



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8937th meeting

Monday, 20 December 2021, 10.05 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Abarry	(Niger)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	India	Mr. Mathur
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Ms. Muigai
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Prince
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Mills
	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/2021/1029)

Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Humanitarian Operations in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2021/1030)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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/2021/1029)

Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations humanitarian operations in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2021/1030)

The President (*spoke in French*): 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 Ms. Amani Ballour, Syrian-born paediatrician and advocate of women's and children's rights.

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/2021/1029, 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), and document S/2021/1030, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations humanitarian operations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: We meet at another year's end, and we can look back on 2021 only as a year of deepening suffering of the Syrian people. Despite no shift in the front lines, we have seen continuing violence against civilians and systematic human rights

abuses, including against women and girls. Levels of hunger and poverty have escalated as the economy has continue to implode, with 14 million people in need, the highest number since the conflict began. Many tens of thousands remain detained, abducted or missing. Thirteen million civilians remain displaced inside and outside the country, many of the children not knowing their homeland, as prospects for a safe, dignified and voluntary return are not improving, and remain a continuing challenge for Syria's neighbours. Syria remains fragmented into several areas that seem to be drifting apart, as de facto authorities entrench their control on the ground and five foreign armies continue to jostle in the theatre. Syria continues to radiate instability — a haven for mercenaries, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Six years since its adoption, we are regrettably a long way from implementing resolution 2254 (2015) in a manner that could ease the suffering of the Syrian people, meet their legitimate aspirations and restore Syria's sovereignty and unity. I believe, however, there are possibilities for progress that need to be explored in 2022. Why do I say this? There are two main reasons.

First, all parties are confronting what I call a strategic stalemate on the ground that has continued for 21 months, with no shifts in front lines, making it increasingly clear that no existing actor or group of actors can determine the outcome of the conflict and that the military solution remains an illusion.

Secondly, there are grave risks and costs to all by simply trying to muddle through the unacceptable status quo, especially given the humanitarian suffering, the continuing displacement crisis, the collapse of the economy, the de facto division of the country, the dangers of renewed escalation and the continued threat posed by terrorism.

I have been highlighting those dynamics in all my engagements. With every passing month, I have sensed a broader realization than before — that political and economic steps are needed and that those can truly happen only together, step by step and step for step. I have travelled extensively in the region, and I met with the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in November and with the Government of Lebanon earlier this month.

I recently travelled to Damascus for wide-ranging discussions with the Syrian Government. I also recently briefed American, European, Arab and Turkish envoys

when they met in Brussels, and, as we speak today, my Deputy, Ms. Khawla Matar, is en route to Nur-Sultan where she will meet with Russian, Turkish, Iranian and other officials participating in an Astana format meeting.

My sense from all those engagements is that there remains a great level of mistrust on all sides. A common message that I hear from many is that, “We have made steps, but those on the other sides have not”. Nevertheless, in my opinion, there is enough interest from all sides to test what might be possible via a wider political process. In order to further explore that, I have begun consulting with senior officials from key Syrian and bilateral stakeholders in bilateral consultations in Geneva.

Those are under way and will continue in January. That is the first set of consultations in what I believe needs to be a rolling process. So far, the Russian Federation, the European Union, Turkey and Qatar have participated in bilateral consultations with me in Geneva. I look forward to engaging with additional participants in the new year. I am asking each stakeholder not only their priorities and demands, but also what they are prepared to put on the table in that context to help move the process forward.

In time, I would hope that we can begin to define and agree on incremental, reciprocal, mutual, realistic, precise and verifiable steps that can be taken in parallel to build trust and confidence and help move the political process forward in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Let me recall why the political solution in Syria must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led. Many issues are not solely in the hands of the Syrians. Moreover, we have seen that, when key stakeholders have worked together in taking mutual steps on issues of common concern, at least some progress has been possible.

For example, United States-Russian channels laid the groundwork for resolution 2585 (2021), and it is important that we maintain and build on that. As the Secretary-General states in his recent report (S/2021/1030), we must continue to take every opportunity to address humanitarian needs, including by further increasing access and further expanding early-recovery efforts. I look forward to hearing more from Martin Griffiths on those issues. The recent Brussels and tomorrow’s Nur-Sultan meetings, which I mentioned earlier, are important because they can address issues on the ground, especially of a

humanitarian and security character. Such efforts will undoubtedly continue.

Nevertheless, the truth is that all existing channels and formats exclude at least one of the critical Syrian or international players. I am convinced that we need all of those with a stake in the conflict involved in the common political effort if we are to see concrete progress on the issues that matter most both to the Syrians themselves and in terms of regional stability, which includes steps that could actually move us towards a safe, calm and neutral environment and could reinforce a Syrian-led political dialogue.

We must channel frustrations over the lack of progress and decide to take initiatives towards a coordinated strategy on a broader process. I hope that, in that way, we can set in motion a virtuous cycle of reciprocal steps and build trust and confidence and the process could meet the aspirations of the Syrians, enable refugees to return voluntarily and in safety and dignity and fully restore Syria’s serenity, unity and territorial integrity.

Let me note that, while in Nur-Sultan, my team will attend a meeting of the working group on the release of detainees, abductees, the handover of bodies and the identification of missing persons. We will continue to urge meaningful progress on the various aspects of the file. Team members will also review the most recent release operation under the working group’s umbrella when on 16 December, in an operation observed by my Office, five persons from each side were simultaneously released in northern Syria. What is absolutely clear is that wide-scale action with regard to releases, particularly women, children, the sick and the elderly, and sharing information on the fate and whereabouts of missing persons are needed to move forward. I urged that during my recent visit to Damascus.

As I work to advance a broader process, I am actively engaged in seeking to reconvene the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee. In October and November, Deputy Special Envoy Matar went twice to Damascus for consultations with regard to a new session and also met in Istanbul with the Syrian Negotiations Commission and the co-Chairs, which it nominated. Just over a week ago, as I mentioned earlier, I travelled to Damascus where I met with the Foreign Minister and the co-Chairs nominated by the Syrian Government.

It is important that the delegations not only propose constitutional texts, but that they be ready to commit to revising those that have yet to be in the light of the discussions. We need a productive drafting process in accordance with the Committee's mandate. As its terms of reference outline, the Committee must work expeditiously and continuously to produce results and continued progress. I have discussed concretely with both co-Chairs what that would look like, and I am continuing to engage in efforts to produce a clear understanding. After my discussions in Damascus, I am awaiting further communication from them before reaching out to the Syrian National Council.

To be clear, I am ready to convene a seventh session of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva as soon as understandings are in place. Once they are, we will of course brief the civil society middle third in preparation for a seventh session.

Let me add that I continue to engage widely with Syrian women and men in civil society who have diverse networks in Syria and the region, including the members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and participants in the Civil Society Support Room. I value their contribution to all efforts to promote sustainable peace in Syria.

Now is the time to explore whether a political process can meaningfully move forward in 2022. The status quo has many dangers, and it would be folly to only manage an unacceptable and deteriorating stalemate. Equally, the realities facing all parties should serve to promote an interest in compromise and open up opportunities for concrete steps forward on the political track. No one should expect miracles or quick solutions. The path forward will necessarily be incremental. However, I hope that this coming year we can work on concrete steps towards the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). I count on the support of the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: As you mentioned, Sir, the Secretary-General has issued the report requested by Security Council members with regard to resolution 2585 (2021) (S/2021/1030). The report outlines the robust measures in place in some detail to ensure transparency in our Syria operations.

The operating environment is clearly complex. Nonetheless, the United Nations operates in a transparent manner to mitigate risks and provide principled assistance. The report describes the robust systems in place for needs assessments, due diligence, monitoring and risk management. The report also speaks to our efforts to facilitate regular and predictable cross-line operations.

In north-east Syria, we reach nearly 1 million people every month through regular cross-line deliveries. However, we continue to strengthen that activity. Approvals for cross-line access to the Tel Abyad area to assess the situation and distribute vaccines are a very positive recent step in that regard.

In the north-west, as we have discussed before and as is stated in the report, over the past six months we have taken renewed steps to create a cross-line delivery system to assist people in need. Two cross-line convoys have now deployed to north-west Syria. The second one crossed conflict lines on 9 December — just a few days ago. They carried food and other humanitarian supplies for a total of approximately 80,000 people. The next convoy is planned for January.

Through our access negotiations, we were able to identify solutions acceptable to all parties. But an agreement needs to be reached on who would be involved in conducting cross-line convoys and who would be authorized to distribute the aid. All of that, as you know, Mr. President, has taken time. We also need and rely on the necessary security guarantees by all the relevant parties to ensure the safety of our convoys and personnel.

On 16 December, distributions of food through a local World Food Programme team commenced under a newly established distribution mechanism. We will continue to push for distributions to proceed apace. We need to collectively translate the initial progress into more predictable and sustained humanitarian operations and, as we have discussed in this Chamber before, the six-month plan that we have developed to achieve that predictability. We will continue to do everything in our power to facilitate those cross-line convoys, with a convoy once a month and deliveries every week. I call upon all parties to facilitate, not block, the implementation of our plan.

As the Secretary-General has said, cross-line deliveries cannot, at this point, replace the massive scale of our cross-border operation, but they are important.

Both those operations are essential to support the 3.4 million people in need in the north-west.

Let me turn to my monthly humanitarian update. I am sure that Ms. Amani Ballour, who will give a briefing after me, will speak much more vividly and clearly to those issues, among others. As Mr. Pedersen has said, as the year ends, the situation for people in Syria remains grim. Humanitarian needs have grown, while funding has shrunk. I have said it before on many occasions and I will say it again: we continue to fail the Syrian people in what they need, what they deserve and what they are entitled to in terms of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Violence continues to kill and injure civilians. For example, on 11 November, a reported air strike hit a shelter in northern rural Idlib, killing five civilians, of whom three were children. As I say to the Council every month, civilians must be protected, and they are legally entitled to that protection.

As winter sets in, millions of people are in the cold. Internally displaced persons living in temporary tents are especially vulnerable. I regret to say that the humanitarian operation simply does not have sufficient funds to provide basic shelter, heating and warm clothes to all those in need. As I said, we are failing in our responsibilities to the people of Syria. The coronavirus disease, on which I am sure we will hear more in a minute, continues to wreak havoc across Syria, with vaccination rates, as we have discussed before, below 5 per cent. Women of course bear the impact of that disproportionately.

