



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

**8958**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Thursday, 27 January 2022, 5.15 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Ms. Juul . . . . . (Norway)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mrs. Espeschit Maia
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mrs. Hackman
India . . . . .	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mrs. Toroitich
Mexico . . . . .	Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy/Mr. Chumakov
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 5.15 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, 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 Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, to participate in the meeting.

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

Before we begin with our speakers list today — recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working methods — I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to seven to 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Voronkov.

**Mr. Voronkov:** I would like to thank you, Madam, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council. My briefing will focus on the terrorist threat to international peace and security, especially in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic.

I look forward to soon briefing the Council in more detail based upon the forthcoming fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by Da'esh to international peace and security, which will be issued at the end of this month.

I am deeply concerned by the attack that Da'esh launched last week against Al-Sina'a prison in Al-Hasakah city, in north-eastern Syria, and the ongoing fighting that has also affected the civilian population. The attack has resulted in the escape of an unknown number of Da'esh prisoners from a facility reported to hold around 3,000 Da'esh fighters. UNICEF

estimates that the prison also held nearly 700 children. I am appalled by the reports that Da'esh has used those children as human shields.

Although the group's barbarism should come as no surprise, those children have been left prey to be used and abused in that way. Members may remember that, during my briefing to the Council in 2020, I called for the children to be taken out of harm's way (see S/PV.8839). I support the former UNICEF Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, in saying that those children should never have been held in military detention in the first place, as Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths also echoed at the previous meeting today (see S/PV.8957).

That incident was predictable. Da'esh has been highlighting and calling for jailbreaks, of which there have been previous instances in Syria and elsewhere in the world. The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team on Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida has regularly warned of the precarious holding arrangements in north-eastern Syria and said that an incident of that kind was to be expected.

For the time being, Da'esh's ability to strategically exploit jailbreaks in the area may be limited. The group cannot easily absorb or exfiltrate fugitives in large numbers. It is therefore not surprising that many who escaped the prisons have been killed or recaptured, but it does not mean that the threat can be neglected.

I would like to recall the words of my colleague, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, who briefed the Council yesterday. Speaking about the events in Al-Hasakah, he said that

“the episode brings back terrible memories of the prison breaks that fuelled the original rise of ISIL in 2014 and 2015. I see it as a clear message to us all of the importance of uniting to combat the threat of internationally proscribed terrorist groups and of resolving the broader conflict in which terrorism inevitably thrives” (S/PV.8955, p. 2).

That latest incident speaks to the urgent need for concerted international efforts to address, in an effective, sustainable fashion, the issue of the prisons and camps in north-eastern Syria that hold suspected Da'esh fighters and individuals with perceived links to the group, including children. Most of those individuals have never been charged with a crime, yet they remain in prolonged detention, uncertain of their fate.

It is a reminder also of why Da'esh continues to embed itself in Syria. Challenges to stabilization in Iraq, as well as the continued conflict and elusive progress on the political track in Syria, make this area a favoured arena for Da'esh and other terrorist groups. That is a tragedy not only for the Syrian people, but also neighbouring countries and, indeed, the world. Only hours after the attack in Al-Hasakah, Da'esh fighters attacked an army barracks located north of Baghdad, killing at least 11 soldiers. Such attacks highlight two pressing areas of concern.

First, they are not isolated incidents. The Secretary-General's reports have warned that the threat posed by Da'esh is growing, including in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since its territorial collapse, the group has focused on reconstituting its capabilities, continued to maintain clandestine cells, pursued a protracted terrorist insurgency and maintained sizeable numbers, the majority of which are based in Iraq.

The group is organized in small cells hiding in desert and rural areas, while they move across the border between Iraq and Syria to avoid capture. This also highlights the transborder nature of the Da'esh core in the region.

The attacks could also embolden Da'esh affiliates in the Sahel and Central and East Africa to mount violent attacks. In recent months, Da'esh affiliates have expanded into many subregions of Africa, spreading from the Sahel, taking a further hold in Central and southern Africa, including Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Meanwhile, I am deeply concerned about the political and security situations unfolding in Mali and Burkina Faso stemming from the unconstitutional takeovers of power in those countries. We may see terrorist groups exploit and actively instigate the power vacuum that State fragility creates, further undermining State legitimacy in the Sahel region.

We are also witnessing a rapidly evolving situation in Afghanistan that could have far-reaching implications for peace and security around the world. I would like to echo the Secretary-General's concern that terrorism remains a constant global threat, not only to the situation of Afghanistan.

Secondly, civilians, especially women and children, pay the highest price from this deteriorating security situation. I urge that the Council heed the situation in Al-Hol, Al-Roj and other camps and detention facilities

in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. In Al-Hol camp alone, more than 56,000 people are held, mostly women and children, in dire humanitarian conditions. The ongoing and increasing physical and psychosocial violence is deeply troubling.

The Secretary-General has consistently stressed the urgency of an adequate international response to the dire humanitarian, human rights and security situation, particularly for children. When I briefed the Council in 2020 on the threat posed by Da'esh (see S/PV.8716), I noted the urgency of getting the children in those camps out of harm's way. We have all seen reports that as male children in the camps reach the age of 12, they are transferred to other facilities.

Some of those children may be among those whom Da'esh has now used as human shields. That would not have happened if they had been repatriated in 2019, 2020 or 2021.

I commend Member States, especially in Central Asia and elsewhere, that have taken on the numerous challenges involved in repatriating their citizens, as well as those that have worked to support the humanitarian situation on the ground in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

However, as the situation festers, which is unfortunately the case, it only exacerbates conditions conducive to terrorism and poses a serious threat in the mid- to long-term perspective. The significant challenges faced by Member States in ensuring the protection of vulnerable individuals, accountability for gross violations of international law, including terrorist crimes, and security are not becoming any less urgent or complex with time. Such challenges and risks are growing more serious with neglect and could have a long-term impact not only in the region but globally.

In that regard, I would like to recall the Global Framework and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund to support requesting Member States on the protection, voluntary repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals with suspected links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups returning from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Global Framework is co-led by UNICEF and my Office. It provides a whole-of-United Nations approach that responds to the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of children and adults, and it supports requesting Member States in promoting security and addressing accountability in the repatriation,

prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration process. The repatriation of third-country nationals from Syria and Iraq remains a major priority for the United Nations, and we stand ready as a reliable partner to Member States in responding to those challenges.

