (WHO) and the ICRC on 3 and 13 August.

We are currently preparing to send a humanitarian convoy to Dara'a with food and other essential materials for those who have remained in their homes. It is an inter-agency convoy with SARC, ICRC, United Nations and International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners that has been given the green light by the Syrian Government. As for Dara'a Al-Balad, an area in the eye of the conflict where we most recently distributed aid on 16 July, we are still monitoring the situation closely from a safety and security perspective. We will enter the area and deliver the much-needed aid once the situation permits.

As a humanitarian organization, we always aim to fulfil our mandate by reaching people in need everywhere. In March 2020, we secured the necessary approvals to carry out an inter-agency cross-line convoy to Atarib, near Idlib. However, more than a year later, there is still no guarantee that the convoy will go ahead. We also facilitated the approval for the World Food Programme (WFP) to preposition cross-line aid materials to Sarmada, which has not happened yet, either.

Last month, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2585 (2021), which called for cross-line access in addition to cross-border access (see S/PV.8817). The resolution stipulated that all modalities possible should be used to reach the people in need, but I am sorry to report that the cross-line part of the resolution has still not become a reality. The President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Mr. Khaled Hboubati, is always asking why cross-line missions are not taking place. I, in turn, pose that question to the United Nations, as hopefully the Organization is in a better position to provide an answer to us and to the Council.

In the south of the country, near Al-Tanf, we are trying to resume our humanitarian intervention by helping those living in the Rukban camp to go back to their areas of origin. To date, we have facilitated the voluntary exit of more than 20,000 people without any problems, but there are still approximately 10,000 to 12,000 people inside the camp. The assessment that we conducted with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs last year indicated that some of them want to leave. Both our teams and the United Nations teams stand at the

55-kilometre point, ready to facilitate their exit to areas of their choice across Syria.

The socioeconomic hardship is taking its toll on the people of Syria. Food prices have gone through the roof. The price of the standard food basket has increased by nearly 200 per cent in the past year. A food parcel provided by ICRC or WFP and distributed by our volunteers is now worth a fortune. We also continuously monitor prices on the black market, which are increasing. There are indeed beneficiaries who sell or exchange some of their food for other commodities, which is now a fact of life. It is not because they do not need the food, but because they have more urgent priorities, such as medicine, shelter or even water, which they sometimes have to buy because the water supply is inadequate or there is no electricity to pump the water even if the supply is there.

Many health services are at risk. Life-saving support in our dialysis centres is now at risk of being stopped as we cannot source the filters or materials to maintain that service. Even our partners at WHO are also facing challenges obtaining those filters. We currently have enough materials to last until the end of this coming September, so we have started to ask our patients to try and find other service providers. That is a critical, life-saving service that will stop within a month, yet there is still no solution on the horizon.

I could go on listing the challenges that the people of Syria are facing and which humanitarian actors, including United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations, are trying to solve, but our job is not getting easier. The sanctions and restrictive measures are yet another factor adding to the suffering of people, including humanitarian personnel. Those measures are making it so much harder for millions of Syrian men, women, and children to get back on their feet with dignity.

I addressed the Security Council nine months ago and, since then, it has become even more evident that the consequences of sanctions on the common people — and, for that matter, all humanitarian organizations in Syria — exceed any political objectives. There is a need to recognize the unintended consequences of the punitive measures on a population already ravaged by a decade of violence and instability.

During my preparation for this briefing, I came across dozens of reports and analyses prepared by other humanitarian organizations working in Syria.

Some organizations have demanded that the term “humanitarian work” be redefined so that their activities are not red-flagged. It is also necessary to persuade donors to fund humanitarian rehabilitation, because they cannot continue to give people water in bottles or jerrycans when the simplest logic dictates that they should maintain the water lines. People should be able to access water on their own and grow their own food instead of drinking and eating from boxes or cans. They should be able to actually send their children to school instead of just reading about how schools are good and that children should be sent there.

We are tired. The staff of humanitarian organizations is exhausted and frustrated with the idea that declaring sanctions and restrictive measures on the entire population is a tool that will bring about change and a better future. They are attempts to hinder efforts to normalize the lives of people who are returning home to cities that have been destroyed. Those people are trying just to build a new life with the little they have left.

I ask the Council to stop prioritizing political gains over ending the suffering of fellow humans, and let us all work together to fulfil the humanitarian pledges made. Let us provide more access and more support and impose fewer generalized sanctions and restrictive measures so that Syrians can live and rebuild their lives with dignity.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Erksoussi for his briefing.

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

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): Today I make this statement on behalf of the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file, Norway and Ireland.

We would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Martin Griffiths; Special Envoy Geir Pedersen; and the Secretary-General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Mr. Khaled Erksoussi, for their briefings.

The last time the Council met to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.8817), we adopted, by consensus, resolution 2585 (2021), which extended the mandate for the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for six months, with an extension of an additional six months, that is, until 10 July 2022, subject to the issuance of the Secretary-General’s substantive report, with particular focus on transparency in

operations and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs. As co-penholders, we warmly welcome the constructive approach of the Council in recognizing the need to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need in Syria, and we hope that together we can build on that hard-won consensus.

Since the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021), United Nations efforts to reduce hunger, build resilience and ensure access to health care have continued to support the 3.4 million Syrians in need in the north-west. Many non-governmental organizations operating in north-western Syria can continue to rely on United Nations operational support for logistics and procurement. Access to life-saving items such as coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines has been maintained, as a direct result of the cross-border operation. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic has remained in place, guaranteeing the humanitarian nature of all deliveries and ensuring a robust humanitarian operation, based on transparency and accountability.

The situation remains dire for the men, women and children of Syria who continue to face hardship and displacement. We heard from the Secretary-General this month that the combination of ongoing hostilities, economic crisis, water shortages and COVID-19 have driven humanitarian needs for millions of already vulnerable people to some of the highest levels seen since the start of the conflict.

The critically low water levels in the Euphrates has limited access to clean water for drinking and agriculture and led to widespread power blackouts, with a knock-on effect on essential infrastructure, including health facilities. Together with the drought, that has contributed to increases in the costs of food, fuel and other basic items, as well as outbreaks of waterborne diseases and reduced food production, thereby driving humanitarian needs.

This month we saw in Dara’a, in south-western Syria, the deadliest violence since 2018, with dozens of civilians killed or injured and tens of thousands of people forced to leave their homes. The mortar attacks that reportedly hit the national hospital of Dara’a are yet another example of appalling activity and unacceptable assault on a critical medical facility.

Increased violence over the past two months in the north-west has caused civilian deaths and displaced more than 20,000 people — the largest displacement in

the area since the ceasefire of March 2020. On Friday, four children from the same family were killed while they slept in their home in Idlib governorate. Last Thursday, three brothers were killed, along with their mother, when their house came under attack. Since the beginning of July, at least 54 children have been killed or injured in Syria. We again call on all parties to live up to their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians throughout Syria and ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

The Council has called for efforts to improve cross-line deliveries of humanitarian assistance. While the landscape for access in Syria remains highly complex, we call on all parties to continue to pursue all modalities that can ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need. While needs in the north-east are growing and continue to be unmet, we welcome the scaling up of cross-line missions over the past year. We strongly support efforts to finalize a cross-line humanitarian mission to north-western Syria, and we call on all parties to support that mission so that it can take place without delay.

We strongly support United Nations-led efforts to find a political solution. We know that progress on the political track is the key to transforming the humanitarian situation on the ground. We must keep the Syrian people at the heart of all of our efforts in the Council. We fully support Mr. Griffiths and his team as they work to deliver a lifeline to so many in need.

In my national capacity, I will now add a few remarks on the political situation in Syria.

I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and reiterate our full support for all he does. We are particularly grateful for his recent engagement with all relevant parties to try to bring the crisis in Dara'a al-Balad to an end.

The levels of violence we have seen in the governorate of Dara'a over the past few weeks are simply unacceptable. We mourn the continued loss of life in Syria and echo the Special Envoy's calls for calm and a political way forward. It is critical that the ceasefire in the north-west be upheld; the escalation of hostilities we see now in Syria, in both the north and south, again underlines the urgent need for a nationwide ceasefire.

Ireland continues to call for a negotiated political settlement in Syria that includes a new constitution, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015). In June, the Council

had the opportunity to hear from Ms. Abeer Hussain, on behalf of the Syrian Women's Political Movement (see S/PV.8805). She expressed and exemplified the drive and determination of women in Syria to take on leadership roles and lead change in their local communities. Ireland stands firmly in solidarity with the women of Syria, who, time and again, have demonstrated their courage and resilience. We reiterate once again their right to full, equal and meaningful participation in all political processes. They should be in the room and at the table. We also call for the inclusion of youth in such processes.