Over 5 million people do not have sufficient and safe water in northern Syria. Food security, access to electricity and livelihoods are also impacted and, as they are connected, exponentially so in terms of how they impact each another. We continue to build on our constructive dialogue with parties — I am happy to say — to find a sustainable solution for the Allouk water station. After two months of sustained engagement and operation, the station has functioned again, however only intermittently, since 26 November. That limits access to water for over half a million people.

The economy continues its downward trajectory. Food costs more now than at any time since the World Food Programme started monitoring such costs in 2013. Many families — and this is an extraordinary assessment — spend on average 50 per cent more on basic items than they earn each month and are. And, of

course, they are forced to rely on credit, loans and help. It should be obvious that that is simply not sustainable.

Immediate life-saving activities therefore remain a priority, but we must also help the people in Syria chart their own course towards a better future. As is emphasized in resolution 2585 (2021), early recovery is another critical aspect of the humanitarian response.

Beyond food, people in Syria are the same as people anywhere. They want jobs to earn a living; they want their basic needs met; and they want a future. Working at the local level, through investment in early recovery we can ensure that basic services can be provided in a manner that is equitable, responsive and accountable to affected populations. To take just one example, a midwifery project of the United Nations Population Fund in rural Aleppo addresses the massive need for trained health-care workers. In that project, a training facility was rehabilitated to broaden access to maternal health care, and midwives were trained and received essential equipment — a simple process that is repeated daily throughout the world of aid. Those midwives helped nearly 800 pregnant women safely deliver their babies in the past year. In turn, the midwives were able to make a living to support their own families. That is a story that can, and should, be repeated throughout Syria.

The Secretary-General's report identifies our increasing focus on that aspect of the response to the needs of the Syrian people. The United Nations is currently completing an allocation of approximately \$20 million to early-recovery activities from the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund. The Syria Humanitarian Fund, which provides assistance to those in other parts of the country, allocated 40 per cent of its budget to enhancing community resilience. The good news is that donors are increasing their engagement in early recovery. We are grateful for such additional support that Member States recently provided, including the recent support from Norway of \$17 million.

We have seen real progress on early recovery, and I am encouraged by the growing donor consensus on the need for, and priority of, that kind of expenditure. I expect that to further increase in 2022. I have also called on the United Nations system to increase its identification of relevant projects available for such funding.

We heard from Mr. Pedersen about the plight of Syria, but also, as he carefully and precisely put it, some hopes for next year that we must work on. I associate

myself with everything that Mr. Pedersen said about the fact that the essential quality of the humanitarian requirement for the people of Syria requires us to hope and to adopt, as he described, a step-by-step approach to meeting those needs and giving the people of Syria a future. Civilians must be protected. There must be support for life-saving aid, especially as people in Syria endure this winter, early-recovery aid, the safe and voluntary return of refugees — if we can make that happen — and, finally, access to all in need.

We will work in lockstep with Mr. Pedersen and his colleagues as we go into 2022 to identify ways in which we can support his mission, because it is quite clear to us all that only an end to this conflict will really meet the needs of the people of Syria.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ballour.

Ms. Ballour: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council today. I would especially like to thank the Government of the Niger for the invitation.

My name is Amani Ballour. I am a paediatrician from Syria. I currently work for the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), a humanitarian organization dedicated to providing principled humanitarian assistance to Syrians in need. SAMS operates 40 medical facilities in north-western and north-eastern Syria, including specialized intensive care units for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients, the only cancer treatment centre and mental health centres. We also provide virtual training and telemedicine for health workers throughout the country.

I most recently briefed the Security Council this past March (see S/2021/315, annex III). During that briefing, I told Council members about my experiences managing a hospital in Syria and the challenges faced by health workers throughout the country. I also spoke about the worsening situation for women and children. I talked about the ongoing threat of COVID-19. I urged the Security Council to take further steps to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance and take meaningful action to hold those who carry out attacks on health accountable.

Nine months later, the humanitarian situation in Syria is worse than ever, as are the dynamics in the Security Council. Instead of focusing on achieving its

stated objective of maintaining international peace and security, too many Council members focus on their own political objectives and geopolitical rivalries. The Security Council has lost its way. Today I again urge the Council to refocus its attention on concrete steps that can be taken to deliver humanitarian assistance and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

I would first like to focus on the health situation. More than a decade of conflict, along with the intentional targeting of hospitals by the Syrian regime and its allies, has devastated the health system throughout the country. The brave health workers who remain are stretched beyond their limits. Many of my colleagues work 20-hour shifts without a break, sometimes examining as many as 100 patients a day. They do that while under the constant threat of an aerial bombardment, as well as the threat of kidnapping and torture by armed groups.

Sadly, needs continue to grow. In the north-west, more than 1.7 million people live in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps. Eighty-five per cent of the tents are beyond their lifespan, while recent rainstorms literally washed some of them away. Meanwhile, Council members are in a warm and safe place, and, after this meeting, they can return to their homes, while IDPs continue to suffer, with no end in sight.

A tent is not sufficient shelter, neither does a food basket provide sufficient nutrition. As a result, we see greater rates of malnutrition, stunting and infant mortality. An increasing number of pregnant women suffer from anaemia and malnutrition, leading to more complications in their pregnancies. Incubators have become scarce, as babies are increasingly born with complications. Yet, without an increase in the number of incubators, doctors are forced to make the difficult decision between which baby to put in an incubator and which to leave to die. We should not accept that. No doctor should ever face that kind of decision.

There are several steps that the Security Council can take to lessen the burden on the health system. It can increase the amount of funds, prioritizing long-term funding to enable sufficient planning. Council members can make their own donations of essential items, such as medicines and equipment. The Council must continue to allow for cross-border assistance, which is providing life-saving aid to millions of civilians. Their lives should not be used as political bargaining chips. The Council should also require the same level of

transparency for humanitarian operations in Damascus and north-east Syria as it does in the north-west. As the dire humanitarian situation requires maximum efficiency, it is crucial to increase the capacity of the health system. That can be achieved through medical education. The Security Council should support the training of new health workers, especially nurses and midwives, and should support specialized training programmes for existing doctors, particularly for intensive care and paediatric oncology.

Next, I would like to discuss the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In recent months, Syria has faced a devastating outbreak, which has pushed the health system to the brink of collapse. In the north-west, positivity rates have averaged as high as 50 per cent, intensive care units have been at 100 per cent capacity and hospitals have faced severe shortages of oxygen. Yet only 2.5 per cent of the population have received two doses of vaccines. That is unacceptable. Conflict-affected countries, such as Syria, must be prioritized for the delivery of high-efficacy vaccines.

In recent days, COVID-19 has reached Rukban camp, where the situation is extremely dire. There are only three beds prepared, no oxygen, no ventilators and no doctors. Owing to a lack of cross-border access and continued obstruction of cross-line assistance, the civilian population has been left completely exposed. If immediate action is not taken, this current wave in Rukban — and the next wave throughout the country — will be even more deadly. How can families living in IDP camps be expected to socially distance, when multiple families live in one tent and when 50 families share one bathroom? The international community must provide the necessary resources to enable the health sector to prepare for the next wave.

I would also like to speak about the protection of humanitarian workers. Health workers have performed their duties heroically throughout the conflict. Yet after 10 years and more than 600 attacks on health workers, there has still been no accountability. As a result, in addition to over 800 health workers having been killed, many others have fled the country.

It is clear that the only way to stop these attacks is through accountability. Yet previous efforts have all been blocked by the Security Council. To those who continue to use their veto to block any efforts at independent investigations, I ask a simple question: what do they have to hide? If, like they say, there have

been no crimes committed against health workers in Syria, then surely they would have no problem investigating these allegations.

The Council should make clear its support for independent investigative mechanisms. It should also support the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and organizations such as mine in efforts to strengthen the humanitarian notification system.

In conclusion, as we begin a new year, I urge Council members to take a fresh approach to the humanitarian situation in Syria, set aside their differences and look beyond their own political objectives. Let this be a year of new beginnings, with an emphasis on promoting human dignity.

In February, my husband and I will welcome our first child — a boy. My dream for him is that he will be able to live in dignity and freedom, as all Council members hope for their own children. I hope he will not be like Kareem, who lost one of his eyes in a bombing, or like Imran, who found himself trapped under the rubble of his own home. And neither should he lose his limbs, like Mahmoud or Abdul Rahman. He should be free to express his thoughts and feelings publicly without fear of being detained or tortured, like Hamza Al-Khateeb. I hope that he will always have enough medicine and food to eat, unlike the many children who starved to death under illegal sieges, or who today still live on the brink of starvation. These are thoughts that no mother should ever have for her child, yet this is the reality for Syrian mothers today. These are real stories of innocent children who have been wounded or lost their lives in the past decade of conflict — children who know nothing but bombardment, violence and death. And for what? No amount of power or wealth is worth such brutality and suffering.

I will tell my child the stories of each of those children. And I urge Council members to think of their own children during their negotiations on humanitarian access and accountability. Syrian children deserve the same human dignity as their own children. Will Council members put their interests first, or their own?

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Ballour for her briefing.

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

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

I want to thank Martin Griffiths for his comprehensive briefing, which has underlined the severity of the humanitarian need and the complex challenge of delivering humanitarian response throughout Syria. It is good to see Geir Pedersen with us today; I will address the political aspects later in my remarks. I want to also thank Dr. Ballour for her remarks. Her messages to us were very clear.

Ireland and Norway also wish to thank the Secretary-General for the two reports (S/2021/1020 and S/2021/1030) furnished to Council Members last week. We welcome in particular the comprehensive report on humanitarian operations in Syria, issued in accordance with resolution 2585 (2021), which was unanimously adopted by consensus by all Council members in July. The resolution extended the authorization to use the border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa until 10 July 2022, subject to the issuance of this report.

This report illustrates welcome progress in a number of important areas, including with regard to cross-line deliveries. We have seen deliveries take place throughout Syria in spite of constraints and challenges to access, which vary greatly by region.