Da'esh's attempts to break its fighters free from prison underlines the need to bring them to justice as soon as possible and ensure accountability to break the cycle of violence. I would like to pay tribute to the work of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in that regard. I also welcome the new provisions on so-called battlefield evidence adopted by the Security Council in resolution 2617 (2021), extending the mandate of our colleagues from the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

For over 20 years, the leadership of a united Security Council has been decisive for international counter-terrorism efforts. A key lesson is that military responses are necessary but not sufficient in addressing the terrorist threat. We need consistent, coordinated and comprehensive efforts across countries, sectors and disciplines, anchored in human rights and the rule of law, to address terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, while ensuring respect for international humanitarian law.

The United Nations, working through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, will continue to support Member States in countering terrorism.

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

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

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is with great concern that we are following developments in the south of the Syrian city of Al-Hasakah, where on 20 January, fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) captured the Al-Sina'a prison — the largest penitentiary facility in the Syrian territory out of governmental control, where approximately 5,000 jihadists were held.

According to the latest reports, it was a carefully planned attack that used two explosive-laden vehicles, driven by suicide bombers. As a result, about 100 ISIL members broke into the prison, where riots had started shortly before. The terrorists managed to set free and arm at least 800 inmates, some of whom immediately joined the attackers. The fighters gained a foothold

within the prison compound itself and also spread to the adjacent residential quarters.

As we know, starting on 21 January, local armed groups, supported by the United States Air Force, have been engaged in counter-action activities. Bloody fights have broken out, including in densely populated areas, where the terrorists took shelter. Intensive air strikes destroyed the buildings housing the technical college and economic department of the local university, demolished a fuel warehouse and disrupted the energy supply to Al-Hasakah. The precise death toll among civilians is currently unknown. We are deeply concerned over possible indiscriminate air strikes by the American air force following the recent attack, because wherever it is involved, it often causes mass casualties among civilians.

Recently, on 25 January, at the open debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.8953), the Permanent Representative of the United States referred to very valid concepts: the absolute imperative of the parties to an armed conflict observing the norms of international humanitarian law, and the growing importance of the protection of civilians during urban warfare. She also recalled how easily explosive ordnance can kill large groups of civilians.

Yet what we see in reality is that the high-flung rhetoric of the United States again runs counter to its actions. Thus, when clearing Al-Sina'a prison and its surroundings of ISIL terrorists, they used both their air force and armoured vehicles. Such heavy equipment, as one might easily guess, uses explosive ammunition, and the massive outflow of civilians from the combat zone — more than 45,000 people, as reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — clearly indicates that measures for the protection of civilians were ignored there.

All members of the Council, especially the humanitarian penholders, must demand that the United States provide a detailed account of casualties among civilians; those responsible must be brought to justice.

Another clear example of this is Afghanistan. If we look back, what comes to mind is the bombings of Raqqa, Hajin and Baghouz. According to the United Nations, no medical facility in Raqqa remained intact after the hostilities. When Baghouz was bombed in 2019, at least 80 people died, the majority of them women and children. Yet no one was held accountable, despite the fact that Washington admitted its guilt.

That is yet another question about the high American standards of accountability to which our Western colleagues often refer.

We cannot but be concerned over the fact that, as reported by UNICEF, there are 850 children in Al-Sina'a prison, and there is no access to them. According to humanitarian organizations, the number of internally displaced persons is growing rapidly owing to recent events. The United Nations estimates that 45,000 people were forced to flee their homes to safety. Residents of Al-Hasakah's southern district are fleeing to Government territory through the checkpoints opened by the Syrian military. In that context, we commend Damascus, which, despite the difficult circumstances created by the sanctions, continues to assist those in need.

We also welcome the efforts of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and all humanitarian non-governmental organizations that are helping with evacuations. Approximately 9,000 families have found temporary housing, but we are concerned that that number will increase. All those who have lost their homes need urgent help, including psychological assistance. We call on humanitarians to respond and to provide appropriate assistance. The local authorities must also allow humanitarian access to the areas of Al-Hasakah that are under their control.

We must note that the events that took place in the United States-occupied territory of Syria are the result of our colleagues indulging terrorist elements in the Syrian Arab Republic. History has taught you nothing, nor have your own mistakes. We have warned repeatedly what could happen if terrorist elements are indulged. That is why the Syrian armed forces, with the support of the Russian Aerospace Forces, continue to seek out and eliminate ISIL terrorists in Syria. That work will continue. We have repeatedly offered to join efforts, but, as we have seen, your political considerations override the goal of eradicating terrorism in Syria. Both north-eastern Syria and Idlib are suffering from those double standards.

We call on the United Nations to maintain the situation in Al-Hasakah under control and to report promptly on the efforts of humanitarian workers to prevent another humanitarian disaster.

We take this opportunity to focus once again on the difficult situation that we are seeing in the north-east of Syria, which is once again illegally occupied by our American colleagues. The areas where the

Americans have been looting oil are suffering from a true environmental disaster. However, the United Nations has not assessed that situation in any way or initiated any action. We note that the Trans-Euphrates area is another grey area on the Syrian map, as is the Al-Tanf area, where militants from Mahavir as-Saura, with the help of the United States, enjoy impunity and are protected.

The illegal presence of United States military forces in Syria has created a lawless zone in the north-east, where foreign terrorists and militants, as well as various criminal elements, feel safe. Lawlessness and violence prevail in those areas. Terrorists there are divided into good and bad, and they can start another life and work to radicalize the local population. That is characteristic of all those locations where United States military forces arrive, both while they are there and after they leave. The most recent example was Afghanistan, where the United States left a tremendous number of problems for those on the ground following the American occupation.

ISIL was struck heavily in Syria. Terrorists were eliminated or had to flee Government-controlled territory. Problems remain where the Americans created a power vacuum where Syria's sovereign territory remains occupied by foreign troops. We call for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Syria. The United States has clearly failed in the fight against terrorism, both locally and globally. ISIL's attack on the prison in Al-Hasakah clearly demonstrates that.