It is important that the Syrian Government show more flexibility and willingness to be constructive with regard to modalities for a sixth session of the Constitutional Committee. We commend Mr. Pedersen for his efforts to urgently convene the Committee, and we look forward to continuing to work with him to that end.

Finally, as we have consistently stated, accountability for all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law is integral to building peace. We support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic as they continue to work for justice and accountability for the heinous crimes committed in Syria.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Mr. Erksoussi for their briefings.

Today I would like to discuss three aspects of the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. The assault on Dara'a and the need for an immediate ceasefire; necessary confidence-building measures for peace; and the dire humanitarian situation.

First, we must address the Al-Assad regime's assault on Dara'a, which killed civilians and displaced tens of thousands of people. The Al-Assad regime's blockade on humanitarian aid has left residents struggling to survive without water, food, electricity and medicine. Humanitarian organizations are standing ready to provide urgently needed assistance but the Al-Assad regime is keeping them out. The regime must immediately grant them access to Dara'a so that they can save lives. We urge those parties with influence on the Al-Assad regime to help mediate a solution.

That assault is another reason to reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), not only in Dara'a but also in north-western Syria, where increasing attacks by the regime and its supporters have killed dozens of civilians, including children and humanitarian first responders.

The United States therefore reiterates its full support for the Special Envoy's tireless efforts to broker a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria and achieve a lasting nationwide ceasefire. We strongly support the Special Envoy's efforts to foster dialogue and bridge gaps between all parties. To that end, there are clear steps that the Al-Assad regime can and must take. When it finally meets again, the Constitutional Committee must be allowed to produce results. It is time for the Al-Assad regime to quit stalling and credibly participate. Those negotiations are a crucial step in the process towards ending the fighting and achieving lasting peace.

The Syrian regime can take a step forward by addressing the plight of detained and missing persons. Members of the Security Council have repeatedly expressed the fact that that would bolster the political process. The Syrian regime understands that. It occasionally announced purported amnesties, but it has yet to make any meaningful efforts to address that critical issue. The Al-Assad regime should immediately release the tens of thousands of arbitrarily detained men, women and children in its custody and share information on the fate of more than 130,000 Syrians who are reportedly missing or detained after being arbitrarily arrested by the regime.

Finally, today marks the first time that the Security Council has met on the humanitarian situation in Syria since the reauthorization of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance. Thanks to unanimous action by the Council, the vital cross-border lifeline at Bab al-Hawa was restored. Approximately 1,000 trucks a month, filled with food and medicine, including vaccines and equipment to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease, will continue to reach the more than 3 million Syrians in desperate need in the north-west for another year. We commend the Security Council and its member States, which worked tirelessly and constructively to reach agreement, adopted resolution 2585 (2021) unanimously (see S/PV.8817) and, in the process, saved countless lives.

That was an important moment for the Security Council. It showed that we can do more than just talk. We can work together to find solutions and deliver actions on the world's most pressing challenges. Now is the time to do that again, because Secretary-General Gutierrez, United Nations agencies and dozens of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Syria are all in agreement that we need to do more.

Humanitarian needs in Syria are increasing. Because the Council did not reopen Al-Yarubiyah and Bab Al-Salam crossings, United Nations convoys are forced to cross more lines of control, negotiate access with more armed opposition groups and confront more shipping delays and road closures. Regime restrictions have kept essential items, including baby formula, from reaching civilians in areas such north-eastern Syria. In order to reach more Syrians in need of assistance, the regime must remove barriers and hindrances to aid delivery and facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations.

Meanwhile, the pandemic continues to strain Syria's already fragile and limited health infrastructure and exacerbate humanitarian needs across the country. That reinforces the urgency behind improving humanitarian access and ensuring that humanitarian actors can deliver unimpeded life-saving assistance to all parts of Syria. To that end, over the coming months the Council should strengthen and expand its humanitarian commitments.

Let me state unequivocally that the United States is committed to supporting all Syrians in need, regardless of where they reside, including under the authority of the Syrian regime. The United States sanctions are targeted at those who are robbing the Syrian people through their corrupt practices and are committing war crimes, not at civilians. We will continue to work with NGOs and the United Nations to ensure that our sanctions do not have unintended consequences.

The United States will not fund large-scale reconstruction efforts until irreversible progress on the political track has been made. But the United States is committed to providing aid through all modalities, including both cross-border and cross-line, and investing in early recovery projects. We welcome efforts by humanitarian actors to facilitate cross-line aid, including with the support of, and in cooperation with, Turkey, and we urge others to do the same.

After more than a decade of conflict, we need to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict and an

end to this war. The United States therefore remains committed to resolution 2254 (2015). It provides the only viable path to a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We call on the Al-Assad regime to adhere to a nationwide ceasefire, deliver on confidence-building measures and fully engage in the political process. We call on the Security Council to build on the consensus that we recently reached on cross-border assistance, expand humanitarian access and help to deliver aid to a people in desperate need.

In response to Mr. Pedersen's comment, I can affirm that the people of Syria and their plight have not been forgotten by the Security Council.

I will now conclude with a question to Under-Secretary-General Griffiths. We welcome the fact that he plans to visit the region in the coming months, and I have two questions. What does the United Nations need to improve access on the ground? And can Mr. Griffiths update the Council on any progress that the United Nations has made on cross-line deliveries? We understand that aid is crossing and that cross-line aid is taking place in north-eastern Syria, but not in north-western Syria. What are the obstacles that the United Nations is experiencing in getting cross-line aid to the Syrian people?

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Martin Griffiths for their briefings.

I think that it was extremely useful for everyone today to hear the sobering briefing by Mr. Khaled Erksoussi, a person who represents an organization that does not engage in theorizing about humanitarian assistance or politicizing this file, which, unfortunately, we very often see, including in the Security Council, but rather provides real help to real people on the ground. I can assure Council members that he knows and understands better than anyone else in the Chamber what is happening in Syria on the ground. I would therefore like to especially thank him for his briefing today.

This is our first meeting since the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021), on 9 July (see S/PV.8817). It was not easy to agree on the document, but achieving Council unity on it was an important political signal and gives us grounds to hope for more objective and productive discussions in future.

We are pleased to see that the ceasefire is holding in most of Syria. However, the situation remains alarming — regular shelling continues along the perimeter of the Idlib de-escalation zone, as do clashes between Kurds and local Arab tribes in northern Syria, military action in the Syrian-Iraqi border area and arbitrary attacks by Israel.

The socioeconomic situation is extremely serious. It is being exacerbated by sanctions and the ongoing looting of Syrian oil, which — bypassing Damascus — is being openly exported from American-controlled oil fields in north-east Syria.

Against that backdrop, we have noted the clumsy attempts of the American military to publicly justify its occupation of north-east and south-east Syria by referencing resolution 2254 (2015). I would like to urge my colleagues not to look for justifications where there are none but to concentrate instead on the implementation of that Council document. We note that the text confirms the imperative of respecting the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the country.

We look forward to the resumption in the coming period of the work of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. That process must remain Syrian-led and -owned, without outside interference. We support the efforts of Mr. Geir Pedersen to that end. At the same time, we call on the Special Envoy to facilitate the intra-Syrian dialogue rather than weighing it down with artificial preconditions and deadlines. We expect that the Special Envoy will focus on convening the sixth session of the Committee and will not be distracted by situations that sometimes are deliberately inflated. We need an objective assessment of the state of affairs in various regions of Syria.

In Dara'a, for example, we must not slide into a one-sided criticism of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which has every right to enforce the rule of law on its sovereign territory. Dara'a Al-Balad is now practically blocked by bandits, there are problems with humanitarian access, and radical elements are using people as human shields.

For our part, we are making every effort to improve the situation in Dara'a, but local armed groups are not complying with the ceasefire agreement reached on 14 August with the assistance of Russian forces. Under that agreement, everyone who wished to leave the province was given the opportunity to do so freely.

Service personnel from the Russian Reconciliation Center are providing assistance to the civilian population by delivering food, and our doctors are also working there.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, I would like to note that the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) gives the United Nations a mandate to relaunch the entire humanitarian response system in Syria. This is not an easy test for Mr. Griffiths, but a great deal depends on the transformation of aid to Syria and the impartiality of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, including how the Council will fare on this test of its unity and effectiveness.

First, we will expect information about the long-awaited breakthrough in establishing a sustainable cross-line delivery of supplies in Idlib. We hope that everyone in the Chamber understands the harm that is done to the image of the entire humanitarian response system by delays in that area. Given the adoption of the aforementioned resolution 2585 (2021), any talk about the lack of a mandate to unblock the internal Syrian routes to the north-west is, at the very least, unfounded. From now on, this fundamental matter is the responsibility of each of us and an important guideline for the humanitarian penholders.