The second inter-agency cross-line delivery to the north-west, which took place on 9 December, marks another significant and positive step. We welcome the commencement last week of the distribution of the much-needed humanitarian aid. We commend the efforts made by the United Nations and the World Food Programme to develop a comprehensive plan for cross-line deliveries, and we call on all parties to facilitate their continuation.

Ireland and Norway, as co-penholders on the Syria humanitarian file, have repeatedly emphasized their support for all modalities to provide humanitarian aid to meet the needs of people across Syria. Our sole objective is ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches all people in need.

As the report makes clear, the cross-border humanitarian operation at Bab Al-Hawa remains an absolutely critical lifeline. As the Secretary-General has told us, this operation is the essential channel for the United Nations to provide life-saving assistance at the scale required to support the significant and

growing humanitarian needs of 3.4 million people in need in north-west Syria.

Ireland and Norway welcome the substantive update on the considerable work taking place to ensure transparency in operations throughout Syria. We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the systems it has put in place to safeguard humanitarian principles and ensure accountability for humanitarian action at all stages. The cross-border operation in the north-west is one of the most heavily scrutinized and monitored aid operations in the world, ensuring the humanitarian nature of all deliveries. The role of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism is critical in that work.

We also note and commend the work of OCHA in delivering early-recovery activities and building resilience to prevent a further increase in the number of people in need, as well as reduce immediate and protracted humanitarian needs by strengthening the self-reliance of affected populations and improving individual and community welfare.

The focus of our attention must be on the worsening hardship faced by the women, men and children of Syria. We heard from the Secretary-General this month that the combination of ongoing hostilities, economic crisis, water shortages and the coronavirus disease pandemic have driven humanitarian needs for millions of vulnerable people to some of the highest levels seen since the conflict began. Those needs continue to grow as the people of Syria grapple with another bitter winter, leaving 4.5 million people in need of winterization support, many without the bare essentials they need to survive.

We in the Council must continue to work together to ensure that those great humanitarian needs are met. We know that only political progress can bring the conflict and the long nightmare of the Syrian people to an end. Ireland and Norway strongly support United Nations-led efforts to find a sustainable political solution, which is key to transforming the humanitarian situation on the ground. In all of this, we must keep the Syrian people at the heart of the Council's efforts.

We continue to fully support Mr. Griffiths and his team as they work to deliver a lifeline to so many in need.

I would now make a statement in my national capacity on political issues.

I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his briefing. I commend his tireless efforts on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which offers a clear, agreed blueprint for delivering a long-term political solution for the people of Syria. I commend him in particular for his ongoing engagement with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and other civil society organizations. This year, the Council heard directly from Syrian women, including from Ms. Rouba Mhaissen during Ireland's presidency (see S/PV.8866). Far too often, those voices are silenced and marginalized by the Syrian authorities. Ireland once again urges the Syrian authorities to engage meaningfully with the opposition and with civil society members of the Constitutional Committee.

Sadly, 2021 has marked another year of conflict, chaos and catastrophe for the people of Syria. Ireland calls on all parties to the Syrian conflict to refrain from violence, de-escalate tensions and exercise maximum restraint.

We are deeply concerned at the continued violence in the north-west, particularly the abhorrent and sustained impact on civilians and civilian objects, which the Council must unreservedly condemn. We repeat our calls for a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

I commend Estonia on last month's Arria Formula meeting, which highlighted the need for accountability as we heard powerful testimony from victims. Ireland fully supports the work of the General Assembly's International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We also strongly support the work of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which has outlined appalling human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, disappearances and sexual and gender-based violence. Ireland calls on the parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, to release detainees and abductees and to take meaningful action on missing persons.

Finally, we listened with interest to the Special Envoy's ideas on steps for steps. Ireland is prepared to consider proposals that would enable the people of Syria to determine their own future. That would require a profound change of approach by the Syrian authorities.

Such a change could help realize the Council's vision of the restoration of Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and prosperity for the benefit of all its people.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the briefers for the information provided.

With respect to the political situation, we wish to emphasize that we advocate the pursuit of intra-Syrian consultations in Geneva in the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We believe that there is no alternative to the advancement of the Syrian-led and -owned settlement process, with the support of the United Nations and without external interference or the imposition of artificial deadlines. That also applies to all new ideas and proposals to that end. On that basis, we will continue to interact with the Syrians, the Special Envoy and other stakeholders, first and foremost our Astana partners. We intend to hold the next meeting of the representatives of Russia, Iran and Turkey, with the participation of interested parties, on 21 and 22 December in Nur-Sultan.

One important area of the work of the Astana representatives is the issue of detainees. On 16 December, in the framework of a special working group of the Astana format, a sixth exchange of such individuals took place. That initiative was carried out successfully thanks to the coordination of the Russian Defence Ministry and Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as well as the relevant Turkish agencies, the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The general improvement in the situation in and around Syria is also facilitated by the resumption of natural ties between that country and its Arab neighbours, including in the economic arena. We call for further steps to ensure the full return of Damascus to the Arab family.

I now turn to the humanitarian situation in Syria, which remains tense. Difficulties persist in areas not controlled by Damascus — in Idlib, beyond the Euphrates River and where Turkish operations are conducted in the north of the country. We believe that the achievement of long-term peace and security in Syria is possible only through the full restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Government control of its national borders and natural resources, with ongoing efforts to combat terrorism.

Given the current circumstances, there is a pressing need to alleviate the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation. The full and conscientious implementation of consensus resolution 2585 (2021) should play a key role in that regard. Another critical component in that connection has already been mentioned — the special report of Secretary-General António Guterres (S/2021/1030).

I now wish to comment on the Secretary-General's report. At the outset, I would like to pay special tribute to the United Nations humanitarian agencies, and to Mr. Martin Griffiths in particular, for their extensive efforts to steer the humanitarian situation in Syria towards a constructive solution. Mr. Griffiths personal contribution to this process has been invaluable.

On the whole, the report lies within the framework of resolution 2585 (2021). We have already mentioned that we fully grasp the difficulties that all parties have grappled with in the implementation of the provisions of that resolution and generally recognize the progress made as the beginning of a long journey. In that connection, I would like to make various observations.

First, I would like to comment on transparency in the ongoing humanitarian operations, primarily in Idlib.

I repeat, once again, that, on the whole, we do not doubt that the United Nations monitoring mission, which oversees the delivery of humanitarian convoys exclusively to the border with Syria, is carrying out its work well. Our concerns, rather, are related to what is taking place directly in Idlib, which is rife with terrorists who have seized control of all areas of life, including freedom of movement. Under such circumstances, how can the provision of assistance be considered in any way impartial and independent?

It is no secret that it is indeed the fault of the fighters that the food that reached Sarmada from Aleppo back in August was distributed as late as 16 December. I cannot but voice regret at the fact that over all that time my colleagues did not utter even a single word of condemnation, all the while patiently waiting to get the approval of terrorists for the food aid to reach areas not covered by the cross-border mechanism. What about the people for whom this assistance is critical? Are my colleagues indifferent in the face of their suffering?

Against this backdrop, the proposal for some kind of effective remote oversight by a United Nations monitoring mechanism in the Idlib enclave is

completely unpersuasive. The terrorists having gained access to assistance provided by the United Nations in Aleppo, eastern Ghouta and Rukban clearly attest to this. Still, we emphasize the pressing need for a United Nations international presence to be established in the enclave. This will help to enhance confidence in the distribution mechanism.

Secondly, with respect to the modest — to put it mildly — progress in humanitarian deliveries across the line of contact, essentially what we cautioned against actually transpired. In six months, only two humanitarian convoys reached Idlib — only 28 trucks — while, in the period from July to November this year, through Bab Al-Hawa, 48,498 trucks reached the de-escalation area. This shows that Idlib fighters are obstructing implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), not the fact that the cross-border mechanism has no alternatives. The potential for cross-line deliveries and the interest in it on the ground is indeed considerable, but incentives for Idlib terrorists to allow assistance to cross through that mechanism are not yet significant.

The Council needs to continue to work to see to the implementation of its resolutions. While a number of those in this Chamber criticize the Syrian authorities, the Syrian authorities are fully carrying out their obligations on time, which has already been confirmed by a number of reports of the Secretary-General.

On 27 October, we heard about clear plan of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to step up cross-line operations into north-west Syria (see S/PV.8888). According to the plan, the area should have had five convoys reach it to date. In fact, there was only one convoy, which did not include the late August United Nations World Food Programme convoy to Sarmada. And yet the plan describes the areas insufficiently covered by cross-border assistance, and individuals who are not receiving assistance that they need. Pragmatic and concrete proposals of humanitarian representatives are rejected by those who are in a position to unblock cross-line assistance and make it sustained. Thus, one of the key provisions of resolution 2585 (2021) is therefore simply being torpedoed. The calm and even positive assessments of the situation, which are essentially tantamount to being satisfied with seemingly noble one-off gestures of terrorists is something which we cannot countenance.

We call upon everyone to contribute to unblocking the provision of humanitarian assistance from

Damascus to Afrin, Al-Bab, and Tel Abyad. We believe that this is possible. Two years have elapsed since the closure of Al-Yarubiyah. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1029) notes that land and air assistance delivery routes from Damascus have been ironed out and made available, and that the United Nations presence has been expanded and access has been improved for those in need, with the exception of such areas as the Al-Hol internally displaced persons camp. From July to October this year in north-east Syria, 425 trucks made cross-line transfers in addition to seven convoys received through the World Health Organization. This number cannot even be compared to the 109 trucks that crossed through Al-Yarubiyah in the six years that the operations have run in the area.

My third point concerns early recovery projects. The report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/2021/1029 provided exhaustive argumentation about the importance of stepping up these efforts. We hear from our colleagues in various formats about the importance of accounting for the views of those in need in carrying out humanitarian needs assessments and developing humanitarian response plans. This allegedly enhances the accountability for assistance being provided.

Can my colleagues imagine individuals living in demolished homes or even tents, not wanting to have access to normal accommodation; that they would not want to provide their children with access to education; or that they would not want access to medical assistance in a properly functioning hospital and running water? Their voices need to be heard first and foremost. Very little is being done for now in the area. We call upon donors to reconsider their approaches to humanitarian assistance in Syria for the benefit of ordinary civilians, including those returning to their homes.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank those countries that proactively joined financing plans and have helped to finance these relevant projects. We expect that the United Nations will develop the relevant comprehensive plans and programmes.