**Mr. Raguttahalli** (India): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing today.

In its remarks in the monthly meetings on the political and humanitarian tracks, India has been repeatedly reiterating the looming threat posed by the resurgence of terrorist groups in Syria. Sadly, the international community has been caught off guard in recognizing that imminent threat. The attacks by Da'esh last week in the north-east of Syria, in Al-Hasakah, which resulted in the killing and displacement of civilians, has once again underlined our oft-stated concerns.

Reports of the Secretary-General have repeatedly mentioned United Nations-designated terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Tahrir Al-Sham gaining strength in Syria. The latest attack by Da'esh is a manifestation of that strength. Iraq has also seen terrorist attacks by Da'esh and affiliated groups in recent months. We strongly condemn those

attacks and reiterate that the global fight against terrorism cannot and should not be compromised for narrow political gains.

The re-emergence of ISIL/Da'esh in Syria and Iraq calls for urgent action by the international community. We reiterate that terrorists cannot be defeated by forming alliances with non-sovereign entities or by pushing narrow political agendas. In fact, such a skewed approach would be counterproductive to our collective efforts. In this regard, we need to support regional Member States in their measures against terrorists and United Nations-designated terrorist groups.

While we are focusing on the region of north-east Syria only, the problem has actually spread across the country. We call for an assessment by United Nations agencies to check the siphoning off of humanitarian aid by terrorist groups.

There is also an urgent need to take steps to counter the strengthening of these networks across Syria. There have been reports of using internally displaced young persons as human shields as well as attempts by ISIL to recruit them. The countries of origin of these vulnerable boys and their families need to take responsibility for them. This problem should not be allowed to fester forever.

In conclusion, the expanding terrorist activities and strengthening of United Nations-designated terrorist groups in Syria and the broader region is a matter of critical concern and deserves serious introspection and concerted action by the international community. As Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, India will continue to take up this issue with all stakeholders so that a zero-tolerance approach to terror and its perpetrators becomes the common call of the international community.

**Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I naturally thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing.

As we mentioned yesterday (see S/PV.8955), the attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on the Al-Hasakah prison last Thursday, 20 January, the largest operation by this terrorist group since it was declared defeated in Syria in 2019, shows that the ISIL is regaining strength in the area, but also in others such as the Sahel, thereby demonstrating that the solution cannot be exclusively military in nature. At the same time, we echo the concern of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human

Rights expressed last Tuesday (see S/PV.8949) about the deplorable and scandalous conditions of detention centres in Syria. The fact that approximately 700 minors are being held in the Al-Sina'a prison, which houses more than 5,000 inmates associated with ISIL, in conditions of overcrowding, insecurity and lack of medical care, is simply barbaric.

But justice will come. And, in this regard, we reiterate the call of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism to urgently repatriate those children who are victims of terrorism to their countries of origin. Otherwise, in addition to denying them their most essential human rights and causing even greater physical and psycho-emotional trauma, we will be sowing in these children the seeds of hatred and hopelessness that trigger the spiral of violence towards terrorism.

Undoubtedly, all acts of terrorism must be condemned and punished in accordance with the law. But we cannot cease to believe that all efforts to prevent and combat terrorism must unreservedly respect human rights. Otherwise, we will forever be cutting off the heads of the hydra without the least result, while we will remain in the Security Council still recriminating one another.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Ivanovich Voronkov for his briefing.

France is doing its utmost in the international fight against terrorism, and as we had the opportunity to state yesterday (see S/PV.8955), we condemn in the strongest possible terms the attack carried out on 20 January by Da'esh against a detention centre in Al-Hasakah, in north-east Syria. We commend the actions of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the international coalition in response to these events and extend our condolences to the families of the soldiers who were killed in the attack.

This attack characterizes the resurgence of Da'esh throughout Syria and particularly in the *badiya*, which is unfortunately neither new nor a surprise, as this threat has in fact never disappeared. That is why we remain resolutely committed to the coalition alongside our partners in the fight against terrorism and impunity. France will continue to play its full part in the international fight against terrorism in order to eradicate it and at least contain this scourge.

The acts committed by terrorists in Syria are crimes. They may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, and those responsible for these crimes must be held accountable for their actions and not go unpunished.

France's position is unwavering. All jihadists who have made the deliberate choice to join Da'esh must, regardless of their nationality, be held accountable before the courts as close as possible to the scene of their crime, where their victims are and where the evidence is. This is the reason for our position with regard to the few French nationals held in detention facilities in north-east Syria.

This should not make us lose sight of the obvious, which is that the vast majority of those detained there are of Iraqi, Syrian or, to a lesser extent, Central Asian nationality. The question raised by the attack is therefore that of the protection of places of detention in general, and not that of the repatriation of a few Westerners who represent only a small minority of the people who are interned there.

To eradicate terrorism in the region, a solution to the Syrian crisis is essential, and this solution can only be political. We all know this. The road map is resolution 2254 (2015), which the Security Council unanimously adopted, and we are determined to push for this by supporting the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for his briefing.

The United States remains deeply concerned about the situation in north-east Syria, and in particular the continued threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

We welcome the reports that local forces have regained full control of the detention facility in Al-Hasakah and have captured all ISIL fighters.

To be sure, enormous progress has been made in the fight against ISIL, thanks to the efforts of the global coalition. Stabilization initiatives and liberated communities have been critical in preventing the return of ISIL.

But as we have consistently told the Security Council, ISIL is not yet defeated. The group has continued to launch brazen terrorist attacks with no regard for the safety of civilians or civilian infrastructure. That is

why the global coalition has remained not only vigilant, but actively engaged, especially in north-east Syria.

This recent ISIL attack underscores the threat that ISIL continues to pose in Syria, as well as the risks associated with holding ISIL detainees in makeshift facilities in the region indefinitely.

The coalition is working to ensure that ISIL detainees who remain in north-east Syria are safely and humanely housed in accordance with international standards. We call on Member States to support this effort. Even prior to this attack, the existing facilities were insufficient, and the damage caused will only worsen the problem.

We know that thousands of civilians fled areas near the facility and are seeking shelter elsewhere in the city. We commend the work of the local authorities and humanitarian organizations that are providing urgent assistance, and we are committed to facilitating that response.