Secondly, an early transition is needed from the provision of emergency assistance, which cannot go on indefinitely, to large-scale recovery and the creation of conditions for the country's independent development. Rebuilding infrastructure is a prerequisite for the return of refugees to their homes and subsequently for restarting the economy. This is simple logic that will ultimately help to ease the burden on donors. The question of the return of Syrian refugees to their homes is being exacerbated by growing socioeconomic tensions in neighbouring countries. The international community must help to improve living conditions for Syrians in Syria, rather than perpetuating the dire situation of refugees in tent camps, where Syrians, children in particular, cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel. In that context, we call on the Secretary-General and Mr. Martin Griffiths to continue to promote the post-war recovery of Syria.

Thirdly, we must not lose sight of the enormous harm done to recovery efforts by the unilateral sanctions against Syria that were introduced in circumvention of the Security Council. Therefore it is necessary to monitor these problems and ineffective humanitarian

exemptions to those sanctions. We expect that the Council will receive a detailed report on this issue in the near future.

We continue to provide assistance in the fight against the coronavirus disease, among other efforts. Last month, we delivered a quarter of a million vaccines and 1 million PCR tests to Syria. We also cannot fail to mention the fact that in July the last Russian children were evacuated from Roj camp. We brought all Russian children home. Soon the 106 remaining children in Al-Hol camp will also return to their homes. Given the deteriorating security situation in the camp, we urge colleagues to follow our example. Incidentally, UNICEF, whose leadership recently returned from the region, is also urging that.

**Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Mr. Khaled Erksoussi for their briefings. We also welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to this meeting.

Since the Security Council last considered the political and humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/2021/516), the escalation of hostilities has exacerbated the already fragile situation of the population. In addition, there are challenges to reaching a political solution. In that regard, I would like to emphasize several points.

First, the continuing violence in north-west Syria and the increase in incidents in Dara'a have primarily affected the civilian population, which is now suffering the consequences of 10 years of conflict. The violence has led to further displacement, and the needs of the population have grown as a result. The recently reported hostilities have also affected schools and hospitals, as well as the mobility of humanitarian actors, as noted in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2021/735).

In that regard, my country, Mexico stresses the need to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access and full compliance with international humanitarian law. Likewise, we echo the Secretary-General's call for a cessation of hostilities and the observance of a durable and sustainable national ceasefire, in accordance with resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2532 (2020).

Secondly, while the renewal of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism provided some relief for the population, other humanitarian access

challenges must be addressed, particularly water shortages, which others have voiced here, and the effects of the drought, which has worsened in recent months and has the potential to affect more than 5 million people. The failure to maintain water facilities such as the Allouk plant adversely affects their functioning. It is therefore urgent to ensure continued access to technical teams in order for them to carry out the necessary repairs and to seek long-term sustainable solutions.

In addition to the health consequences, other worrying aspects related to water shortages are the effects on crops and food security, as well as the disproportionate impact on women and girls, who make up 70 per cent of agricultural workers.

Thirdly, in the light of the increase in incidents of violence in Al-Hol, a solution must be found to end the suffering of the people living in the camp. In that regard, the repatriations carried out in recent months by countries such as Iraq and Albania are undoubtedly an incentive to offer families an alternative.

In echoing the call of the Secretary-General, Mexico urges other Member States to follow suit and facilitate the return of their nationals who remain in Al-Hol camp.

Fourthly, there is the need to promote political dialogue. Almost two years since its establishment, the Constitutional Committee continues to fail to produce concrete results. We urge the delegation appointed by the Government to respond constructively to the Special Envoy's proposal so that the meeting of the small group can take place in the near future and allow for the continuation of the Constitution-drafting process. We also hope that Mr. Pedersen will soon be able to visit Damascus and that the dialogue with the parties concerned will be constructive.

We reiterate that an inclusive political dialogue, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and other civil society groups, is critical to making progress in resolving the Syrian conflict. In addition to the foregoing, we encourage Member States, in particular those with influence over the parties, to foster rebuilding trust among delegations and thereby safeguard the political process under the auspices of the United Nations.

In conclusion, without a definitive cessation of hostilities, humanitarian needs and distrust concerning the resumption of political dialogue will continue

to grow. Mexico believes that both the ceasefire and the political process are priorities. Accordingly, the international community must shoulder the responsibility to ensure the viability of both.

Finally, I would like to ask Mr. Pedersen for further information as follows. We understand that the proposal submitted to the parties for the upcoming meeting of the small group of the Constitutional Committee was rejected by the delegation appointed by the Government. We would be grateful for further details about the reservations of the Government delegation and the possibility of addressing those differences so that progress can be made on the constitutional process. If it is not possible to hold another meeting, what alternative would there be to proceed with the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015)? Lastly, given the recent developments in the region, particularly in Afghanistan, we would be grateful for details concerning their possible repercussions for Syria.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Mr. Khaled Erksoussi for their briefings.

This year, 2021, marks the tenth year of the Syrian crisis. The war has inflicted untold suffering on the Syrian people. We have once again been reminded by the briefers and the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/735) that the Syrian crisis simply must not continue and that the international community must comprehensively implement resolution 2254 (2015) to restore peace and stability in Syria and alleviate the humanitarian misery of its people.

Today, I will underscore three imperatives. The first imperative is to expedite the process leading towards inclusive dialogue so as to bridge the differences among the parties and find a political solution for lasting peace and stability in Syria. To that end, the international community should provide constructive assistance, and the United Nations should continue to work effectively as the main channel of mediation. China encourages Special Envoy Pedersen to continue facilitating the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, calls on all parties in Syria to demonstrate the political will necessary to enable the convening of and positive progress in the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee. The work of the Constitutional Committee must remain independent and free of foreign interference

to ensure that the political process is Syrian-owned and Syrian-led.

The second imperative is to stabilize the security situation in Syria by taking practical steps and effectively combating terrorism. Recently, instability and volatility have persisted in the north-western, north-eastern and southern parts of Syria with terrorist forces launching frequent attacks and armed group escalating confrontations, while operations by foreign troops in Syria and Israeli missile attacks against the country have further heightened tensions.

China calls on all parties concerned to genuinely respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and immediately end their unlawful invasion and occupation of and attacks against Syria. The international community should, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, step up counter-terrorism cooperation and counter all Security Council-designated terrorist groups. There is no room for double standards. The Syrian Government has the right to lead efforts to combat terrorism on its own soil. This right must be respected. Any attempt to incite inter-ethnic divisions in the name of counter-terrorism must be rejected.

The third imperative is to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria, support the Syrian Government's effort aimed at improving its people's well-being and expedite reconstruction. Syria is faced by a multitude of economic and humanitarian challenges, including armed conflict, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, soaring food prices and oil shortages. The recent repeated disruptions to the operations of the Allouk water station have had a dire impact on the 460,000 people living in north-eastern Syria, for whom water is a basic necessity and resource for people's livelihoods. Meanwhile, unilateral coercive measures remain in place, further exacerbating the humanitarian plight of the Syrian people.

The international community should take action without delay to increase the delivery of aid to Syria, including food, medical supplies and vaccines. In the context of the implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), China urges all parties to the conflict in Syria to protect civilians and halt attacks against civilian facilities in earnest. China calls on international humanitarian relief operations to respect Syria's sovereignty and proceed in consultations with the Syrian Government, while prioritizing the expansion of cross-line deliveries

and making cross-border assistance more transparent. Certain countries should heed the call of Secretary-General Guterres and the international community to immediately lift all unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria.

China has been supporting the efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria by taking concrete actions and has sent multiple shipments of supplies to Syria to combat COVID-19. The most recent shipment of COVID-19 vaccines from the Red Cross Society of China arrived in Damascus on 29 July.

During his visit to Syria in July, the Chinese State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Wang Yi, set forth China's proposed four-point solution to the Syrian issue. He stressed that the principle of sovereignty and independence is inviolable; the humanitarian crisis must be alleviated without delay; the fight against terrorism must not slacken off; and the path leading towards inclusive reconciliation must be followed without deviation. This proposed solution has been well received by and has widely resonated in Syria and other countries in the region. China stands ready to continue working together with the rest of the international community to implement the four-point proposal and contribute to achieving peace, restoring stability, expediting reconstruction and bringing about lasting order and security in Syria.

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen; the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths; and the Secretary-General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Mr. Khaled Erksoussi, for their briefings. I also welcome the presence of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran at today's meeting.

Tunisia is following with concern the developments on the ground in Syria, as the level of violence and tension has increased in recent weeks in many parts of the country. That does not serve diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict but undermines those made to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and counter the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In this regard, we reiterate our position, namely, that there is no military solution to the crisis in Syria, and that the only solution is to reach a Syrian peaceful and political settlement facilitated by the United Nations in

accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), to ensure that security and stability return to Syria and to preserve the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity of Syria in its entirety. We also stress the importance of a rapid return to stability through de-escalation and the restoration of calm based on current understandings. Efforts should also be advanced in the areas of negotiation and mediation so as to establish a comprehensive, lasting ceasefire in Syria in response to the appeal by the Secretary-General and Special Envoy Pedersen.