The stepping up of comprehensive humanitarian assistance to Syrians is especially important given the coronavirus disease pandemic. This would be facilitated by addressing the problem of unilateral sanctions. In our view, a step in the right direction was the publication of a special explanation by the United States Department of the Treasury stating that

restrictions do not apply to early-recovery projects. Their implementation, including for critical civilian infrastructure facilities, will help to meet not only the urgent needs of Syrian people, but will also help to improve living conditions and assist in preventing the collapse of water- and electricity-provision systems. Rebuilding schools, hospitals and homes will also help to ensure that conditions are ripe for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Time will tell as to whether the humanitarian exemptions are effective; we will closely watch this situation. We call upon the Secretary-General not to divert attention from this and to report about the situation in his regular reports.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that, on the basis of our assessment, both the United Nations and individual members of the Security Council can and should do more to ensure implementation of resolution 2585 (2021). Without this, the efforts we undertook in July to establish constructive cooperation on the Syrian humanitarian track will not bring us the desired results.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Ms. Ballour.

My delegation wants to thank the Secretary General for his substantive report on United Nations humanitarian operations in Syria (S/2021/1030) and for his 60-day report on resolution 2585 (2021) (S/2021/1029). Both of these reports provide key insights into the robust United Nations efforts to ensure the transparency and efficiency of aid operations and progress on cross-line access.

Resolution 2585 (2021), together with the cross-border mechanism that it authorizes, remains a vital lifeline to the Syrian people, as we have just heard. The United States supports the use of all modalities to deliver aid in Syria. We echo the Secretary-General's observation that cross-line aid complements but cannot replace the cross-border mechanism.

There is no denying the tangible progress on delivering cross-line assistance since resolution 2585 (2021) was adopted (see S/PV.8817). This includes the two World Food Programme convoys that delivered assistance in northwest Syria on 31 August and 9 December, as we heard. We also welcome the distribution of this aid to beneficiaries and encourage

future cooperation among all parties to enable these operations to continue in a predictable and safe manner.

We support the development and full implementation of the proposed operational plan for regular United Nations interagency cross-line operations over the coming six months and for the new distribution plans for that cross-line aid.^[P.]^[SEP.] But let there be no illusions: there have been threats to the security of humanitarian personnel seeking to deliver and distribute that assistance — threats from shelling, air strikes, landmines and improvised explosive devices. Those aid operations are also extremely resource-intensive when compared to the cross-border modality. As we heard from Martin Griffiths earlier, that is especially important to remember as the gap between needs in Syria and donor funding grows larger.

The United States will continue to support a response that puts humanity at the centre of policy. In that vein, access for United Nations aid through Bab Al-Hawa remains irreplaceable if we want to alleviate the suffering that we have heard about in north-west Syria. If the Council is unified in its position that we need to let aid flow through all modalities, then we must also reopen the closed cross-border points.

The report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021) is clear that, in the north-east, the closure of Al-Yarubiyah has been devastating for the health sector, which was the most reliant on the crossing. That has contributed to limited access to essential medical supplies for communities there, including coronavirus disease (COVID-19) testing kits and treatment. How many more variants of COVID-19 do we need to see before the Council takes seriously its responsibility to open the Al-Yarubiyah crossing so that critical vaccines and supplies can reach all in need?

The cross-border mechanism remains one of the most robust and closely monitored humanitarian operations in the world, subject to multiple layers of checks to ensure a high degree of transparency and accountability. As the report notes, more than 47,000 truckloads of humanitarian aid have crossed into northern Syria through the rigorously monitored system since July 2014. That is the type of transparency that the Council has called for. It reinforces why the United Nations cross-border mandate is so critical.

The United States remains steadfast in its support for humanitarian relief in Syria, including early-

recovery projects. Early-recovery activities like rehabilitating schools and clinics and helping vulnerable families improve their livelihoods aim to make Syrians more resilient and reduce their dependence on external assistance. As we have heard, just last month the United States Department of the Treasury issued an expanded general license to ensure that United States sanctions related to Syria do not inhibit activity undertaken by non-governmental organizations inside Syria in furtherance of early-recovery projects.

Ultimately, however, humanitarian aid merely treats the symptoms of Syrian suffering, not the cause. We support the Syrian people in their efforts to live in dignity. We continue to call for a nationwide ceasefire. The only path for a sustainable peaceful future for the Syrian people is an end of the conflict, as laid out in resolution 2254 (2015). We urge the Al-Assad regime to seriously pursue the avenues towards peace that Special Envoy Pedersen has laid out, including through the Constitutional Committee.

Confirming the whereabouts of the tens of thousands of missing Syrians and securing the release of those arbitrarily detained will remain a priority for the United States. Seeking accountability and justice is critical to build confidence in the broader political process, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015). Without that accountability, the Syrian people will never experience a stable, just and enduring peace.

Let me conclude by saying that only through an inclusive political process can Syrians witness the future in which they no longer live in fear and are no longer dependent on humanitarian relief for their day to day survival.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen, Mr. Griffiths and Ms. Ballour for their briefings.

The Syrian people continue to pay a heavy price. France reiterates its call for an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities. The protection of civilians must remain a top priority. As the coronavirus disease pandemic continues to spread and fewer than 5 per cent of the Syrian population is vaccinated, everything must be done to ramp up the vaccination campaign.

France welcomes the report of the Secretary General (S/2021/1030) submitted pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021). Progress on cross-line convoys has been positive. We support the implementation of the plan

involving inter-agency operations to that end. But the Secretary-General is clear: even if the plan were fully implemented, that would not allow for the removal of the cross-border mechanism. The latter's 12-month renewal came as a sigh of relief. It will remain necessary as long as aid fails to reach all populations in need. France welcome the measures taken by the United Nations to strengthen risk management mechanisms and guarantee the transparency of operations.

The definitive resolution of the conflict can only be of a political nature. I would like once again to recall that the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). It continues to be the shared road map for Council members to achieve a political solution to the conflict. As long as resolution 2254 (2015) is not fully implemented, achieving lasting peace in Syria will be impossible.

France support the efforts of the Special Envoy to ensure the convening of the seventh session of the Constitutional Committee. France regrets the regime's obstruction with regard to the work of its sixth session. As we believe in the virtues of a political solution as the foundation for lasting peace, we are also open to the step for step approach presented by the Special Envoy. We thank him for convening bilateral meetings to define its structure. All stakeholders must shoulder their responsibilities. That applies first of all to the regime, which, for the time being, has not agreed to make any gesture. The lack of any progress since 2018 on the fate of missing persons attests to that.

In the absence of a solid political solution, there is absolutely no reason to normalize relations with the Syrian regime. Without a political solution, our position on the lifting of sanctions and reconstruction will remain unchanged. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of the 5.6 million refugees in the region, only 282,000 Syrian refugees have chosen to return to their country since 2016. Many other Syrians continue to leave.

Reports by non-governmental organizations point to serious human rights violations committed systematically by the regime against refugees upon their return to Syria. They will be unable to return as long as the regime continues to oppose their return by threatening their lives and depriving them of their property. It is imperative that UNHCR have access to all returning refugees.

Lastly, France will continue its relentless fight against impunity for the perpetrators of crimes committed in Syria. Those responsible for those crimes will have to answer for their actions.

Mr. Mathur (India): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their updates today. I also thank the civil society representative, Ms. Amani Ballour, for her briefing.

India has been reiterating since the beginning of the conflict that imposing external solutions cannot help in the resolution of the conflict. It is for the Syrians to determine and decide what is best for Syria and their own future. The decade-long conflict and involvement of external players has adversely affected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. The Special Envoy briefed us in detail on his recent efforts to engage proactively with all the stakeholders, including his visit to Damascus last week. We hope that those efforts will bear fruit soon and culminate in the next round of the Constitutional Committee meeting.

While the holding of that meeting is important, the progress in the step for step approach articulated by the Special Envoy needs mutual trust among all parties, including external players. The support of the international community to address the economic and humanitarian challenges remains integral to the success of the political process. The recent diplomatic engagement between Damascus and other capitals in the region is reassuring. It may also positively impact the restoration of Syria's membership in the League of Arab States.

Regarding confidence-building measures, we welcome efforts by the Syrian authorities to prioritize the return of displaced Syrians to their areas of origin. We also welcome the recent announcement of the opening of the border between Jordan and Syria.

On the security front, we remain concerned with the overall situation in Syria, including increasing incidents of ceasefire violations in north-west Syria. We call on all sides to desist from any actions, including military provocations like missile strikes, that may lead to violence and disturbance in Syria.

Furthermore, the growing influence of terrorist groups in internally displaced persons camps like Al-Rukban and Al-Hol needs to be urgently addressed. The issue of the repatriation of foreign citizens from

those camp sites needs to be dealt with as a priority. United Nations-designated terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, as mentioned in the recent reports of the Secretary-General, have continued to gain in strength in Syria. Da'esh has also continued to launch attacks in areas across Deir ez-Zor, Hasakah and eastern rural Homs. The global fight against terrorism cannot and should not be compromised for narrow political gains.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has not seen significant improvement in recent months. We believe that a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire is paramount to the interest of the Syrian people. It will also help to expand cross-line humanitarian aid operations. In that context, we note that progress has been made to expand the overall humanitarian response and facilitate cross-line access.

In the north-west, we believe there is considerable scope for expanding cross-line operations. The ongoing cross-border operations will continue to negatively impact on the sovereignty of the Syrian State. In the north-east, cross-line operations have become regular and sustained. In October and November, the World Health Organization delivered cross-line shipments by road and air. We encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies to expand efforts to enhance cross-line operations further.

Taking into consideration the difficult economic and social situation in Syria, which has been further compounded by the global coronavirus disease pandemic and the onset of winter, there is need to scale up humanitarian assistance. As the Council looks towards the renewal of the Syria humanitarian resolution — resolution 2585 (2021) — next year, it is critical to achieve progress with regard to provisions related to “expanding the scope of the work in early recovery and increasing the resilience of the infrastructure in Syria”.