United States armed forces are present in north-east Syria as part of the global coalition for the sole purpose of continuing the fight against ISIL. We are proud to work alongside local Syrian partners, and we honour the sacrifices they have made in this campaign.

As ever, we encourage all States Members of the United Nations to act alongside us to ensure ISIL never again finds safe haven anywhere in the world. We also encourage all Member States to support the repatriation, rehabilitation, reintegration and prosecution, where appropriate, of their nationals currently in north-east Syria.

The United States is deeply grateful to Governments and communities across the world that have brought their nationals home. We stand ready to support any Member State that wishes to do the same. We also urge Member States to support the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees. This framework is co-chaired by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNICEF and enables the entire United Nations to support Member States on individuals returning from Iraq and Syria. This framework combines human-rights-based, age-appropriate and gender-responsive approaches in order to address the different needs of women, men, girls and boys.

In response to the Russian representative's comments just now, which, unfortunately have turned this platform into a rhetoric-driven mass of disinformation

and, frankly, lies about the United States role in Syria. Let me just say this — the United States is steadfastly committed to complying with our obligations under the law of armed conflict, including those obligations that address the protection of civilians. As a matter of policy, the United States routinely applies heightened targeting standards that are more protective of civilians than are required under the law of armed conflict.

The Russian representative mentioned the tragic air strikes in Al-Baghuz, Syria, and the United States Department of Defense has initiated a review of those March 2019 air strikes. I would note that the United States Government and the Department of Defense did that in response to reporting by the media, the free and independent media that exist in the United States and something that, as an American citizen, I am quite proud to point to. Of course, I cannot point to that same press in Russia because there is no such free and independent press in Russia, and if such an air strike had occurred as the tragic result of a Russian military mistake, there would be no independent press to report on it, just as there is very little Russian opposition available to raise the issue if a press could report on it. That is an important thing to remember.

Let me close by noting that the situation in north-eastern Syria is but one component of the broader crisis in Syria, which, as we all know, requires a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). This discussion could have occurred alongside either our discussion yesterday on the political file (see S/PV.8957) or discussion that just took place on the humanitarian situation (see S/PV.8953). The Council cannot discuss the situation in north-eastern Syria without considering the wider humanitarian needs in that region. Years of hostilities and an ongoing economic crisis have pushed thousands of families into poverty and displaced more than 650,000. Many are now dependent on international assistance for their survival.

We are grateful for the efforts of humanitarian organizations working in north-eastern Syria, but it is not enough for Council members to make expressions of gratitude. We have the power to do more to help. The Council can dramatically expand humanitarian assistance, including by reopening the Al-Yarubiyah border-crossing between north-eastern Syria and Iraq. If we were to take that step, Council members would restore the flow of critical supplies like medicine and coronavirus disease testing kits to a region in desperate need.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Russia for requesting this open meeting, and I thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for the briefing that he just made. The terrorist attack on a prison in Al-Hasakah carried out by the Islamic State is very likely to have more serious consequences. The exchange of fire between the parties for multiple days have seriously threatened civilian safety and warrants great attention from the Security Council.

First, we must pay greater attention to terrorism and foreign occupation in Syria. In recent days, the situation in north-western and north-eastern Syria remains turbulent, with frequent attacks by the Jabhat Fath Al-Sham terrorist organization and an escalation of military operations by foreign troops illegally stationed in Syria. Those movements have heightened tensions in Syria, causing civilian casualties and displacement, damaging civilian infrastructure, distracting the Organization's political settlement efforts, facilitating a resurgence of the Islamic State and enabling it to take advantage of the situation.

Secondly, we must promote the international community's efforts to strengthen cooperation on countering terrorism in Syria. The international community should adopt a unified standard in accordance with the requirements of international law and Security Council resolutions in order to jointly fight against all terrorist organizations in Syria, as listed by the Security Council. I want to emphasize that respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity is a principle that must be adhered to when dealing with the Syrian issue. Counter-terrorism is not an excuse or basis for foreign countries to illegally station troops in Syria. The Syrian Government's leadership in fighting terrorism must be effectively respected.

Thirdly, the issue of foreign terrorist fighters must be addressed. Both Syria and Iraq have a significant presence of foreign terrorist fighters, which has spillover effects. This festering issue represents a common threat to the countries of origin for terrorists, the countries involved and the countries of the region. All parties concerned must work together to deal with it. To our knowledge, the prison under attack houses thousands of terrorists. Which countries do they come from and when will they be repatriated and stand trial? Those are all issues that the Council must focus on. China calls on the Secretariat, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Group of Experts of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015)

concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities to step up efforts in the collection and integration of information on foreign terrorist fighters so as to enable cooperation for the resolution of this issue.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I too wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for his briefing on this issue.

Ireland strongly condemns the recent Da'esh attack on Al-Hasakah city and is appalled at the reports of civilian casualties. The scale of the attack shows that despite their territorial defeat, the Da'esh threat in Syria is severe. The international community must remain committed to ensuring the lasting defeat of Da'esh.

Ireland is gravely concerned at the scale of displacement of the civilian population. We are also deeply concerned about the situation of children, as raised by UNICEF and others. We must recall that in conflict children must be treated primarily as victims and require the support appropriate to that status. It is vital that full access is given to humanitarian actors and that donors respond to the needs on the ground.

Ireland is also concerned about the broader implications for the security situation in north-eastern Syria overall. As with all attacks in Syria, there should be accountability for this attack and for all crimes committed in Syria. We call on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and to respect international human rights law, with these events underlying, yet again, the need for substantive and meaningful progress towards an inclusive political solution in Syria.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this meeting. I too thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for his information.

We join other speakers in condemning in the strongest terms the heinous terrorist attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams (ISIS) at a prison in north-eastern Syria. This attack is a rude awakening that reminds us of the constant threat posed by terrorism to the Syrian people and other people in the region and beyond. We must remain vigilant and committed.

There are no good or bad terrorists; they are all murderers. They should be treated as such, and they must be brought before justice. Accountability for crimes committed is not negotiable. All possible means must be used to defeat terrorism. Albania continues

to play its role as a member of the Global Coalition Against Da'esh, but military options and means will not be sufficient to eradicate terrorism. We must also tackle its many sources — the social, political, historical and religious grievances that lure young people to this enterprise of death.