We express our concern over the acts of terrorism in many regions of Syria and emphasize the need to continue efforts to combat terrorist groups in the country, as that is an essential element in guaranteeing the security necessary to arrive at a long-term political solution in Syria and stability in the region. Moreover, we call for the resumption of the political process in Syria through a resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee and its small body in Geneva with the holding of its sixth session very soon, while also ensuring the continuation of its work. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy in that regard to bring the views of Syrians closer together.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the updated information provided in his recent report on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/2021/735), as provided for by the Security Council in its most recent resolution 2585 (2021) and other relevant resolutions. We applaud the tireless efforts of the United Nations and its executive partners in Syria, coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and improve Syrian living conditions amid the coronavirus disease pandemic and the current economic crisis.

We would also express our grave concern over the worsening humanitarian situation in Syria recently. In that regard, we stress the need for all parties to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law by working to protect civilians, civilian and medical installations, and humanitarian and health workers, as well as guaranteeing the rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need. Establishing a ceasefire in Syria remains an urgent necessity.

We would also warn against the negative trends of dealing with the issues of water, energy and food in Syria amid the water shortage, which has repercussions on essential services, including health facilities, and a negative impact on the fight against the coronavirus

disease. In that regard, we support the international and regional efforts to address this problem in a sustainable and effective way.

In conclusion, we look forward to receiving more updated information in the forthcoming reports of the Secretary-General, particularly those pertaining to strengthening United Nations humanitarian relief efforts in Syria, early-recovery projects and improving the living conditions of the Syrian people. That could also contribute to the dignified return of displaced persons and refugees. We look forward as well to ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance, to be used effectively and transparently while expanding the scope of cross-line deliveries in coordination with the Syrian Government.

**Mr. Dang** (Viet Nam): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Mr. Khaled Erksoussi for their comprehensive briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in our meeting today.

I would like to begin by reiterating our constant support for a comprehensive and lasting political solution in Syria. Only a political process led and owned by the Syrians and facilitated by the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), international law and the Charter of the United Nations, can finally bring an end to this decade-long period of hardship for the Syrian people.

We therefore encourage the concerned parties to engage constructively in dialogue and negotiation, especially within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We hope that the parties will soon reach agreement on working methods and timelines to continue the Constitutional Committee talks.

Trust and confidence need to be consolidated among the Syrian interlocutors as well as international actors. In that regard, we fully support the crucial bridging role of the United Nations and the Special Envoy. We also hope that the Special Envoy's proposal on a new international format will soon be realized and yield positive results.

Even though there has been no major outbreak of violence for nearly a year and a half, the security situation remains extremely volatile. My delegation is concerned over the uptick in violence, including in the north-west and the south-west. According to the Secretary-

General's report (S/2021/735), innocent civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence and terrorism; the number of incidents that have affected civilians has doubled in the past six months compared with the six months prior. Women and children accounted for more than half of civilian casualties. Civilian infrastructure continues to be damaged. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint in order to preserve the calm security situation on the ground. That is a crucial precondition for the quest for a political solution.

At the same time, efforts to combat terrorist groups designated by the Security Council must be continued in a well-coordinated manner in order to best ensure respect for international law, including humanitarian law, and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On the humanitarian front, my delegation shares the concern over the continuously deteriorating situation in various parts of Syria. The economic crisis, food insecurity, the shortage of basic goods, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation and so forth are pushing vulnerable people further into misery.

We also share the concern about the water crisis relating to the Euphrates River, which may have severe humanitarian implications, both short-term and long-term. That current dire situation necessitates safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access in order to enhance the response in Syria.

We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2585 (2021), as maintaining access for people in the north-west remains critical for now. The resolution also recognized the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to promote recovery projects, inter alia. In the meantime, the dialogue among concerned parties needs to be intensified to agree on the operational details of cross-line delivery to the region. We are also delighted to see the notable progress on cross-line delivery to the north-east, where assistance in terms of medical items is a high priority.

Let me conclude by stressing the need for unity on the part of the international community. It is our hope that our unanimity in adopting resolution 2585 (2021) will provide strong momentum for a long-term, comprehensive solution to the Syrian crisis.

**Ms. Prince** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Mr. Erksoussi for their informative briefings.

The crisis in Syria continues to be of profound concern. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating and is exacerbated and fuelled by an economic downturn and the perpetuation of hostilities across the country. Unquestionably, only a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process will restore peace, stability and prosperity to the country.

We continue to support the Special Envoy's unwavering efforts to facilitate the political process. We encourage the parties to engage constructively on all issues that will assist in advancing the process, including on critical matters, such as missing persons and detainees, and the important work of the Constitutional Committee.

We have noted with concern the increase in violence resulting in injury and death to civilians and damage to and destruction of civilian objects, in particular health and educational facilities. It bears repeating that the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is paramount. Further, all military objectives, including those aimed at eradicating the scourge of terrorism, must comply fully with the enduring principles of international law. Distinction, proportionality and precaution ought to guide all actions.

Moreover, an immediate nationwide ceasefire, as called for by the Special Envoy, is necessary. This nationwide cessation of hostilities is not only imperative for the protection of civilians, but is also required to create an environment conducive to the advancement of the political process.

On the point of civilian protection, we remain troubled by the growing insecurity in Al-Hol camp. Those residing and working in displacement camps must be afforded protection. The security situation must therefore be given urgent attention.

The ongoing economic crisis has compounded the myriad of challenges facing the Syrian people, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. Millions of Syrians are still heavily dependent on humanitarian aid and the recently reauthorized cross-border mechanism is a lifeline. However, it must be effectively complemented by the cross-line modality to reach all Syrians in need. In this regard, we are pleased to note the increase in cross-line deliveries.

We strongly urge parties to continue working together to increase the humanitarian response and to assist in facilitating the efficient distribution of

coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines. On that point, we note the delivery of the second tranche of those vaccines from the all-important COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility. We commend those countries that have provided additional vaccines to Syria. The fight against COVID-19 requires international cooperation and global solidarity.

The water crisis is also a cause for deep concern. Critically low water levels in the Euphrates River have disastrous consequences for the country's overall socioeconomic condition. Lives and livelihoods are threatened, as electricity generation, the availability of clean drinking water and crop irrigation are all dependent on the supply of this vital commodity. The situation must continue to be monitored closely. Further, a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Allouk water station must also be prioritized.

We urge the international community to engage pragmatically on Syria. In this regard, we appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures that have been imposed on Syria in order to assist the country in facing the seemingly insurmountable challenges at hand. We further encourage support for Syria's overall socioeconomic recovery through reconstruction aid to enhance the resilience of the Syrian people and to bolster the country's own national efforts.

The Syrian people must remain at the forefront of all deliberations and decisions. Our words and actions must always be guided by humanitarian considerations, rather than by what is geopolitically expedient. We have a responsibility to support Syria and its people in a meaningful way, and we must not fail in fulfilling it.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I also take note of Mr. Khaled Erksoussi's briefing this morning.

No effort should be spared in order to bring about a general cessation of hostilities under the auspices of the United Nations, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions. France continues to condemn the murderous offensive launched by the Syrian regime with the support of its backers on the city of Dara'a. We are also very concerned by the increase in its attacks in the north-west of the country.

Respect for international humanitarian law is an obligation for all. The protection of civilians, including

humanitarian and medical personnel, remains an absolute priority. We must also pay particular attention to those who are most vulnerable, including women and children, and ensure that they receive the necessary humanitarian assistance. Indeed, all parties, in particular the regime, must ensure full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. It is essential that the regime allow humanitarian aid to be delivered to the Dara'a Al-Balad area, which is de facto under siege, without further delay.

The renewal of the cross-border humanitarian mechanism for 12 months comes as a relief, but we are all aware that it is insufficient to meet humanitarian needs. We regret that the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Yarubiyah crossings have not been reopened. We welcome the progress made in establishing a cross-line convoy to the north-west and hope that it can be implemented soon. I would, however, like to stress that cross-line assistance is not an alternative to the cross-border mechanism.

In a context of increasing humanitarian needs throughout Syria, compounded by growing food insecurity and extreme water access issues, as Mr. Griffiths reminded us, the lack of a significant increase in the regime's authorization of United Nations humanitarian convoys is of great concern, as evidenced in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/735).

The uprisings in the south-west against the restoration of the regime's security apparatus once again underscore the importance of achieving a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). In its absence, those cycles of violence will continue to be repeated, and civilians will continue to pay the highest price.