For our part, India has continued to extend developmental assistance and human-resource development support to Syria through grants and lines of credit for developmental projects, supplies of medicine and food, artificial limb fitment camps and capacity-building training programmes. Since the beginning of the conflict, India has always stood by the Syrian people.

Let me conclude by reaffirming India's commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Ms. Juul (Norway): Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and for his and his team's tireless efforts to seek a political solution in Syria. Our thanks of course also go to Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Ms. Ballour for their valuable information and insights, especially on the grave situation for women and children.

We are encouraged by the Special Envoy's recent consultations with key actors on the step for step approach. Norway urges all actors involved in the conflict, including the Syrian Government, to contribute constructively to that process. Despite the deep disagreements, we believe there is still a shared interest in providing a better future for the Syrian people and ensuring stability in the region.

Issues such as the release of detainees, the safe and dignified return of refugees, combating terrorism and inclusive political reform should all be part of the process. The status quo on the ground, both in Government-controlled areas and elsewhere, is not sustainable.

The Constitutional Committee also plays an important role, both in and of itself and as a confidence-building measure. We encourage all parties to contribute to the process in good faith and in a constructive manner. Norway gives our full support to the Special Envoy's approach.

Finally, in conclusion, let me reiterate the need to implement all parts of resolution 2254 (2015), including a nationwide ceasefire.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We very much welcome his efforts over the past month to facilitate a political solution, including his recent visit to Damascus to seek to unblock progress on the Constitutional Committee.

For years, the Security Council, on behalf of the wider membership of the United Nations, has demanded the implementation of the steps in resolution 2254 (2015). Yet not only has the regime failed to engage genuinely in the process, but the issues that gave rise to and sustained the conflict continue — atrocities, human rights abuses, disregard for the rule of law,

widespread corruption and economic mismanagement. Until there is genuine willingness to engage in the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2254 (2015), there is no prospect of a successful peace process, or of a sustainable solution, which should remain the priority for us all.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for his briefing and for the ongoing work of the United Nations and its partners to address the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. I also thank Ms. Ballour for returning to the Security Council and for her powerful testimony and her appeal for what a normal childhood would look like for the children she names.

It is evident from the Secretary-General's reports submitted pursuant to resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2585 (2021) (S/2021/1029 and S/2021/1030) that the humanitarian needs in Syria remain vast. Those needs are exacerbated by the approach of winter and the lack of testing and treatment capabilities amid the continued spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

It is vital that the Council continue to support the provision of assistance to Syrians in need by the most effective and efficient means. At present, it is clear that nothing can replace the scale or scope of the United Nations-mandated cross-border mechanism for achieving that. We welcome evidence in the reports of the progress made by the United Nations to scale up cross-line assistance into north-west and north-east Syria, as well as to increase humanitarian early-recovery interventions. We should continue to be guided by the objective and thorough reporting by the United Nations on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Finally, this year marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Global 16 Days Campaign, focused on the issue of the gender-related killing of women. Women and girls continue to be acutely affected by the conflict in Syria, with gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and assault widespread, particularly in camps. Poverty, displacement and COVID-19 have exacerbated the problem. We should continue to ensure the availability of humanitarian funding to counter gender-based violence in Syria. The United Kingdom has contributed more than \$34 million to the United Nations Population Fund to counter gender-based violence in Syria since 2019. We encourage others to do the same.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I also thank Ms. Amani Ballour for sharing her views. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in our meeting today.

The crisis in Syria has now lasted for nearly 11 years, taking its tremendous toll on the country and its people. Hundreds of thousands of people have died, and millions of others have had to seek refuge or been displaced. Women have been left behind as they struggle with daily life. Millions of children have been born into war, without knowing the meaning of peace, many of whom are without even parental care. It goes without saying that future generations will continue to endure the socioeconomic consequences of this crisis for many years to come.

While there is currently the longest period of calm since the beginning of the conflict, all efforts should be devoted to finding a comprehensive and long-term political solution. A Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political settlement, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), was fully endorsed by the Security Council and is supported by the international community. However, the decade-long crisis, together with the complex nature of the conflict in Syria, has been pushing the parties concerned far apart. Trust needs to be rebuilt and dialogue needs to be renewed to ensure the long-awaited implementation.

In that regard, we encourage the Syrian parties to engage constructively in dialogue and negotiation within the Constitutional Committee's framework to achieve substantial results and move the broader political process forward. To assist that process, the constructive engagement of the relevant international interlocutors is badly needed. We support all viable diplomatic efforts that bring the parties to the negotiation table.

In that connection, my delegation commends the Special Envoy's efforts. We fully support his step-for-step approach, which was kick-started with a series of meetings with international and regional actors. We hope that a tangible outcome will soon ensue.

It is a constant disappointment that the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to show no sign of improvement. We keep witnessing sad milestones, one after another, due to the impact of the persistent insecurity, the economic crisis, food and water insecurity, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

pandemic, et cetera. While protection concerns remain prominent, we call on all parties to ensure their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

Food insecurity continues to worsen. The water insecurity situation in various parts of Syria remains concerning. The disruption of the Allouk water station requires a sustainable solution. In addition, it is vital to ensure safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to enhance the humanitarian response in Syria. All appropriate channels need to be utilized.

We also call for greater support from the international community to the humanitarian response plan in order to help alleviate the predicaments of Syrians in the light of the harsh winter and the severe COVID-19 developments.

My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1030) submitted pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021). It is encouraging to see a real improvement with regard to cross-line deliveries, including progress towards establishing operations in the north-west and the preparation of a six-month plan by the United Nations. We call on all parties on the ground to fully cooperate in order to reach agreement on a sustained operational modality in that area.

We also take note of various early-recovery activities in Syria. Strengthening the resilience of the Syrian people is indeed the only way towards settling the deteriorating humanitarian situation. In that regard, we encourage further collaboration between the United Nations and all the relevant stakeholders to formulate a long-term strategy.

Let me end our last statement on the situation in Syria during our current Security Council tenure by re-emphasizing our strong support for all efforts towards sustainable peace, stability and development for the Syrian people.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Ms. Ballour for their briefings.

China commends the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy for the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome his recent visit to Damascus, during which he met with the Syrian Foreign Minister and exchanged views on outstanding issues facing Syria. We took note of the fact that the Constitutional Committee has not yet decided the dates for the next round of meetings. We

call on all parties to continue to engage constructively with the Special Envoy and strive to reach an agreement as soon as possible on the arrangements for the next session. The Security Council should provide concrete support for the work of the Special Envoy to advance the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

Ten years into the conflict, Syria is mired in a profound economic and humanitarian crisis. The international community must help the Syrian people to maintain their livelihoods and hope. China supports the international community and United Nations agencies in stepping up their assistance to Syria based on the guiding principles for emergency humanitarian relief, as set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

Under-Secretary-General Griffiths just presented the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1030) submitted pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021). China has carefully studied the report, and we would like to emphasize the following points.

All humanitarian relief operations in Syria should fully respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The cross-border mechanism, which is politically and legally controversial, should be adjusted in a timely manner in the light of developments on the ground and make a gradual transition to cross-line delivery. The report states that the environment for cross-border relief operations is complex. The local authorities in some areas have close ties with terrorists, and the risk of the misappropriation of humanitarian supplies therefore cannot be ruled out. China is concerned about that. We request the United Nations to take all the necessary monitoring measures to ensure the humanitarian nature of the cross-border operation.

The cross-line relief operations in north-eastern and north-western Syria should continue to be scaled up. China welcomes the development by the United Nations of a six-month cross-line relief plan for north-western Syria. We welcome the launch by the World Food Programme of the second cross-line delivery to north-western Syria on 9 and 10 December. We commend the Syrian Government's active cooperation in implementing the United Nations plan, and we urge Turkey and local authorities in north-western Syria to provide timely access and safety guarantees for cross-line relief operations and facilitate the distribution of supplies.

Early-recovery and livelihood projects should be robustly supported. We are pleased to note that the

United Nations and its partners are carrying out early-recovery projects in a number of areas, in line with the provisions of resolution 2585 (2021), including removing debris, restoring critical infrastructure and providing vocational training, among other things. However, the scale of the relevant projects is quite limited. We hope that the United Nations will increase its investment in that regard to help the Syrian people become self-sufficient and reduce their humanitarian needs.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that, to fundamentally overcome Syria's humanitarian challenges, we must comprehensively address the major issues that endanger Syria's sovereignty, security and development. Unilateral sanctions have brought about immeasurable losses and harm for Syria. Council members should take concrete measures to eliminate the negative impact of unilateral sanctions. Countries concerned should withdraw from the illegally occupied territory in northern Syria and stop all actions that undermine Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The international community should abandon double standards and eradicate terrorist forces in Syria at an early date. Only in that way can we help Syria restore peace and order and safeguard the fundamental interests of the Syrian people.

Ms. Muigai (Kenya): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Ms. Amani Ballour for their briefings. We also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey.

The situation in Syria is a profound test of the promise of the United Nations and its Charter to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Our inability as the Council to bring to an end the untold suffering of the Syrian people should rally us in 2022 to do our utmost to fulfil the Charter of the United Nations in this situation.

Kenya condemns the unrelenting destruction of human lives and livelihoods caused by the inability to find a political settlement in Syria. We implore the Security Council to rise out of dormancy and its repetitive meetings and find the means to act together. Kenya will support all actions that offer relief to the long-suffering people of Syria.

We commend Special Envoy Pedersen's engagements in Damascus, but regret the lack of commitments to convene a seventh session of discussions of the Constitutional Committee. We hope

that the discussions will take place in January and urge the parties to agree to this undertaking and engage meaningfully and constructively.

Progress on the political track is the lifeline for the people of Syria. It is intimately linked to the humanitarian track. For the international community to have confidence in the Government's ability and willingness to be the primary conduit for aid, it must show respect for the human and civil rights of all Syrians regardless of their region or ethnic identity. No areas or groups should be punished by association, and neither should the practice of collective punishment be instituted.

We ourselves recall the practices of collective punishment meted out by colonial authorities throughout Africa in the last century. The African people recall them as profound injustices and condemn them wherever they may be occurring, including in Syria.

The Government and actors in Syria must accept the need to more closely distinguish between civilian populations and terrorist fighters and insurgents. The Government should aspire in concrete ways to providing aid to all Syrians, while making sure that aid is not diverted.