The description of Syria that we have heard these days, of the political process, of meeting the huge humanitarian needs and of providing people with prospects of a better future go in that direction. We must work collectively to give people hope to live, lift them up and remove their pretexts to die.

We must do everything in our power to rid Syria and everywhere else of the plague of terrorism. We deplore that in the prisons, where ISIS terrorists and foreign fighters are held, there are hundreds of children who have been born into a hellish place of darkness surrounded by death. No effort should be spared to save children and women from the inhuman and degrading conditions in which they are being held. They need to be repatriated and helped to reintegrate into society.

Since 2020, Albania, has done exactly that. We have taken decisive steps to address the outrageously dire situation of children and women of Albanian origin caught in the several refugee camps in Syria and Iraq. In the course of the past two years, some 24 women and children have been repatriated. It is not an easy subject to handle, but it is needed. We are working in close cooperation with our partners to ensure their rehabilitation, adaptation and long-term reintegration into normal lives. In our view, they deserve to start their life anew, and we are doing what we think is best to help them do so.

**Mrs. Toroitich** (Kenya): I join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing.

Terrorism in whatever form is deplorable and should be condemned wherever and whenever it is perpetrated. No act of terrorism whatsoever can be justified. We recall the anguish visited on innocent civilians by terrorist groups in recent years in several countries across the world. My own country, Kenya, has suffered from such heinous acts perpetrated by Al-Shabaab- and Al-Qaida-affiliated terrorist groups against innocent civilians.

After nearly 11 years of conflict, the people of Syria continue to suffer atrocious acts of terror. Notably, civilians, particularly women, children and other vulnerable members of society, are bearing the

brunt of the impact of such terrorist attacks. That is unacceptable. In that regard, we condemn the 20 January terrorist incident against the Ghweiran prison in the city of Al-Hasakah, which claimed several lives and injured many. We cannot overemphasize the urgent need to deal comprehensively and decisively with the continuing threat posed by terrorist groups and their affiliates — whether or not they are listed by the Security Council.

Such terrorist acts continue to jeopardize the peace process in Syria, with negative implications for regional and international security. The Security Council and the relevant United Nations agencies must act with resolve to strengthen counter-terrorism measures to ensure that terrorists and their affiliates are held accountable for their heinous acts and denied the opportunities and resources to continue carrying out such acts. Let us identify concrete steps that the Council should take to combat the growing threat of terrorism in Syria and all over the world.

In conclusion, Kenya calls on all players to focus on and prioritize the interest of the Syrian people.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): I thank Under Secretary-General Voronkov for his briefing.

The evolving situation in north-eastern Syria over the past week demonstrates how, even without territory, Da'esh and its poisonous ideology continue to pose a threat in Syria, Iraq and the wider world. The international community must remain firm in its determination to counter and defeat it. Yesterday, we welcomed the news that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had retaken control of Ghweiran prison in Al-Hasakah. We pay tribute to the courage and sacrifices made by the Syrian Democratic Forces in their efforts against Da'esh and offer our condolences to the families of the SDF fighters killed.

In order to safeguard long-term stability in north-eastern Syria, the Security Council should work together and with the wider international community to explore options to ensure that we are coordinated in responding to those emerging challenges. The murder of four women in the Al-Hol camp in December 2021 highlights increasing threats against residents in the camps, especially women and girls, who remain vulnerable to exploitation, prostitution and kidnapping. We are deeply concerned about reports that children were put at risk by Da'esh during the attack in Al-Hasakah.

It is vital that humanitarian actors be able to deliver assistance safely and for the camp administration, security forces and humanitarian agencies to agree urgent steps to improve the situation to protect all residents, especially women and girls. We will continue to work with international partners in seeking justice and accountability for those who have fought alongside Da'esh. Any such justice mechanism must respect human rights and the rule of law, as well as ensure fair trials and due process.

As a leading member of the Global Coalition Against Da'esh, the United Kingdom continues to support the Syrian Democratic Forces, and we continue to monitor closely the situation. Our work as part of the Coalition fighting the enduring threat posed by Da'esh will continue.

**Mrs. Hackman** (Ghana): Let me also thank Under Secretary-General Voronkov for the briefing on the prevailing situation in north-eastern Syria and make the following points.

The attack in Al-Hasakah constitutes a grievous violation of international law, having resulted in civilian casualties and the displacement of persons, and putting at risk the lives of the 850 children in detention at the Ghweiran prison. The principle remains that terrorism, committed by whomever and wherever, cannot be justified by any motivation and is unacceptable. We urge the authorities to take urgent action to secure the release and repatriation of all children in prisons and detention camps across Syria to their countries of origin.

The recent developments in north-eastern Syria should remind the international community of the persistent threat posed by armed groups to international peace and security and reinforce the need for international cooperation on counter-terrorism measures. Once again, we urge all parties to the conflict to prioritize civilian protection and adhere to their obligations under international law.

Addressing the challenge of armed groups in Syria will be impossible without a resolution of the conflict. Ghana therefore reiterates the importance of a political settlement and urges all parties and regional actors to support meaningful progress on the political track, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Vladimir Voronkov for his briefing. The clarifications provided allow for a

better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic State a few days ago against the Ghweiran prison, which held a number of jihadist prisoners, in Al-Hasakah, in northern Syria. Gabon firmly condemns those hateful acts, which can be added to the long list of such acts committed since the beginning of the Syrian crisis and deplores the loss of human lives and the unacceptable trauma suffered by the civilian population, in particular the women and children, living near the prison who were used as human shields during the fighting between the Kurdish forces and the jihadists.

Such attacks, which have become part of the daily fabric of the Syrian people and are exacerbating the cycle of violence and the scope of insecurity and instability in the country, confirm the resurgence of the Islamic State's ability to cause harm in the region, since it was defeated and expelled from its last fiefdom in the east in 2019. The number of victims and the scale of devastation resulting from such wanton violence must remind us of the compelling and urgent need to act with greater commitment in Syria. It is high time for the Security Council to revive an in-depth discussion on how to respond to the threat posed by Da'esh. Such a response must transcend the military dimension. The international community must rally to take action meaningful and dynamic to counter international terrorist groups and drain their breeding grounds to rapidly conclude the political process and find a comprehensive and viable solution to the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, let me say that terrorism is a global threat. Its ability to spread and grow is unquestionable, and we must be unwavering in our response and determination on all fronts to combat terrorism throughout the world.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this important and urgent meeting. We also thank Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office, for his valuable and comprehensive briefing.