Nearly two years after the establishment of the Constitutional Committee, work on a new Constitution has not even begun, owing to the regime's repeated interference. It is high time to work together to implement all the components of resolution 2254 (2015) to accompany the intra-Syrian process in Geneva, which will otherwise remain at a standstill. We encourage the Special Envoy to work in that direction. We reiterate that the process must be conducted with the full participation of women. France, alongside its European partners, stands ready to play its full part. Russia has a particular responsibility in that area, and we hope that it will be able to use its influence to induce Syria onto a path to lasting peace and stability.

Without a political solution, there will be no safe, dignified or voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. The holding of another conference on the return of refugees in Damascus at the end of July could therefore do nothing to change the facts and the reality on the ground. The conditions for such a return have not been met in any way to date. Without a political solution, our positions on the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction will remain unchanged.

Finally, we will continue our tireless fight against impunity for crimes committed in Syria. Those responsible for such crimes will be held accountable for their actions.

**Mr. Lipand** (Estonia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings on both the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. We also took note of the comments made by Mr. Khaled Erksoussi.

Syria faces numerous challenges in the near future. In this regard, I want to highlight the recent military escalation in the south of the country, which is of growing concern for Estonia. Unfortunately, the Syrian authorities have failed to ensure stability in Dara'a governorate. Over 35,000 people have been displaced in the region this summer, as violence has steadily increased.

Estonia condemns the shelling of urban areas by the Syrian army, threatening the well-being and safety of the most vulnerable, including women, children and the elderly. Based on resolution 2254 (2015), implementing an immediate nationwide ceasefire is a precondition for peaceful dialogue. Overall living standards also continue to deteriorate, as corruption and warlordism remain widespread across Syria. The safe and dignified return of refugees is not possible.

In the light of those hardships and the coronavirus disease pandemic, I want to underline the work of international humanitarian organizations, which remains critical in reaching millions of people on the ground with the necessary medical and humanitarian aid. Estonia calls all parties to provide safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all Syrian people in need. With that in mind, the renewal of the cross-border aid mechanism for one year in July is certainly encouraging, especially when considering that no cross-line deliveries have taken place to the north-west of Syria.

Political discussions are at a deadlock, as Constitutional Committee talks have not continued. Estonia encourages the Special Envoy to explore additional confidence-building measures to enhance genuine dialogue. Most important, we believe that meaningful steps with regard to arbitrarily detained people could help ease tensions. I reiterate the call of Estonia and the European Union on the need to create an international mechanism to locate missing people or their remains. There must be accountability for the many war crimes and crimes against humanity, and an end to impunity. We demand the release of all arbitrarily detained people and political prisoners.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I thank today's briefers.

As we have heard, the situation in Dara'a is severe. Some 50,000 civilians have been besieged there since June. Heavy bombardment has led to the displacement of 37,000 people, and at least eight civilians have been killed. Civilian infrastructure has been targeted by the Syrian regime, as it has throughout the conflict, with shelling rendering parts of the Dara'a national hospital inoperable. Civilians continue to contend with shortages of fuel, cooking gas, water and bread, as a result of the regime's behaviour.

The United Kingdom calls on all parties to ensure and expedite impartial humanitarian access through all modalities, including through partners not registered in Damascus. In particular, we call for immediate humanitarian access to be granted to Dara'a al-Balad, where an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 families have been without access to humanitarian aid and support since 5 August.

We welcome the recent statement made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights addressing the appalling humanitarian situation, as well as the remarks today by Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths. We would welcome an update from the United Nations on progress on efforts to develop contingency plans and ensure a positive response to the request for an inter-agency convoy to Dara'a.

All people of Dara'a must have access to vital support services and food. The siege must stop. We also remain concerned about the escalation of violence in the north-west of Syria, in violation of the ceasefire agreement. We are appalled at UNICEF reports that at least 45 children have been killed or

injured since the beginning of July. We urge all parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire and ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, in line with international humanitarian law.

Finally, with regard to the humanitarian situation, there is a need to address water scarcity through an inclusive, multisectoral response plan, coordinated at a whole-of-Syria level, with support from the United Nations Syria regional response hub in Amman. We welcome recent progress in that regard and look forward to consolidated analysis and response planning.

With regard to the political process, the United Kingdom urges the implementation of the steps enshrined in resolution 2254 (2015), namely, a nationwide ceasefire, unhindered aid access, the release of those arbitrarily detained, the establishment of conditions for safe refugee return and free and fair elections, pursuant to a new Constitution. These represent the only way out of the conflict.

Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths have our full support for their continued efforts to make progress on this file.

**Ms. Heimerback** (Norway): I thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths, Mr. Erksoussi and Special Envoy Pedersen for their briefings.

The violence and escalation in southern and northern Syria over the summer are cruel reminders of the urgency of seeing progress on the political file and moving forward towards a political solution. It illustrates the need for all parties in Syria to agree on a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). It also shows that the status quo is not viable and how volatile the situation is. The relative calm we have seen over the past year and a half is fragile, as the Special Envoy has highlighted, and we support efforts to encourage de-escalation. There is a significant risk of further violence and more civilian casualties. Let me remind all parties of their obligation to protect civilians.

At last month's meeting (see S/PV.8817), Norway, along with other Council members, expressed its hope that the Council's unanimous vote in support of resolution 2585 (2021) would form the basis of a renewed and more constructive dialogue and process on the political track. We continue to hope for such engagement by all parties in order to make progress that benefits the entire Syrian population. In that regard, let me reiterate our support for the Special Envoy's efforts

for a better international mechanism and a step-by-step approach. We urge all actors involved in Syria to engage constructively in the process and identify concrete issues that can be a part of a step-by-step negotiation.

In order to secure an inclusive and credible process, we highlight the need to see women included. We strongly support the Special Envoy's efforts to engage with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and broader Syrian civil society, including women's groups.

Overall, resolution 2254 (2015) remains the framework for a political solution in Syria, agreed by consensus by the Council. It includes a nationwide ceasefire, the release of arbitrarily detained persons and a new Constitution, with elections following. Therefore, the Constitutional Committee is just one part of a larger puzzle, but it is still the only ongoing process and arena where the parties meet.

Although a sixth round of negotiations has not yet taken place, we note that work is ongoing and support the Special Envoy's efforts in that regard. Furthermore, we hope that the parties will agree on a suitable framework before the next round of negotiations. It is imperative that the next round produce concrete results towards a reformed Constitution and that the work for a broader political solution continue and show progress as well. Both the Syrian parties and the regional and international actors involved in Syria must contribute to progress and make compromises.

Let me conclude by underlining that the Syrian people deserve peace and stability. The region, too, needs them.

**Mr. Aougi** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings. I also thank Mr. Khaled Erksoussi for his briefing. I welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to today's meeting.

A resolution to the Syrian crisis will not emerge by the force of weapons alone — that can never be stated enough — but rather via a negotiated political solution involving all the various segments of Syrian society without exception. We deplore the ongoing hostilities, air strikes and other rocket fire on areas inhabited by civilians, in particular in the south and north-west. We call upon all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. The Niger calls on the parties to declare a nationwide ceasefire, as requested by the Secretary-General and

his Special Envoy, so as to create the conditions for a successful political process and make it possible to effectively combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

On the political front, my delegation deplores the fact that the political process in Syria has struggled to make genuine progress despite the establishment of the Constitutional Committee and multiple rounds of negotiations. It is high time that the parties organize themselves and demonstrate a minimum level of compromise to break the deadlock and put the political process on the right track.

On the humanitarian front, we welcome the daily efforts of humanitarian organizations, which are working relentlessly to assist Syrians in need across Syria. They are the real heroes of those people.

In that regard, the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and support, in accordance with international humanitarian law, is now more important than ever. We also call on the Syrian Government to continue its cooperation with the United Nations and its partners to improve and enhance the delivery of humanitarian assistance across the demarcation lines.

The Niger is deeply concerned by the fact that the Syrian people continue to suffer under the combined effects of the economic and security difficulties and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the declining water level and the low flow of the Euphrates river are of serious concern. That situation could further complicate the already precarious conditions for the population, who will have no choice but to move again.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for the easing or lifting of the unilateral economic sanctions, which weigh heavily on Syria's ability to cope with the pandemic and the current economic crisis. The sanctions are an aggravating factor in the humanitarian situation, not only for Syria but also for its neighbours and the international organizations working on the ground.

Finally, we call on all external actors involved in the Syrian crisis to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the country. Real and tangible progress in the work of the Constitutional Commission and the cessation of hostilities also depend on the level of that external influence.

**Mr. Kiboino (Kenya):** I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths

and Mr. Khaled Erksoussi for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey.

Kenya welcomes the combined consideration of the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. We reiterate that Kenya's principal interest is the safety, well-being and peace of the people of Syria.