For Syrians to succeed in implementing such recommendations, regional and global actors intervening in the country must play their part. We strongly condemn the subsuming of the safety and security of the Syrian people to the interests of external States. We therefore urge all members with leverage and engagement in Syria to update their approaches so that they are not associated in any way with the profound suffering caused to the people of Syria.

The cross-border aid mechanism, supported by cross-line deliveries, remains a crucial avenue for humanitarian assistance. We applaud the development of a six-month plan, as well as the new direct distribution modality in north-west Syria. We call for clear standards of oversight and transparency of aid delivery for the cross-border mechanism and for cross-line deliveries. Aid should not be politicized or diverted.

Kenya commends the United Nations humanitarian response through the early-recovery and livelihood activities. We encourage the expansion of such activities to include psychosocial support to the population, especially for children who have known nothing

but war. It is imperative that those programmes be adequately funded so that they can meet their intended goal for change.

In conclusion, we reiterate the importance of respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I reaffirm Kenya's solidarity with the people of Syria in their quest for peace, which can be delivered only by a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue.

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

For over a decade, the Syrian people have endured the perils of war and the resulting effects of living through one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has witnessed. The country's dire situation is further exacerbated by a combination of factors, including severe socioeconomic decline, which has precipitated commodity shortages and food insecurity.

The perpetuation of hostilities intensifies the humanitarian crisis. It is therefore crucial that parties to the conflict immediately end the violence to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, prevent further displacement and allow humanitarian actors to carry out their work. It is past time for a nationwide ceasefire to be implemented and fully respected by all.

We recognize that counter-terrorism operations are required for the protection of Syria's people and its territorial integrity. However, we remind parties of their obligation to comply with international law. Military activities should never take precedence over the protection of civilians, and the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be respected.

The protection of civilians extends to those residing in displacement camps, such as Al-Hol, where insecurity persists. We reiterate that camp residents and humanitarian workers must be afforded safety and access to basic services.

The economic crisis compounds the myriad challenges facing the Syrian people, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. Millions are heavily dependent on humanitarian aid, and the cross-border mechanism is a lifeline. However, other indispensable modalities, such as cross-line deliveries, are necessary to complement the mechanism and ensure timely, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access. We urge the parties to continue working

together to expand this modality to ensure regular and predictable cross-line operations. We further appeal for the preservation and scaling up of existing access arrangements to reach all persons in need. That is especially important to assist in the effective and efficient distribution of coronavirus disease vaccines.

Beyond humanitarian aid, further practical steps must be taken to assist Syria. That demands the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on the country, which have deepened the socioeconomic crisis and are incompatible with international law. It further necessitates support for early-recovery and livelihood projects to reduce vulnerabilities, enhance resilience and enable the achievement of long-term development goals.

Critically low water levels in the Euphrates River, due partly to the existential threat of climate change in combination with other troubling factors, has generated a water crisis that threatens lives and livelihoods. The situation is at a critical stage, and it calls for immediate attention. Furthermore, a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Allouk water station must also be prioritized.

The political and humanitarian situations are undoubtedly interwoven and, to resolve the conflict and protracted humanitarian crisis, there must be full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We reaffirm our support for the Special Envoy as he works assiduously to assist the political process. We note particularly his efforts to support the Constitutional Committee and to resolve the unsettled issues of detainees, abductees and missing persons. We implore all parties to remain committed to working together on the political track and to engage constructively. We also reiterate that the full participation of women is imperative to ensure fair and balanced outcomes for all.

The Syrian people must remain at the forefront of all deliberations and decisions. Our words and actions must be guided by humanitarian considerations, rather than by what is geopolitically expedient. This calls for pragmatic steps to be taken, such as the removal of all foreign forces present in Syria, in violation of its sovereignty. The politicization of the grave humanitarian situation must immediately come to an end. This being our final statement in the Security Council on this issue, it is incumbent upon us to reiterate that we have a responsibility to support Syria

and its people in a meaningful way, and we must not fail in fulfilling it.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, the Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, and Syrian Civil Society Representative, Amani Ballour, for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in this meeting.

Regrettably, after more than a decade of crisis, Syria is still facing difficult conditions, in which the Syrian people endure the greatest amount of suffering and sacrifices as a result of the ongoing conflict, violence and terrorism. The manifestations of the crisis have been exacerbated and its factors have multiplied over the years, in a way that has made it more severe and more complex and that undermines the pillars of security and stability in the entire region.

In that context, we reiterate that there is no sustainable alternative to a solution in Syria other than a negotiated political settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), that preserves Syria's unity and sovereignty and ends foreign interference and the presence of terrorist groups, while working to accelerate the process in order to end the humanitarian suffering of the Syrians and put the country back on the path to stability and development.

In that regard, the international community and the Security Council must make concerted efforts to have a positive political and economic impact in Syria, as was the case when the Council unanimously adopted the central resolutions on the Syrian issue, that will end the various manifestations of the crisis and contribute to the return of the displaced and refugees to their homeland. That will also require greater efforts and flexibility on the part of the Syrian parties in their leadership and ownership of the political process in a way that prioritizes the interests of the Syrian people above all else and achieves political and social harmony to restore security, stability and Syria's regional and international role.

In that context, we reiterate Tunisia's support for the efforts and good offices of the Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen, in order to advance the constitutional and political process among the Syrians and establish a comprehensive ceasefire, especially within the framework of a step-by-step approach to the solution.

We also support international and regional efforts in this direction.

I thank the Secretary-General for his two recent reports, and in particular his objective one (S/2021/1030), which is clear, detailed and frank in response to the content of resolution 2585 (2021). In this regard, we commend the renewed vision of Under-Secretary-General Griffiths to improve humanitarian work in Syria and increase its effectiveness and transparency, despite the ongoing challenges.

It is necessary, in light of the difficult conditions created by the outbreak of the pandemic and the advent of winter, to continue to meet the growing needs in all parts of Syria and to reduce the manifestations of fragility and risks without political considerations. That can be done by ensuring the access of Syrians to urgent assistance and early recovery projects across lines and across borders, thereby contributing to alleviating human suffering, building resilience among individuals and local communities and providing them with a better horizon.

In that context, we note the engagement of the United Nations with its various specialized agencies and partners to embody a comprehensive and multisectoral humanitarian response, in line with resolution 2585 (2021) and General Assembly resolution 46/182, which specifically states that emergency relief must be carried out in a manner that supports recovery and sustainable development.

We reaffirm our thanks to the donor countries that have contributed to funding early recovery projects, noting that the amount of funding in this regard is still small, incommensurate with the needs in Syria and not in line with the strategic objectives of the United Nations response plan.

We also welcome the onset of the distribution of humanitarian aid across the lines in Sarmada on 16 December, and the encouraging signs for more through the development by the United Nations of a six-year operational plan to send regular and predictable aid shipments across the lines to the north of Syria. In addition, there has been a steady improvement of the humanitarian situation in north-eastern Syria, a strengthening of the United Nations operational presence in the region and various measures taken to enhance accountability, effectiveness, transparency, monitoring and risk reduction in relation to cross-line and cross-border aid.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the priority remains to identify a political solution pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), the alleviation of the suffering of the Syrians and ensuring that aid reaches those who deserve it by using all available mechanisms and removing all obstacles, as well as ending the problem of terrorism, which has continued to complicate the situation.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their informative briefings. Their balanced and objective views have guided us well throughout the two years that we have been on the Security Council. I also welcome Ms. Amani Ballour to today's meeting.

Estonia commends the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which continues to provide humanitarian aid to millions of people in Syria. As noted by Mr. Griffiths, all modalities are important in reaching the large number of internally displaced persons across the country. That is especially true in the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic and ongoing winterization efforts.

I welcome the timely publication of the reports (S/2021/1029 and S/2021/1030) on the implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), which, among other things, focuses on cross-line deliveries. There have been substantial improvements when it comes to coordination between the relevant parties on the ground. In that regard, we remain cautiously optimistic about potential new developments that could make cross-line deliveries regular and reliable. Until then, however, cross-line deliveries will be unable to substitute for the large-scale humanitarian response provided through the cross-border mechanism.

Cross-border aid remains the backbone of the Organization's overall humanitarian response in Syria. Maintaining stable aid flow is crucial, as the war in Syria has not ended. In the past months, 100 civilians have been killed in clashes and attacks. I reiterate our call for a nationwide ceasefire, which is a precondition for a peaceful dialogue based on resolution 2254 (2015). All parties must adhere to international law and provide safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all Syrians.

Last month, Estonia organized an Arria Formula meeting, at which the United Nations-mandated International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes

under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and Syrian civil society representatives gave a detailed overview on the question of accountability in Syria. Those kind of meetings do not stop atrocities in Syria. However, they do provide us with relevant information for taking action against impunity in future.

There will be no peace in Syria until impunity prevails. The international community will never normalize its views on killings, torture, sexual violence and forced disappearances, which unfortunately continue in Syria on a daily basis. I hope the next membership of the Security Council will be able to tackle these atrocities in a meaningful and swift way.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Ms. Ballour for their briefings. I also welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to the Security Council.

First of all, I would like to say that Mexico recognizes the continued efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to promote understanding and dialogue between the Government and the opposition, in the interest of resuming the work of the Constitutional Committee and promoting the advancement of a political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome his recent meeting with the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and call for the parties to engage constructively in this process in order to resume the drafting work. We also acknowledge Mr. Pedersen's contacts with other international actors. We stress the importance of those actors with influence helping to push forward the United Nations-facilitated political process and the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

On the humanitarian front, my delegation appreciates the issuance of the Secretary-General's two comprehensive reports (S/2021/1029 and S/2021/1030), pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021) of last July. The bimonthly report contained in document S/2021/1029 makes it clear that, in the face of continuing hostilities and profound needs, the outlook is critical, as Ms. Ballour described it. We reiterate our condemnation of the acts of violence affecting the civilian population and express our concern about the attacks that have been carried out in the vicinity of humanitarian-aid warehouses and distribution routes. We recall that it is imperative for all

parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

In terms of access, Mexico welcomes the second convoy of humanitarian aid that was deployed across the lines of conflict to the north-west region. The recently adopted six-month plan is a tool to strengthen this mechanism and to have regular and predictable operations. We will remain attentive to the implementation of this plan, for which we reiterate the importance of all parties involved providing the security guarantees required for smooth operations.