The United Arab Emirates condemns with the strongest terms the terrorist attacks carried out by Da'esh terrorist organization against Al-Sina'a prison in Al-Hasakah governorate. These attacks have caused nearly 45,000 people to be internally displaced, including many women and children. They have also led to casualties and the destruction of infrastructure,

which exacerbates the humanitarian and security situation in Syria.

We also express our deep concern about the use of children as human shields by Da'esh, which is a blatant violation of international law. Those recent attacks serve to emphasize that our fight against this terrorist organization continues and we should continue to build on the tangible progress made by the international community against Da'esh in Syria and Iraq.

We again stress the need to cut off Da'esh's funding sources, drain its military capabilities and put an end to the recruitment of fighters, as well as the spread of extremist rhetoric. It is also necessary to continue to address the methods it develops and the strategies it uses, such as launching attacks against prisons in order to re-establish its influence.

The United Arab Emirates will spare no effort in combating terrorist groups around the world, whether Da'esh or others, in accordance with international law. As we have recently witnessed, terrorist threats have reached very dangerous levels in our region, especially in terms of the use of advanced technology and weapons by terrorist groups to target civilians and civilian infrastructure, as happened recently in my country.

These challenges require concerted international efforts as we work together diligently to prevent extremism, fight terrorism and eradicate it completely, inside Syria or outside, to maintain regional and international peace and security.

In conclusion, we stress the importance of establishing sustained security and stability in Syria, meeting the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people and letting them live in a safe and stable homeland away from extremism and terrorism.

**Mrs. Espeschit Maia** (Brazil): Brazil thanks Mr. Voronkov for his briefing to the Security Council.

The continuing and growing presence of terrorist groups around the world is a shared concern of the Security Council. The episodes of violence that followed those terrorist actions in Syria were appalling, especially as they included the fate of hundreds of children, some as young as 12 years old. We are still very concerned about the safety and security of all civilians caught up in this situation. Brazil echoes UNICEF's call on all parties in Syria to keep children out of harm's way and to protect them at all times. Brazil also underlines the importance of giving due attention to the issue of the repatriation of children to their home countries.

As mentioned by Special Envoy Pedersen yesterday (see S/PV.8955), this episode is a clear message to the Security Council and a call for action to resolve the broader conflict in Syria in which terrorism inevitably thrives. Brazil remains convinced that the Syrian-owned, Syrian-led United Nations-facilitated political process is the only lasting solution to the Syrian conflict.

Brazil repudiates terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, regardless of its motivations. The Security Council has a special role in condemning and countering terrorism in a coherent and universal manner and in full accordance with international law. Equally important, it has the responsibility to ensure its decisions do not impede impartial humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, nor cause more suffering than it is mandated to avoid.

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

I thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for his briefing.

Norway condemns the attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on a prison in Al-Hasakah on 20 January. We are deeply concerned about the situation for civilians in the area. It is especially worrying that a large number of boys reportedly have been exposed to or even injured or killed by fighting between ISIL and the Kurdish-led Syrian Defence Forces. Children should not be in prison.

The prison attack shows that ISIL is still present, willing and capable and that it poses a significant threat to peace and stability. We are concerned that the continued lack of a political solution to the Syrian crisis gives further room for ISIL to grow. It is critical that we continue our efforts to defeat ISIL. We urge all parties to the conflict to respect international law and do their utmost to protect civilians, including children, at every step in the planning and during military and security operations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Chumakov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am forced to comment on the statement delivered by my esteemed colleague, Mr. Richard Mills.

The freedom of the press and the opposition are indeed very interesting topics in Russia and in all other

countries. Indeed, we have quite a lot to say about this, but that is not the topic of today's meeting. In fact, we heard no substantive answers to the questions that we asked, and we hope that the questions that we raised will continue to be followed carefully by Council members.

**The President:** I wish to again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank the permanent delegation of the Russian Federation for having taken the initiative to request this important meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Mr. Vladimir Voronkov for his briefing.

Al-Hasakah city has seen bloodshed for a number of days now, beginning with the explosion of a car bomb by Da'esh terrorist organization next to the industrial secondary school in the Ghweiran district. The United States occupation forces had turned the school into a detention centre under the supervision of their affiliated Kassad separatist militia. Subsequently, after Da'esh's attack, the Kassad militia invaded the neighbourhood, and planes related to the United States occupation forces carried out a violent raid on the detention centre, which led to the killing of innocent civilian victims, including women and children.

As a result, there was a wave of collective displacement of tens of thousands of citizens living in the region, in addition to extensive damage and destruction of a number of homes as well as civilian and service installations, including the fuel company headquarters, the Basil bakery, the Al-Furat University, an academic college, the municipality parking area and others.

What the city of Al-Hasakah has gone through in recent days is the inevitable result of erroneous and hostile approach adopted by some Western countries towards my country since 2011 until today. It is the product of a number of serious violations of the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations by successive United States Administrations and their allies, who have bypassed the Security Council by erroneously interpreting Article 51 of the Charter to form their own illegitimate coalition, without the approval of, or coordination with, the Syrian Government.

We must point out that the Governments of certain countries participating in that alleged coalition have recruited thousands of foreign terrorist fighters, facilitated their move to Syria and provided them with all kinds of support to spread terror and chaos and to kill, destroy and destabilize security and stability. At the same time, those countries prevented the Security Council from responding to Syria's numerous requests to create a legal international coalition under the auspices of the United Nations to combat terrorism and support efforts to tackle that threat, to fully implement Security Council resolutions and the relevant international instruments.

The United States has used fighting terrorism as a pretext to target Syrian civilian installations and infrastructure, including schools, health centres, bridges and dams. It was about to cause a humanitarian disaster as a result of bombarding Al-Furat dam in March 2017. It has destroyed the entire city of Al-Raqqah over the heads of its inhabitants. It also targeted the Syrian Arab Armed Forces that were fighting Da'esh terrorist organization, whereby it enabled the fighters of that organization to occupy new locations such as Sarda Mountain in Deir ez-Zor in 2016.