Like other speakers, we once again reiterate that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is a negotiated political settlement. For that reason, the parties and stakeholders must genuinely commit to breaking the current impasse with respect to the resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings and commit to the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

We call on the parties to give serious consideration to the Special Envoy's suggested bridging proposals and commit to constructively taking steps towards building hope, reconciliation, peace, political stability and prosperity for Syria. The Syrian people look to them to deliver on those critical aspirations.

Kenya is gravely concerned by the uptick in hostilities and the levels of insecurity. We deplore the frequent sporadic cross-line fire, indiscriminate shelling and air strikes in the north-west in southern Idlib and in the south-west, particularly in the Dara'a and Al-Suwaydaa governorates. Such attacks are exacerbating the conflict and jeopardizing any prospects for peace and a return to normalcy.

We cannot overemphasize the need to de-escalate the hostilities and for all the parties to honour and adhere to the nationwide ceasefire and renew their commitments to the cessation of hostilities. They must prioritize the protection of civilians, including in Al-Hol camp, where there are growing threats against women and girls, and the protection of critical civilian infrastructure.

We again emphasize the need for renewed efforts to combat Security Council-listed terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, including holding accountable those responsible for heinous crimes.

The worsening humanitarian situation, compounded by the economic distress and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, remains of grave concern. Food security continues to deteriorate, as demonstrated by

the inadequate food consumption level, which has increased nationwide by 15 per cent.

Furthermore, the climate change impacts, particularly the reduced water levels in the Euphrates river and at the Allouk water station, have major implications for water and food security, as well as the electricity supply, for millions of people. We call for appropriate measures to address that alarming development.

Kenya commends the United Nations humanitarian response through the early recovery and livelihood activities, including through the provision of essential services and livelihood opportunities, particularly for the most vulnerable. That initiative is a promise of hope for recovery towards normalcy.

We note that there are still 3.4 million people in north-west Syria and a further 1.3 million people in north-east Syria in need of humanitarian aid. We are pleased that the cross-border aid mechanism remains a crucial avenue for humanitarian assistance, including the COVID-19 vaccines, to reach those people.

We are further encouraged by the increase from 10 to 12 per cent in the regular and sustained cross-line operations in the north-east, particularly in Hasakah governorate. We continue to encourage the Government of Syria and the United Nations to keep working on concluding an agreement that will enable cross-line deliveries in the north-west.

In conclusion, Kenya welcomes the Special Envoy's planned visit to Damascus and hopes that it will yield outcomes that will mark a step forward in the search for sustainable peace for Syria. We have also taken note of the intention of Mr. Griffiths to travel to Syria in his new capacity in order to have a better appreciation of the humanitarian situation, and we look forward to his briefing thereafter. Kenya stands in solidarity with the people of Syria in their quest for lasting peace through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue.

**The President:** I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of India.

I join other speakers in thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I also thank Mr. Khaled Erksoussi, Secretary General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, for his insights.

The Special Envoy's efforts to end the stalemate concerning the work of the Constitutional Committee has not yet yielded positive results. The small body of the Constitutional Committee has not met since January. The Constitutional Committee has an onerous task of preparing and drafting the constitutional reform for popular approval, which will contribute to the political settlement in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We hope that the Special Envoy's recent engagements, including his visit to Moscow, will help in convening the sixth meeting of the small body of the Constitutional Committee soon. An agreement among the three parties on the terms of reference and core rules of procedure for the sixth meeting would positively contribute to the process.

We believe that all major stakeholders need to engage in a constructive dialogue for the United Nations-led political track to move forward. The adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) last month proved that sincere efforts on behalf of all stakeholders can lead to positive outcomes. We call on the regional and international interlocutors to extend their full support to the Special Envoy in his efforts to take the political track forward. We welcome the recent meetings involving the Astana guarantors and the Special Envoy's interactions in that regard.

We are concerned about the security situation in Syria, particularly in Dara'a, the north-east and the north-west. As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/735), military activity and hostilities have increased in recent months, seriously affecting the civilian population. The recent fighting in Dara'a reflects the fragile nature of the situation. We believe that a nationwide comprehensive ceasefire is paramount to the interests of the Syrian people.

We have been referring to the involvement of external actors in Syria and its impact on the growth of terrorism, both in Syria and in the region. The groups designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, have continued to gain in strength in Syria and their activities are mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. ISIL has continued to launch attacks in areas across Deir ez-Zor, Hasakah and eastern rural Homs. ISIL has also targeted energy infrastructure in some instances. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continues to have a dominating influence in Idlib. That is a cause for serious concern. It is imperative that all parties adhere to their international obligations to

fight terrorism and terrorist organizations in Syria, as designated by the Security Council.

India firmly believes that long-term security and stability in that region can be achieved only by preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We remain convinced that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict and reaffirm our commitment to advancing a Syrian-led and -owned United Nations-facilitated political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The briefing by Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths once again highlighted the grim humanitarian situation in the country. The Syrian people have suffered relentless violence and terror for more than a decade now. The economic situation has deteriorated further in recent months. Syrian women, children and elderly persons have been impacted in disproportionate ways. The pandemic has only made the situation worse. There is an urgent need to increase humanitarian assistance to all Syrians throughout the country, without discrimination, politicization or any preconditions.

What we need immediately is an active engagement that is consistent with Syrian independence and territorial integrity and addresses the urgency of the humanitarian issues in order to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. There is also an urgent need for concrete steps to address the hurdles that are obstructing the functioning of both cross-border and cross-line operations, in particular in north-west Syria. The adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) provides another opportunity to strengthen humanitarian assistance, especially cross-line delivery of aid. We hope that will strengthen further in the coming months.

India has extended development assistance and human resource development support to Syria through grants and lines of credit for development projects, medicine and food supplies, artificial-limb fitment camps and capacity-building training programmes. We intend to stay the course, and India reiterates its steadfast commitment to continuing its support to the people of Syria.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you,

Mr. President, for having organized this joint debate on the political and humanitarian tracks in Syria, which optimizes the time and resources of the Security Council.

The return of Syrian citizens to their country is a priority for Syria. In his inaugural speech on 17 July, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic renewed the call for Syrian citizens to return to their country. During the second session of the International Conference on the Return of Syrian Refugees, held in Damascus in July, the Syrian Government reiterated its intention, within its capabilities, to continue efforts to that end, to work to create the conditions to facilitate the safe and dignified return of its citizens and to provide them with decent living conditions. Its close cooperation with friendly countries, the United Nations and the relevant international organizations in that regard has resulted in the return of a large number of Syrians to their homes.

On the other hand, the United States of America and its Western allies continue to obstruct all initiatives related to the return of Syrians to their homeland and continue to misinform the media and propagate anti-Syrian propaganda by claiming that the conditions conducive to the return of Syrian refugees to their country are not yet in place.

Syria welcomes Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and his planned visit to Syria at the end of this month in order to update him on the situation on the ground and to learn about his preliminary vision for radical solutions to the humanitarian crisis in the country. We look forward to realistic reports and a fresh approach to the humanitarian situation in Syria that addresses the challenges that greatly impact the humanitarian and relief work of the United Nations in the country.

Syria has repeatedly clarified the real reasons for the worsening humanitarian and living conditions in the country and the inability of the Syrian Government to provide the basic needs of its citizens, advance the reconstruction process, rehabilitate the infrastructure damaged by terrorism and foreign aggression and take the measures necessary to address the coronavirus disease pandemic, including securing vaccines for the Syrian people. Syria reiterates that improving the humanitarian situation of Syrians requires the following.

First, the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States and the countries of the European Union on Syria and its people must be lifted. These have

had catastrophic repercussions as they prevent food, medicine, fuel and other basic necessities from reaching the Syrian people. They also directly impact the level, quality and effectiveness of the humanitarian and relief operations conducted by the United Nations and other international organizations in Syria and undermine the essence of the humanitarian work undertaken.

Secondly, the occupation of north-east Syria by American forces and of north and north-west Syria by Turkish forces must end. They must stop depleting and plundering the Syrian people's resources and national wealth. They violate Syria's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. All their false justifications for their occupation will not persuade anyone.

The Turkish occupation forces, affiliated terrorist groups and separatist militias continue to use water as a weapon of war against civilians by shutting off water from the Allouk station for the twenty-sixth time. This station is the lifeline for the more than 1 million citizens living in Hasakah and its countryside, providing them drinking water, which is now more critical because of the temperature increase. This situation risks becoming a humanitarian disaster. It is a criminal act and a flagrant violation of international agreements amounting to a crime against humanity and a war crime. Immediate action by the Security Council and the Secretariat is therefore required in order to compel the Turkish regime to reopen that station and to respect international agreements by pumping water from the Euphrates River back to the levels and quantities agreed bilaterally by the two countries.