We also welcome the issuance of the substantive report on transparency, both in cross-border operations and across conflict lines. The report makes it clear that operations across the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing have a strict monitoring system in place to ensure a good level of transparency. It is clear that even with the full implementation of the six-month plan for cross-line operations, cross-line operations are complementary to cross-border operations. Both modalities are essential to deliver vital assistance to the population, especially in the face of the additional challenges posed by the winter season.

Likewise, we appreciate that the report contained in document S/2021/1030, which explains in detail the mechanisms for monitoring, risk management and early-recovery projects that are being developed in the field. On this last point, as we are well aware, the effects of 10 years of conflict have been devastating for the Syrian economy and, consequently, for the resilience of the population. It is very unfortunate that 90 per cent of the population in the country lives in poverty. Early-recovery projects are critical as part of the humanitarian response to generate opportunities and facilitate access to basic services.

In conclusion, we highlight the close relationship between humanitarian needs and the ceasefire. As long as the conflict does not cease, humanitarian demands will continue to deepen. It is essential to promote steps towards a peaceful settlement, in accordance with international law and in compliance with resolution 2254 (2015). The cessation of violence and the political transition process are complementary and mutually reinforcing steps, and we urge their parallel advancement. The Syrian people deserve a peaceful future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Niger.

I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their detailed briefings on the situation in Syria and, at the same time, salute Ms. Ballour for her contribution to today's debate, which cannot leave anyone indifferent. Syria needs us, and it needs us now. I welcome the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran to this session.

My delegation takes note of the regular and substantive reports submitted by the Secretary-General on 14 December 2021 on the humanitarian situation and the aid-delivery mechanism in Syria (S/2021/1029 and S/2021/1030). Therefore, in this statement, the last that my country will make on this issue, I would like to dwell on three aspects that I consider essential, namely, the security, political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

First of all, with regard to the security situation, we deplore the continuing hostilities involving the use of improvised explosive devices, air strikes and other rocket attacks on areas inhabited by civilians. My delegation calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities as a sine qua non for achieving tangible progress in resolving the crisis in Syria. However, the call for a ceasefire and the need for collective efforts to address the coronavirus disease pandemic must not distract us from the fight against terrorism, especially since there are reports of an upsurge in attacks and other crimes perpetrated by elements of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on Syrian armed forces and its allies in the south, but also against Kurdish forces in the north-east of the country. This state of affairs is a real source of concern and sufficient proof that the ISIL is regaining its capacity to act after its defeat following the decisive actions of the international coalition.

With regard to the political situation, the Niger, which has made this point repeatedly throughout its term on the Council, remains convinced that only an inclusive dialogue led by the Syrians themselves and reflecting the will of the Syrian people will make it possible to find a peaceful and long-term solution in Syria in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome the holding of the latest round of negotiations in the Constitutional Commission but remain disappointed at the lack of progress made by this body, despite its being bipartisan.

As we stated in the Special Envoy's last briefing, we share his disappointment when he said,

“The Committee lacks both a clear understanding of how to move the process forward and a vision of how to develop a ‘substantive drafting process’”.

This conclusion is evidence of the stalemate of that body and the inability of its members to accomplish the mission assigned to them. This calls for a radical change in the structure, composition and working methods of the Commission, which must begin with an end to outside interference in the already complex process.

We therefore call on all key external actors to uphold the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria by refraining from any interference in the work of the Commission so as to give the resolution of the crisis — the victims of which, as we all know, are civilians, primarily women and children — a genuine chance of succeeding. We acknowledge the tireless work of Mr. Pederson's to achieve that goal through dialogue with all stakeholders in the process, including the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and civil society organizations in Syria.

Concerning the humanitarian situation, my delegation supports the cross-border and internal mechanisms for delivering humanitarian aid to the suffering Syrian population. Once again today, we have learned from Emergency Relief Coordinator Griffiths, whose work we commend, that the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate under the combined effects of the destruction of basic social infrastructure, poverty, food insecurity, caused by more than a decade of conflict, the effects climate change and the repercussions of the coronavirus disease pandemic. With regard to the latter, it is astounding that less than 3 per cent of the Syrian population been vaccinated to date.

As winter is setting in, more important for Syrians than the way in which humanitarian aid is delivered is that it arrives quickly and in sufficient quantity. We welcome the fact that the cross-border delivery of aid has seen progress in recent days with the recent delivery by the World Food Program of humanitarian aid on 9 and 10 December from Government-controlled territory to the north-western part of Syria.

Issues related to access to water for populations living along the Euphrates River remains of concern for the Niger. Water must be a source of cooperation

and shared prosperity rather than conflict and discord among riparian nations. Therefore, we encourage the equitable use of that common good in the region.

Lastly, as we have always posited, the imposition of unilateral economic sanctions has exacerbated the dire economic and humanitarian situation throughout Syria. The Niger calls for easing or suspending unilateral economic sanctions that are severely impacting Syria's ability to cope with the pandemic and the current economic crisis, which is a moral imperative.

In conclusion, it can never be said enough that the resolution of the Syrian crisis cannot come from the force of arms alone, but rather through a negotiated and just political solution, involving the various segments of Syrian society, without exclusion. We therefore continue to believe that the political and humanitarian issues of the Syrian crisis cannot be treated separately, as the pursuit of hostilities negatively affects the humanitarian situation, which, in turn, affects the peace process.

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*): My country's delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1030), submitted pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021), and listened closely to the briefing by Mr. Martin Griffiths.

I would like to make the following remarks.

First, with regard to cross-line access, the Syrian Government continues to spare no effort to facilitate the operations of the United Nations and its specialized agencies in implementation of the mandate set out in resolution 2585 (2021), while the Turkish regime and its affiliated terrorist groups continue to obstruct them in Idlib. Cooperation between the Syrian Government and the United Nations in late August enabled the cross-line delivery of a World Food Programme convoy from Aleppo to Sarmada in north-western Syria. In response, a hysterical, aggressive campaign was carried out by the Turkish regime and its terrorist affiliates. The contents of the convoy were unable to be distributed for months. The same campaign obstructed another convoy scheduled to arrive in Sarmada on 9 November, during the visit to Aleppo by Mr. David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme.

Terrorist groups targeted the routes to be taken by the convoy with missiles. Another convoy scheduled on 28 November was also blocked.

The Syrian Government, based on its commitment to stepping up access to all parts of the country, approved the United Nations six-month plan and responded positively and in record time to all requests. That resulted in the delivery of a food and non-food aid convoy by the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund to Sarmada on 9 December. The Syrian State's achievements in enhancing cross-line access in the north-west should be commended by the Security Council. We regret that the report fails to explicitly and unequivocally attribute responsibility to the Turkish regime and its terrorist affiliates for obstructing the duly implementation of the mandate.

With regard to the north-east, the report confirms that access for most of the deliveries was made possible and that 625 truckloads and seven airlifts were delivered. The report also notes that the Syrian Government authorized a UNICEF and World Health Organization cross-line convoy containing vaccines against the coronavirus disease to Ras Al-Ayn and Tal Abyad. My country's Government also authorized a United Nations humanitarian assessment mission in that area. That was the sixth such authorization granted by the Syrian Government, pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021), also coincided with the publication of the Secretary-General's report, confirming that all access requests have been granted by the Syrian Government.

With regard to the Rukban camp, the report confirms that humanitarian access to the camp remains beyond reach. We had hoped that the report would clarify the reasons that have prevented such access, which we have already laid out before the Council. They are directly linked to the illegitimate presence of United States forces in the area and their sponsorship of the Jaysh Maghawir Al-Thawra terrorist organization. We emphasize the need for that shameful camp to be closed, as it continues to only exacerbate the suffering of Syrian citizens and support armed groups.

Secondly, with regard to promoting the transparency and efficiency of the cross-border mechanism, my country reiterates our principled position rejecting that politicized mechanism, as it constitutes a stark violation of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We also reject the mechanism

because of the grave shortcomings undermining its actions, foremost of which is its failure to guarantee that assistance reaches its intended beneficiaries, not terrorist organizations.

The Secretary-General's report states that cross-border humanitarian operations are fraught with risks, thereby demonstrating the validity of our position with regard to the mechanism. The report notes that the operation is managed remotely and that part of the area covered is under the control of a local authority that is generally believed to have close ties with non-State armed group designated by the Security Council as a terrorist organization, allowing it control aid.

My delegation is astonished by the report's exaggeration of the number of people in need in the north-west. The report's description that activities inside the country complements and cannot replace cross-border action is not objective and based on unrealistic assessments. The facts demonstrate that serious and sincere cooperation with the Syrian Government and stepping up action along the lines ensure the achievement the desired goals and avert the risks and shortcomings inherent to the cross-border mechanism.

Thirdly, with respect to rapid recovery projects, my country's delegation expresses its extreme disappointment that certain Western countries, within the framework of the so-called donors community, are impeding the implementation and quantitatively and qualitatively upgrading of many such projects. Those countries raise unjustified questions regarding the definition of early recovery projects and obstruct the adoption of a strategic framework for cooperation between the Syrian Government and the United Nations in the humanitarian field, despite the significant flexibility that has been demonstrated by the Syrian Government.

Moreover, those countries continue to politicize humanitarian and development work and to attempt to impose conditions on the provision and delivery of aid. How else can we explain the fact that financing for the humanitarian response plan was reduced by more than \$200 million, despite increased humanitarian needs?

My delegation would like to make it clear that some of the early recovery projects referred to in the report (S/2021/1030) have been implemented for years, even before the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021). We had hoped to see a list of new vital projects that would

contribute to strengthening resilience, improving the humanitarian situation and facilitating the dignified and safe return of displaced persons. It comes as no surprise that some members of the Security Council have not tried to hide their hostility towards resolution 2585 (2021) or their rejection of its provisions. We will have to announce the names of those countries.

My delegation also regrets that the report disregards the catastrophic consequences of the illegitimate, immoral and inhumane siege imposed by the United States of America and the European Union against the Syrian people. We call for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the illegal coercive measures in place, which have caused the suffering of each and every individual Syrian.