In parallel, the United States occupying forces regularly transferred Da'esh terrorists from detention centres to their illegitimate military sites in Syria, with a view to recycling and reusing them in order to execute their plans. Between 7 and 13 April 2021, nearly 100 terrorists were trained and transferred by those forces to the Al-Omar oil field, which is under illegal United States control. In addition, between 21 and 22 June 2021, United States forces transferred more than 60 terrorists from a detention centre at a vocational high school to their illegitimate base in the city of Al-Shaddadah, in southern Al-Hasakah governorate.

Therefore, the recent events related to Da'esh's timing and invasion of the vocational high school detention centre in Al-Hasakah clearly proves that the intention is to recycle Da'esh terrorist elements and to find excuses to justify the continued illegitimate presence of United States forces on Syrian territory, so that they can continue to interfere in our national affairs, kill more innocent civilians and steal our national resources, as well as to support the separatist militia that is trying to remove Arab citizens from the region. The United States must therefore be held accountable for its crimes.

In accordance with United Nations reports, approximately 70,000 people, most of whom are women and children, are detained in Al-Hol, Al-Areesh Al-Roj and other camps under the control of Kassad separatist militia, supported by the occupying United States forces. Those camps are facing a very difficult humanitarian situation, with high rates of crime, trends of extremist ideologies and the recruitment of child soldiers by Kassad militia, who are being removed from their families from the age of 12. The events that took place in Al-Hasakah city bolster our rightful demand for the closure of those camps and detention centres, which have become hubs ripe for the spread of violent and extremist ideologies.

We reiterate our request that the countries concerned repatriate their citizen foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their countries of origin or residence, while also guaranteeing that they will be held accountable and their children will be rehabilitated. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns the attempts by certain Western countries to deny their responsibility with regard to their citizens who are foreign terrorist fighters and refuse to repatriate them by cancelling their passports or citizenship, meaning that they are unable to return to their countries. We also categorically reject the involvement of certain countries in suspicious deals with Kassad separatist militia, whereby they detain foreign terrorist fighters and their families for selfish private gain and for recognition purposes.

The Syrian Government, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, managed to repatriate many foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their countries of origin, by coordinating and cooperating with the Governments of those countries, including Russia, China, Albania, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Sudan, Egypt and South Africa and others. Syria invites other relevant countries to adopt the same approach and work with the Syrian Government to repatriate their terrorist fighters.

In conclusion, the implementation of Security Council resolutions cannot be selective; there can be no double standards. The restoration of security and stability in Syria requires, first and foremost, guarantees for the country's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, as stipulated in all relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the immediate withdrawal of the United States and Turkish forces illegitimately present on Syrian territory.

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

**Mr. Keçeli (Turkey):** Although Da'esh has suffered major setbacks in Syria and Iraq, we have seen its capacity to stage attacks. We believe that a three-pronged approach is needed to effectively tackle the threat posed by Da'esh.

First, genuine intelligence-sharing is essential. Da'esh remains a common threat to humankind and requires unified and coordinated strategies to eradicate it completely.

Secondly, the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters is a necessary step in the fight against Da'esh. Not only will it disempower Da'esh on the ground, but it will have a ripple effect around the world, as the repercussions for joining Da'esh will be made clear in every country, and thereby impede future recruitment.

Thirdly, we must address the root causes of the problem. Da'esh and other terror organizations found fertile ground in Syria because the regime had begun attacking its own people. A democratic Constitution and the implementation of universal human rights and freedoms will go a long way towards preventing any resurgence of Da'esh.

Since the outset of this fight, we have pointed to the persistent wrongdoings and ill-advised strategies. However, our warnings were not heeded. We have consistently highlighted the mistake of subcontracting a terrorist organization, namely, the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG)-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to defeat Da'esh. It was clear from the beginning that its main objective was never to defeat Da'esh. Its aim was ethnic cleansing. As we mentioned here yesterday (see S/PV.8955), the PKK/YPG continues to target civilians, recruit children, target hospitals and kill humanitarian workers.

Those are textbook examples of violating international humanitarian law. Yet some actors in the region continue to reach out to that terror organization to do their bidding. We wish to remind them: Make no mistake that there are no good terrorists.

Our concerns have been proved by the latest development in Al-Hasakah. On numerous occasions, we have informed the international community that Da'esh members are being released in exchange for bribes and other objectives under unclear schemes. The recent prison break and subsequent incidents have

yet again proved the unreliability of the PKK/YPG-dominated SDF. We ask how Da'esh fighters managed to bypass checkpoints with car bombs in such a sensitive site. How did they gain such deep access inside that sensitive site?

We have warned the international community that the red carpet that it rolls out to terrorists will very quickly become a veil of blood. The international community should not once again be blackmailed by the so-called SDF, led by the PKK/YPG.

Repatriation is the only viable way to bring foreign terrorist fighters to justice. The so-called local judicial process by the SDF or attempts to create international mechanisms to put its suspects on trial is both a flagrant breach of international law and a futile exercise to create some kind of legal system that does not have precedents. We strongly encourage the international community to engage in legitimate partnerships to achieve justice.

Our fight against Da'esh is resolute. Turkey is the only country that has fought face to face with Da'esh. We had been an active member of the Global Coalition against Da'esh since its inception, and we have eliminated more than 4,500 Da'esh members in Syria. Just last year, 236 Da'esh members were eliminated inside Syria as a result of operations conducted by Turkey. The Syrian National Army has also been fighting against Da'esh in areas controlled by the legitimate Syrian opposition. We believe that, through cooperation with the legitimate Syrian opposition and countries in the region, it is possible to completely defeat Da'esh, but to do that we need everyone to be on board with such a plan. That needs to happen in tandem with our efforts to achieve a political settlement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

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

**Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (spoke in Arabic):** My delegation commends the efforts made by the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January for quickly convening this emergency meeting on the latest developments in north-east Syria related to the terrorist attack by terrorist Da'esh gangs on Al-Sina'a prison in Al-Hasakah governorate. The attack led to thousands of terrorists escaping from the prison, including dangerous terrorist leaders.

Iraq expresses its deep concern over those latest attacks, which coincided with other dangerous attacks

in Diyala governorate and other areas of Iraq, claiming the lives of dozens of martyrs from the Iraqi armed forces.