Thirdly, humanitarian activities must include support for early-recovery projects and the rehabilitation of infrastructure to provide basic services such as education and health. We note that resolution 2585 (2021) included new and clear guidance on the need to expand the areas of humanitarian action, which requires practical implementation on the ground and the achievement of tangible results in that regard.

Fourthly, humanitarian work should be enhanced from within Syria, as that is the most effective approach, especially since the bulk of humanitarian and relief operations are carried out from inside Syria, in coordination with the Syrian Government, which facilitates the delivery of aid to all Syrians including to areas in the north-west, taking into account the safety of humanitarian workers during the delivery of such aid.

Fifthly, the Security Council must put an end to the failing mechanism for cross-border aid delivery because it wastes resources, tarnishes and politicizes humanitarian action and violates Syrian sovereignty. In addition, the absence of a monitoring and distribution mechanism that ensures that humanitarian assistance reaches its proper final destination has turned assistance into a tool and a lifeline for armed groups designated as terrorist entities.

Sixthly, the inhumane behaviour of certain Western countries must stop. Those countries continue to exploit the plight of the Syrian people by politicizing every aspect of humanitarian work so as to achieve their own political goals. The United Nations and its humanitarian agencies should address the imbalances and gaps in these countries' work by adopting a new approach, support early-recovery projects and contribute to the inevitable transition towards development work. This transition is facing great challenges as a result of the pressures, politicized conditions, restrictions and dictates imposed by Western countries on the role played by the United Nations.

Some statements today described the situation in Syria in false and inaccurate ways, particularly with regard to Dara'a Al-Balad, which, to be clear, is an area that has witnessed an escalation in hostilities by armed groups and terrorist elements. Upon the instructions of their paymasters, these groups have violated the ceasefire and de-escalation agreements brokered by our Russian friends. Both civilians and members of the Syrian army have been attacked and subjected to violence leading to the escalation we have seen in the south.

Despite the misinformation spread by certain countries and international bodies with regard to the situation in Dara'a Al-Balad, we would like to enlighten those who, having lost their critical judgment and their sense of balance, have blindly believed terrorist propaganda. I will cite a few statistics that will demonstrate the wisdom of the Syrian State. For example, 3,900 out of 4,600 case files of those wanted for their involvement in terrorist acts have been processed. More than 2,500 people have been returned to work. More than 1,700 people have been released from incarceration.

On the other hand, the terrorists have assassinated 18 innocent municipality leaders and killed 2,050 members of the army and police forces and more than

65 civilians simply because they sided with the Syrian State. Terrorists have killed numerous ordinary citizens in Syria and wounded or injured many more, including civilians and military personnel. Have we ever heard statistics such as these from the United Nations or the terrorists' masters, whose reports are replete with statistics only when they want to tarnish the reputation of the Syrian State? Indeed, why is it that we have never heard anything about the terrorist attack against Al-Mataaiyah village in Dara'a governorate, which resulted in 40 casualties? Six houses were completely destroyed there. Water and electricity resources were also decimated. That is exactly what Boko Haram is doing in Nigeria. Have Western countries — such as the United Kingdom, France and other countries of the European Union that have supported the terrorists — dealt with these bandits using any methods other than weapons, prosecution and neutralization?

Syria reiterates its unequivocal rejection of all false allegations in relation to the situation in Dara'a. We deplore the humanitarian team's mistaken approach to the situation in the south, which has constrained the freedom of civilians there. These false allegations are a misrepresentation of the facts on the ground and the result of the authors' insistence that some reports adopt fabricated or biased narratives that directly or indirectly target the Syrian Government. Syria stresses its willingness to address the root causes of the instability in the south through dialogue. Until this very moment, Syria has been exercising self-restraint so as to avoid any confrontation that would harm innocent people.

The well-coordinated yet ill-conceived campaign to level falsehoods against the Syrian Government has been met with utter silence by States members of the Council working in aggressive tandem with United States and Turkish forces and in cooperation with proxy separatist militias and terrorist entities on my country's territory. A blind eye has simply been turned on the Israeli attacks against the sovereignty of Syria, and there has been a total disregard of the attacks' repercussions on the stability and security of the region. Each one of those actions and attacks is a grave violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions, all of which emphasize the necessity of respecting the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

We welcomed the statement issued by the guarantor States of the Astana track issued at the outcome of their sixteenth round of talks held in Nur-Sultan

in July. Accordingly, we thank Russia and Iran for contributing to the success of those talks. We demand that the Turkish regime fulfil its obligations under the Astana agreements and Sochi understandings and that it cease practices that do not contribute to creating an environment conducive to a political solution.

We wish to stress that we are following the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen closely and that we have renewed our commitment to a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political solution in Syria. Further, we are constructively engaged in facilitating the sixth round of the small group of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible. In that regard, we underscore the importance of full respect for the terms of reference and the rules and regulations of the Committee, of non-interference in its work and of avoiding attempts to impose any outcome or unreasonable or unrealistic time frame on the Committee's work.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

**Mrs. Kocyigit Grba (Turkey):** I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. I also extend our congratulations to Under-Secretary-General Griffiths on the assumption of his new role and look forward to welcoming him in Turkey.

As we recently marked World Humanitarian Day, let me express our gratitude to humanitarian workers across Syria, who are risking their lives to help the Syrian people. We will continue to support their tireless efforts.

For more than a year, in the face of the worsening humanitarian situation and the adverse impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we have emphasized that the United Nations cross-border mechanism is more crucial than ever.

The Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), other United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations on the ground have underscored the need to continue the critical humanitarian assistance to Syrian people.

With the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) last month, the Council made a choice between the urgent needs of the Syrian people and the political calculations of the Al-Assad regime. We welcome the Council's decision to renew the mechanism for 12 months.

As we speak, millions of people in the north-west continue their struggle to survive with aid coming from Turkey through Bab al-Hawa crossing. That also includes the COVID-19 vaccines, which remain indispensable given the presence of very densely populated areas in the region. My country continues to support and facilitate United Nations cross-border operations.

Regarding resolution 2585 (2021), let me put on record the following points that require our collective attention.

We acknowledge the emphasis on broadening humanitarian activities in Syria, including early-recovery projects. However, it is essential that these projects comprise all people in need, without any discrimination. We will not allow the regime and terrorist organizations to abuse this issue for their narrow agendas.

On cross-line access, let me remind Council members that resolution 2585 (2021) highlights the entire country. That entails cross-line operations to the north-east as well, including to areas such as Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad, where OCHA reports urgent needs. Unfortunately, our calls regarding the need to conduct cross-line operations into that area fell on deaf ears for almost two years. Not a single person in the region has been vaccinated against COVID-19 to date. We repeat our call and request the start of cross-line operations to the area as soon as possible.

As for cross-line access to the north-west, Turkey has already given its approval to the World Food Programme (WFP) plan of 2 July, which foresees a mission from Aleppo to Sarmada, Idlib. During the month of August, we conveyed our readiness to conduct the mission both to WFP and OCHA and committed to security guarantees for its successful completion. We also expect relevant parties to give the necessary security assurances and take measures to prevent provocative actions.

We expect that the momentum created with resolution 2585 (2021) on the humanitarian front will also have a positive impact on the political track. We continue to support efforts towards finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015). However, the political process is not advancing in a satisfactory manner. Despite Mr. Pedersen's intensive efforts over the past months, the sixth round of the Constitutional Committee has not been convened owing to the obstruction of the regime's

delegation. It is imperative that the terms of reference and the core rules of procedure of the Committee be respected.

Despite the regime's efforts to derail the Constitutional Committee, the opposition's ongoing constructive engagement is commendable. We have been urging the opposition to maintain this positive approach. The Constitutional Committee remains the sole concrete element of the political process. We reiterate our call to all relevant parties to adopt the same constructive attitude towards the Constitutional Committee in order to make credible progress on the political track.

The Astana process constitutes an integral part of efforts towards achieving a political solution in Syria. The sixteenth meeting of the Astana process, held in Nur-Sultan last month, focused on the political process and developments on the ground. Turkey will sustain its endeavours to ensure that the Astana process continues to contribute to the settlement of the Syrian conflict.

The situation on the ground remains alarming. We are deeply concerned at the rising civilian toll. The protection of civilians is of paramount importance. The regime has ramped up its ceasefire violations in the past two months. During that period, more than 50 civilians were killed. Attacks targeting civilians must stop. So long as the ceasefire violations persist, the possibility of ending the conflict through a solution that is acceptable to all sides will remain elusive.

After a decade of tremendous suffering and loss, it is clear that the only way to end the Syrian conflict is through a political solution. Continuing to this day to seek a military solution is delusional. Besieging towns and attacking and oppressing civilians will yield no results. In that vein, attacks against civilians in Dara'a are unacceptable and should cease immediately. Humanitarian access must be urgently granted to all Syrians in need.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) constitutes another major threat to the security of Syria. That terrorist organization and its offshoot, SDF, increasingly target and oppress civilians. We reiterate our call for a United Nations investigation into the PKK/YPG's attack against the United Nations-supported Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin on 12 June. Their persistent assaults on Afrin aim to prevent the return of local communities to that city, which has become more stable after being cleared of terrorists. The international

community must not remain silent in the face of the attacks carried out by the PKK/YPG in complicity with the regime.