For the sake of truth and to be clear, any objective assessment of the complexities of the humanitarian situation in Syria lead to one conclusion, namely, that the root cause is the Turkish regime, with its practices, crimes and sponsorship of terrorist organizations and entities affiliated to it in the north and north-west of my country. We have submitted to the Council a number of letters describing in detailed the Turkish regime's practices and crimes against the Syrian people, including by depriving them of access to water and imposing its policy of Turkification. All of this should prompt the Security Council to undertake urgent and decisive deterrence. My delegation also demands that the Turkish regime be held accountable for its crimes and desperate attempts to impede stability in Syria, including its obstruction of humanitarian cross-line convoys and the implementation of the six-month plan.

In this regard, we cannot but note the practices of the United States forces illegitimately present in north-eastern Syria. Those forces support separatist militias and facilitate the efforts of non-governmental organizations as they seek to lead illegal cross-border piracy operations through the crossing point at Fish Khabur, in stark contravention of Security Council resolutions. They also use humanitarian assistance as a pretext to violate our sovereignty. Their most recent practice involves importing large shipments of wheat riddled with dangerous diseases through the Semalka crossing point, with the aim of inflicting damage on the Syrian people and the Syrian economy.

We listened to the statement made by Special Envoy Pedersen, who a few days ago held talks in Damascus with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates,

as well as with the co-Chair of the national delegation to the Constitutional Committee meetings. The Syrian Arab Republic remains committed to a political solution based on a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people and ensures full commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and integrity of Syria.

Syria awaits the seventh session of the Constitutional Committee. We applaud the positive contribution of the national delegation to its work; however, we emphasize that external parties should refrain from meddling in the work of the Committee and creating further obstacles by imposing artificial timelines or prejudging its conclusions.

The need for a comprehensive ceasefire has been mentioned in a number of statements today. We underscore that, if such a ceasefire is to be achieved, there is a need to abolish the terrorist organizations active in certain parts of the country, specifically Da'esh and Al-Nusra Front, as well as their affiliates. There is also a need to end the Turkish occupation and the illegitimate presence of United States forces in Syria, leading to the restoration of the authority of the Syrian State throughout its entire territories, the re-establishment of security and stability and an end to any irregular and unacceptable situations. We consider a step forward those national and local reconciliations, as we have recently seen in Dara'a and Deir ez-Zor. We note that the cooperation of the Syrian State in the efforts of our Russian friends has resulted in the release of a number of detainees and abductees, despite all attempts by the Turkish side and its agents to block that humanitarian initiative.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to thank your delegation, Mr. President, as well as those of Tunisia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Viet Nam for their efforts and objectivity as members of the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I welcome today's meeting and I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. I would also like to salute Ms. Amani Ballour and I thank the Secretary-General for his report on United Nations humanitarian operations in Syria, submitted pursuant to resolution 2585 (2021) (S/2021/1030).

Those humanitarian operations are vital for the people of Syria. Food deliveries have saved millions of civilians and 1.1 million vaccine doses have protected Syrians against the secondary threat of the coronavirus disease. Those cross-border operations are undertaken in line with the universally agreed principles of the United Nations, including transparency. There is no hidden agenda. The aim is simple: to save lives.

We have heard from Under-Secretary-General Griffiths that the distribution of cross-line aid has begun. Each and every cross-line mission requires risk assessments and negotiations with different actors. Shelling and attacks by the regime and its backers continue to target the supply routes, warehouses and distribution points of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations.

I assure the Council that Turkey remains committed to ensuring the safe continuation of those missions into the future. However, we note that, even with the full implementation of the existing plan, the cross-line convoys cannot replace or replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operation. It is clear that there is no feasible alternative to the cross-border mechanism.

No one wants the Syrian people to be dependent on humanitarian aid. The cross-border mechanism is saving the lives of Syrians right now, but their future will be saved by successful negotiations that lead to a sustained peace — a sustained peace whereby families sleep in their own homes without fear and where children walk to school, carefree, with full bellies.

But delays in the political process prolong the suffering. Thus far, the Syrian regime has been unwilling to seriously engage in United Nations-led peace talks in Geneva. The next round of the Constitutional Committee must be held as soon as possible. Moreover, that round should produce tangible results. We support the Special Envoy's step-by-step initiative to accelerate the political process. It is highly critical that those consultations align with the international community's acquis on the Syrian conflict, as well as the letter and spirit of resolution 2254 (2015). As we all know, a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict can be achieved only by protecting Syria's territorial integrity and unity through political means based on resolution 2254 (2015).

The other hurdle in reaching a political solution is the ceasefire violations by the regime and its backers. The victims of those violations are innocent civilians

whom international humanitarian law has sought to protect. The security impact of the prolonged conflict is, of course, not confined to Syria. It also affects the surrounding region, including my own country. The situation in Syria creates a breeding ground for terrorist organizations. Attacks perpetrated by the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) and its offshoot, the Syrian Democratic Forces, take the lives of defenceless Syrians and, indeed, Turkish citizens in my own country. No Member State can, or should, tolerate deliberate attacks against its own people or territory. We therefore once again invite the members of the international community to see the real face of the PKK/YPG and its violations of international humanitarian law, including the documented deliberate bombing of civilian targets, including hospitals, the abduction by force and recruitment of children, as certified by the United Nations, the use of violence to suppress civilian demonstrations in response to hardship, including increases in the price of basic goods, such as bread and gasoline, and the heinous act of blocking the return to refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes through the threat of death, often at gunpoint.

We wish for a world free from terror. History has proved that backing one terrorist group to do one's bidding against another terrorist organization has never been successful in the long term. It is my duty to warn that supporting terrorist organization extensions under the guise of fighting Da'esh will not yield the results that are hoped for. I ask all members of the United Nations to exercise caution in rolling out a red carpet to terrorist leaders. By endorsing such actors, they legitimize terror. Today's crimson carpet can very quickly turn into a floor of blood. Members do not want to have the blood of innocent Syrians on their hands,

Only two days ago, our pivotal timelines were flooded with the hashtag International Day of Migration. In Turkey, every day is a day of migration. For 10 years now, we have welcomed approximately 4 million Syrian refugees who left their homes in search of safety. Tens of thousands of Syrian children took their first breaths and their first steps in Turkey. We want them to know their homeland, their culture and their language. No child should grow up in exile. A hashtag is all well and good, but a home is better.

I fear that history will define the Security Council as the hashtag-generation Council. Each month, we come to the Chamber; we speak; we tweet; and we

leave. We return the following month and go through the motions again. I remind the Council that we are the last chance for the people of Syria. Is this the best that we can come up with? Perhaps instead of tweeting our New Year resolutions, we can actually do something to save the Syrian people.

As for the statement made by the representative of the criminal Syrian regime, I will repeat: I do not consider him as my legitimate counterpart. His presence in this Chamber is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the Al-Assad regime. I will therefore not honour his delusional remarks with a response.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ms. Ershadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I join other speakers in thanking the briefers for their inputs.

For well over a decade, the Syrian people have been seriously suffering from the conflict. To end their grief and the dangers that the conflict poses to regional peace and security, we need to redouble our efforts to find a political solution to this unfortunate conflict. The Astana format will continue such efforts. To that end, senior officials of the Astana guarantors will meet in Nur-Sultan on 21 and 22 December.

We welcome the recent release of 10 Syrian detainees as a result of the efforts of the working group on the release of detainees/abductees, established by the Astana format. Iran will continue to seriously contribute to such efforts, and we urge all parties to cooperate for the realization of that noble humanitarian endeavour.

We hope that the ongoing consultations conducted by Mr. Pedersen will assist in the holding of the Constitutional Committee's next meeting soon. The Committee must work without any external interference or pressure or the setting of any artificial deadline for its work or any other conditions of a similar nature.

According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1030) on the implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), the humanitarian situation in Syria is deteriorating, needs continue to grow and significant parts of the civilian infrastructure have been destroyed or are disintegrating. That indicates the dire need to intensify humanitarian work, in particular through the effective implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), in which the Security Council calls upon all States to

respond with practical steps to address the urgent needs of the Syrian people, stressing that such efforts must include supporting early recovery projects.

One such practical step can, indeed, be the removal of the unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria, prolonging the sufferings of its people and adversely affecting the work of international and national humanitarian agencies in the country. As the Secretary-General rightly states, early recovery activities are key to preventing a further increase in the number of people in need, as well as reducing immediate and protracted humanitarian needs, and therefore dependence on external assistance.

While noting the efforts undertaken in early recovery activities, we believe that such activities are much less than needed. We therefore support the call by the Secretary-General for further expanding early recovery efforts, as, according to him, such efforts are critical to the continued success of the humanitarian response in the country. It is important to ensure that the aid that enters Syria through cross-border operations reaches the actual beneficiaries and does not fall into the hands of terrorist groups. We call for an increase in the funding and allocation of humanitarian aid to cross-line operations, aimed at turning them into only humanitarian operations in Syria.

We welcome the positive response of the Syrian Government to all five United Nations notes verbales requesting access for cross-line operations, as confirmed by the Secretary-General in his report. However, it is extremely disappointing that, due to the lack of cooperation by other sides, so far only two cross-line deliveries have taken place, which have yet to be distributed.

We call for facilitating the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. At the same time, we warn about attempts to discourage them from returning home, including by disseminating inaccurate information about the current conditions in Syria.

We strongly condemn all aggressions by the Israeli regime against Syria, and we reaffirm Syria's inherent right to self-defence and to respond at a time and place of its choosing. The Security Council must compel the Israeli regime to end the occupation of the Syrian Golan and immediately stop its aggressions against Syria.

Moreover, the continued occupation of parts of the Syrian territory by foreign forces, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, must come to an end and all occupying and uninvited foreign forces must leave that country without any precondition or further delay. In that context, the recent reports by United States media about the killing of dozens of Syrian civilians — including farmers, children and villagers — by the United States forces, which we strongly condemn, indicate the urgency of their withdrawal from Syria.

We reject separatist activities or illegitimate self-rule initiatives in Syria and condemn any efforts to support them.

The Syrian crisis must be settled peacefully and in accordance with principles of international law, particularly full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to support the people and the Government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.