The Government of Iraq would like to thank the Security Council for its significant solidarity and support to the Government and the people of Iraq by issuing two press statements condemning the terrorist attacks that took place in my country between November 2021 and January 2022 (SC/14692 and SC/14774).

Given its transnational nature, terrorism poses a significant, increasing and continuing threat to international peace and security. Iraq has been one of the country's most affected by terrorist acts. Terrorist groups have repeatedly sought to undermine stability and security in my country by targeting Iraqi State institutions and killing, terrorizing and torturing civilians.

Iraq values the briefing by the Under-Secretary-General and commends the efforts made by the Office of Counter-Terrorism. We reiterate our commitment to cooperating with the international community to combat terrorism, whether through the Global Coalition to Counter Da'esh, strengthening long-term partnerships in different areas or multilateral cooperation with the United Nations and other specialized United Nations agencies.

Iraq has shown its commitment to repatriating Iraqis stranded in the Al-Hol camp in Syria. The Iraqi Government repatriated two groups of civilians. The first group, on 8 December 2021, included 128 Iraqi families, comprising 507 individuals, and the second, on 8 January, included 111 Iraqi families, comprising 421 individuals. The groups were transported to Jed'ah 1 camp in Ninewa governorate for psychosocial rehabilitation. Since May 2021, Iraq has repatriated 450 families, comprising 1,796 individuals.

Iraq has also repatriated 1,900 terrorist fighters from detention camps in Syria under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (Kassad). Iraq calls on those supervising the camps to hand over all Iraqi terrorist fighters in order to prosecute them and bring them to justice, particularly since Kassad forces have not yet handed over to Iraq Da'esh leaders in its custody.

The irresponsible behaviour of Kassad forces, including weak prison security and its reluctance to hand over terrorist fighters and Da'esh leaders to Iraq, undermines regional security. That is dangerous, especially given the increasing risk of prison breakouts.

Such breakouts would help Da'esh to regroup and coordinate new attacks in Iraq and Syria, as well as the region in general. Recent Iraqi intelligence information points to concern over increasing Da'esh activities as well as attempts to cross the border to carry out terrorist attacks in Iraq. My country will make every effort to protect and secure our border and prevent terrorists from infiltrating Iraq.

Given Iraq's experience in countering terrorism, we stress the importance of promoting international cooperation. The Government of my country calls on the Security Council to urge Member States to fulfil their obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions in order to stem the financing of terrorism and terrorist access to logistical support; to prevent terrorist gangs from trafficking in Syrian and Iraqi oil, weapons and artefacts; and to make concerted and tireless efforts to prevent foreign terrorists from crossing the border and deprive them of safe havens.

We make this appeal because of our concern for international peace and security. Our experience with countering terrorism has taught us that the threat is not limited to one people or one geographical region. The Government of the Republic of Iraq is committed to cooperating with the international community to combat terrorism, especially Da'esh terrorist gangs, to eliminate them totally and to bring terrorists to justice, thus promoting international security and stability.

Iraq calls once again for a stepping up of the process of repatriating foreign terrorist fighters and their families from Iraq and Syria, and to prevent prisons and camps from becoming incubators for a new generation of terrorists. We would warn against the politicization of terrorism and the use of counter-terrorism for political purposes. No country should use the territory of another to settle scores, thus threatening its stability and security.

We stress the importance of respecting the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, especially respecting the sovereignty of other countries, good-neighbourly relations and strengthening cooperation. We call on the Council to consider this matter seriously and to call on Member States to comply fully with the principles of the Charter.

The Government of the Republic of Iraq reiterates its commitment to combating terrorism in all its forms. We condemn all terrorist operations and call for united international and regional efforts against terrorism,

regardless of its origins or appellations. We call for the strengthening of security and intelligence cooperation and the exchange of information and expertise, bilaterally and multilaterally, to fight terrorism, eliminate its gangs, uproot it and dry up its sources of financing.

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

**Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Madam President, for having convened this meeting, and I also thank Under-Secretary-General Voronkov for his informative briefing.

The most recent attack on a prison in Al-Hasakah, which was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), in Syria's north-east, is an alarm bell indicating once again that ISIS, which is backed by certain States, remains a real threat to regional security and stability.

Iran is closely monitoring the developments in the east of the Euphrates, especially in Al-Hasakah province. What we are witnessing today in Al-Hasakah is the result of the continued illegal occupation of parts of Syria by foreign forces, including the United States. More importantly, the free movement of terrorist groups, including ISIS members, in territories under the illegitimate occupation of foreign forces in Syria and Iraq, as well as their transfer to other countries, threatens regional and international peace and security. We view the recent incident in that context.

The Al-Hasakah incident clearly shows that the occupying force and its allies have been unable to restore security and order in the occupied areas. That has helped ISIS expand its influence in the region, thus jeopardizing the lives of the civilians living there. That incident reminds us once again that the presence of foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying

families in the conflict zone remains a growing source of insecurity and instability for the entire region.

It is deeply regrettable that those countries that constantly and repeatedly claim to pioneer human rights refrain from repatriating their own nationals, especially women and children, who are trapped in the appalling conditions in conflict zones. Considering the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters to the security and stability of the region, the Security Council must address their repatriation to their own countries as a matter of priority.

Fighting terrorism must not be used as a pretext to violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. The continued occupation of parts of Syria is the main factor in creating conducive grounds for such terrorist activities in Syria and must be ended forthwith. We believe that the effective exercise of sovereignty by the Syrian Government over all its territory is an important element in restoring stability and security to that country.

In that regard, as reaffirmed by Security Council resolutions, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be respected. The Syrian Government has the legitimate and inherent right to counter terrorist activities on the territory under its jurisdiction, and any measure taken to counter terrorism must be coordinated with the Syrian Government. Counter-terrorism can be effective only once all States carry out their obligations fully and responsibly and refrain from using double standards or a selective approach.

Iran will continue to support Syria's efforts in countering the threat posed by terrorist groups, thus ensuring its unity and territorial integrity.

**The President:** Before I draw this meeting to a close, I would like to wholeheartedly thank the interpreters, who stayed with us into this late hour.

*The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.*