Regarding the water disruption in Allouk, the reasons behind the problem are not only well known to United Nations agencies but also clearly reflected in the relevant reports of the Secretary-General. Water is supplied from the Allouk station to the Hasakah region through water pumps that operate on electrical power coming from Tishrin Dam. The electrical supply to Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad from the Tishrin Dam through the Mabrouka and Al-Darbasiyah electricity stations, the only source of electrical power to the region, is deliberately cut by the PKK/YPG on a regular basis. Repair teams under the coordination of Russia have been able to reach the station as of 27 July. Lately, a technical team visited the area on 18 August.

PKK/YPG is a terrorist organization that bombs hospitals and civilian areas, recruits children, mercilessly kills and obstructs the return of local populations. Supporting such a terrorist entity under the pretext of fighting Da'esh is unacceptable. Such support is brazenly channelled to oppressing local Syrians and enabling terrorist acts. Turkey will continue its resolute fight against all terrorist organizations, including Da'esh and the PKK/YPG.

For more than a decade, Syrians have endured tragedies that are beyond imagination. By far, Syria has become the gravest humanitarian catastrophe of the century. The regime's war crimes and crimes against humanity are well recorded and require immediate steps towards full accountability. Of those crimes, the chemical weapons attack in Ghouta is probably the grimmest episode in the Syrian conflict. On the occasion of the eighth anniversary of that horrible attack, we strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime in Ghouta and elsewhere. We reiterate our strong call for ensuring accountability for the crimes committed by the Al-Assad regime.

With the lies we just heard, the regime will not be able to divert the attention of the international community from the atrocities it has committed. Turkey will continue to address the suffering of the Syrian people and work towards the transformation of Syria into a peaceful and stable country.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): We recall resolution 2585 (2021), through which the Security Council called upon all Member States to respond with practical steps to address the urgent needs of the Syrian people.

It is essential that the Council has also recognized that humanitarian activities are broader than solely addressing the immediate needs of the affected population and should include support for essential services through water, sanitation, health, education and shelter early-recovery projects.

Given that the imposition of unlawful unilateral sanctions against Syria by certain countries is one of the major causes of the current humanitarian situation in that country, the Council, by using the term "practical steps", is literally calling, though implicitly, for the removal of such sanctions, at least in areas related to early-recovery projects. Yet that call must not be misconstrued as if sanctions imposed on other sectors were acceptable or assisting Syria in other areas, particularly reconstruction efforts, were less important.

As resolution 2585 (2021) is the result of a compromise, including by the main countries imposing such sanctions, we urge them to honour their promises, to take their obligations under that resolution seriously and to remove, immediately and fully, all unlawful sanctions against Syria.

In a situation that has been described by the Council as a complex humanitarian emergency, removing unilateral sanctions is also essential given the fact that sanctions seriously undermine the efficiency of the humanitarian operations in Syria conducted by the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations. As most of the humanitarian operations are carried out from inside Syria, in line with the call enshrined in resolution 2585 (2021), cross-line humanitarian assistance must be improved, including through a substantial increase in allocated assistance and ensuring that they are commensurate with the size of population living in the areas covered by such operations.

Likewise, we take positive note of the request to the Secretary-General to provide a report containing detailed information on cross-border operations, including the distribution mechanism, operating partners and the volume and nature of items delivered. That must lead to addressing one of the missing points in cross-border humanitarian assistance, namely, the

lack of transparency. In any case, the cross-border mechanism must be used in full accordance with the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance, and it must be guaranteed that the mechanism is not used, directly or indirectly, to lend any support to terrorist groups inside Syria.

The full and effective implementation in good faith of resolution 2585 (2021), beyond addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, can have positive implications for other areas, leading to the depoliticization of humanitarian assistance and creating a certain level of trust and confidence, which is required for further cooperation towards the peaceful settlement of the crisis.

In that context, we reiterate our principled position that the Syrian crisis must be settled peacefully and in accordance with the principles of international law, particularly respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, non-intervention and non-interference in their internal or external affairs and the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

To create grounds conducive to ending the conflict in Syria, all uninvited foreign forces must leave the country without any precondition or delay, and terrorist groups must be confronted. Equally important, the Council must compel the Israeli regime to put an immediate end to its acts of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. Such adventurist practices constitute flagrant violations of international law, threatening regional and international peace and security.

Along with other members of the Astana format, we support the Constitutional Committee's work, which must continue according to its rules of procedure and without foreign interference or externally imposed timelines. We hope that the Committee's next meeting will commence soon. As we are committed to the restoration of the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, we will continue our efforts in assisting the Government and the people of Syria in overcoming the enormous challenges they face.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen to respond to the questions posed and comments made.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Let me thank all members of the Security Council and the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran, as well as Mr. Erksoussi, for their

statements. I have been listening very carefully and taking notes.

Allow me to start by repeating that I am highly appreciative of the support that we are receiving. However, despite all of that support, as I highlighted in my intervention today, the situation on the ground is increasingly of concern. I am hoping that through the diplomacy I will be conducting over the next few weeks, by the time of my next briefing to the Council, at the end of September, I will, hopefully, have some positive news.

In my present remarks, I have chosen not to go into much detail on some of the issues I am working on, in particular with regard to the Constitutional Committee. If the representative of Mexico should so accept, I ask that I respond to her question in my briefing next month, in late September.

During the forthcoming period, I hope that, with the support of the Council and the cooperation of both the Syrian Government and the opposition, we will be able to resolve outstanding differences in order to be able to come together and start not only preparing but also drafting a new constitution for the Syrian people. As many Council members highlighted in their statements today, that is a task for the Syrian people alone. Nevertheless, it requires that the two parties to the Constitutional Committee — namely, the representatives nominated by the Syrian Government and the representatives nominated by the opposition, the Syrian National Coalition — come to an agreement on how we are to proceed.

I hope that will be possible, as I said, within the not-too-distant future. I look forward to returning to the Council in late September.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Pedersen for his clarifications.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths to respond to the questions posed and comments made.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I believe I have only a couple of small items to respond to.

The representative of the United States was asking for my comments on how to improve humanitarian access in Syria, right at the outset of the debate. I have some suggestions here.

Perhaps the most immediate, obviously, would be the cessation of hostilities that we have all been

discussing today. Active conflict in Syria, just as in the other countries we have discussed in this Chamber, continues to endanger civilians and limit access in a very obvious way. An easing of administrative restrictions, of course again in Syria, as in many other countries, would also be of benefit. I am also sure that assessments, delivery and monitoring — indeed, all parts of the delivery process of humanitarian assistance and protection — can be streamlined.

Finally, I would like to make a point that the decentralization of the United Nations presence in Syria has helped to increase access. During my visit next week, we will be looking to see how that can be expanded. By the way, I am very grateful to the Government of Syria and to His Excellency Mr. Sabbagh for the welcome I am looking forward to in Damascus a few days from now.

There were also questions about the plans for a cross-line convoy and, in fact, there was reference to one possible such convoy by the World Food Programme. All I can say at this point is that we do not have final agreement from all the parties, but we are still negotiating. I had hoped to have better news today in that regard, in the sense that some progress had been made, but we are still negotiating. There is still unrest and violence and a need for demining, which we are still in the business of trying to settle, hopefully before I get there.

To conclude, on the Dara'a convoy, which I believe the representative of the United Kingdom asked about, I can only repeat what Mr. Erksoussi of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent said. I do not have any other updates on that matter. As we have discussed here, we are hoping that it will be able to go in as soon as possible.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Griffiths for his clarifications.

I now give the floor to Mr. Erksoussi to respond to the questions posed and comments made.

**Mr. Erksoussi:** I do not have a lot to add, but allow me to renew the call for improved access and greater support to the humanitarian organizations in Syria. Of course, we do not believe that our work will solve the conflict, which is political and needs a political solution.

We would like donor Governments and the permanent members and other members of the Security Council to facilitate our work. Although sanctions and restrictive measures are set out on paper, they nevertheless have a major effect on the ground. Banks and suppliers, which are afraid, do not want to transfer money either because of their fear or because they do not understand sanctions. On several occasions we have asked that sanctions be explained to banks, financial companies and other companies in the financial sector, so that they understand that humanitarians are not subject to sanctions.

We look forward to Mr. Griffiths' visit, which we hope will take place next week. At that time, we will be able to work together to obtain greater access and provide more support for the people in Syria.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Erksoussi for his clarifications.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

*The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.*