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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Nebenzia	(Russian Federation)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Spasse
	Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. De Rivière/Mrs. Dime Labille
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Issahaku
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Russian*): 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 Türkiye 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; and Ms. Lisa Doughten, Director, Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: We are at a potentially important juncture in efforts to move forward a political process on Syria. In the tragic aftermath of the earthquakes, we have seen renewed diplomatic attention on Syria. Diplomacy is continuing involving the Astana players and the Syrian Government. And there have been new openings of engagement between Arab countries and the Syrian Government. That renewed attention to Syria is very important if it can act as a circuit breaker and unlock long-stalled efforts to move the political process forward.

I thank the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan in particular for their continued engagement with me. I look forward to continuing to stay in close touch with regional players and with the full range of stakeholders to maximize coordination and common messaging. In that regard, I appreciated the engagement I had recently in Athens with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece and with representatives of European Union members.

I continue to stress that a political solution is the only way out of the suffering of the Syrian people, towards stability, security and peace. Such a solution requires realism from all sides and agreements and actions on key issues in resolution 2254 (2015). I

continue to seek to facilitate a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process. Equally, I have always said that the United Nations cannot do it alone. We need the support of all key actors, and we will continue to work with all. No existing groups of players — not the Syrian parties, not the Astana players, not the Western players, not the Arab players — can alone bring about a political solution. If we are to make progress on any issue, even incrementally in a step-for step manner, we must see a wider group of players work together. Ultimately, all will have to make contributions in a coordinated, multilateral effort.

Members might ask why that is — because no existing group of actors can fundamentally shift the military stalemate or restore Syria's sovereignty, independence or territorial integrity. No one group of players can address structural issues, fix the economy and reconstruct Syria. No one group of actors can resolve the threat of terrorism, stabilize Syria, stem the sources of regional instability and safeguard legitimate security concerns, including on Syria's borders. No one group of actors can realize our collective responsibility to protect Syrian civilians, address the issue of the detained, abducted, disappeared or missing and ensure conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns. And no single group of actors can realize our collective responsibility to help the Syrian people chart their own future, the only way that Syria will ever be truly stable and prosperous again. In short, unlocking each of Syria's myriad problems requires several keys, each held by a different stakeholder who cannot be overlooked and who can block if excluded.

The recent diplomatic moves mean we are now in a period of renewed probing and testing, in a new context, with an enhanced regional engagement and with many ideas that have long been on the table. I am continuing to use my good offices and to develop the collective thinking on those ideas. I am ready to help facilitate the way forward, step-for-step and step-by-step, in a reciprocal and verifiable manner, consistent with my mandate in resolution 2254 (2015). I will continue my direct engagement with the Government of Syria and with the Syrian Negotiations Commission, and I appeal anew for genuine engagement and readiness to move forward on substance. I am ready to work very closely with others who are seeking to play a facilitative role as well.

When I briefed the Security Council the previous time (see S/PV.9291), I mentioned the kinds of areas where moves could be made on both sides. It is clear

that actions by the Syrian Government, matched then with actions from the outside, on some of these issues could arrest negative trends and build positive ones. That would have new potency, with a stronger regional role. Substantive moves could build some trust and confidence, including among civilians inside Syria and those who have fled. On the other hand, if this opportunity is not seized, we will not see real change on the ground, leading to new frustration and despair.

Let me also reiterate my readiness to facilitate Syrian-Syrian dialogue, including to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. It is surely past time for us to move beyond the non-Syrian issues that have been stalling the process. The Committee should resume its work in Geneva in a spirit of compromise, with substance and at pace.

Meanwhile, I continue to convene a broader spectrum of Syrians in Geneva and the region, including through the Women's Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room. Those meetings show that Syrians still have much that they can agree upon, across many divides. We saw that earlier this month in a meeting that Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi convened in Geneva, bringing together a group of Syrians from all quarters of the country, and its diaspora too, to discuss post-earthquake political challenges.

Let me register my concern that the brief calm after the earthquakes has been further eroded. Violent incidents have been increasing in the north-west, with ever-more regular shelling and rocket fire across front lines involving pro-Government forces, armed opposition forces as well as the listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which has announced further cross-line raids on Government positions. The relative calm in the north-east has been punctuated by Turkish and armed opposition groups targeting Syrian Democratic Forces positions, in what they say was a response to the latter's shelling and rocket attacks, including on Turkish soldiers. Israeli strikes are becoming ever-more frequent. The south-west remains turbulent. And, in some areas, sporadic attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant appear to be on the uptick, especially in the central desert, with increasing Syrian Government, Russian and United States-led coalition strikes against them.

I urge all to work to rein in violence and bring about sustained calm, an appeal I will continue to make to all key stakeholders, including in the ceasefire task

force in Geneva. Ultimately, we need a nationwide ceasefire and a coordinated approach to countering listed terrorist groups, in line with international law.

Finally, I remind the Council that, after the earthquakes and more than 12 years of war and conflict, Syria remains a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. We will hear more on that, of course, from my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Syrians still need immense resources from all members to meet emergency humanitarian needs, including with regard to early recovery and livelihoods. Humanitarian access remains essential via all modalities, whether cross-line or cross-border.

To summarize my key message, we are at a potentially important juncture, with renewed attention on Syria — particularly from the region — that could assist our efforts in advancing a political solution to this conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015). But for that renewed attention to help unlock progress, many actors will need to take concrete steps, not just one set of actors. I will continue to engage directly with the Syrian parties and to remind them — in particular, at this juncture, the Government of Syria — that they should seize the opportunity with a readiness to move forward on substantive issues. I will also continue to work closely with all and to emphasize the importance of close coordination with all key actors. Even modest and specific steps will require give-and-take from a broad range of different players, and genuine verification too.

And I hope that, if we build some trust and confidence with substantive moves, that can then serve in time as a basis for a more comprehensive effort to resolve this conflict via a political settlement. There is no shortcut to stability without addressing the fundamental drivers of the conflict. We must constantly remind ourselves that, even if we start small and move in stages, Syria still needs a comprehensive solution, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015), that restores Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Doughten.

Ms. Doughten: The current scale of humanitarian need in Syria is unprecedented, even in the long and brutal history of the Syria crisis. I has been almost

three months since the devastating earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners continue to support recovery efforts. Over 3 million people in Syria have received hot meals and ready-to-eat rations. Some 1.1 million people have received health assistance. And over 470,000 cubic metres of rubble have been cleared. Progress has been made, but much more needs to be done.

The earthquakes on 6 February were nothing short of catastrophic. They not only brought more death and destruction to parts of northern Syria worn down by more than a decade of war, but they also underscored a dire reality facing millions throughout the country, namely, that 12 years of armed conflict, growing macroeconomic pressures, dwindling public services and decaying critical infrastructure have left the population of Syria acutely vulnerable to shocks and stresses, let alone those as devastating as the recent earthquakes. Even before the earthquake, 15.3 million people — more than half of the total population — required humanitarian assistance and protection support. That number, I fear, only stands to grow.

The protection needs provoked by the earthquakes are enormous. They sent thousands of people seeking refuge, with many taking temporary shelter in schools, mosques and neighbours' homes. Many turned to open spaces for fear of aftershocks. Women, men and children are living in crowded, stressful settings, compounding the mental strain on those coping with years of trauma. Children are being forced to work to support families. The number of children dropping out of school is on the rise.

The United Nations and its partners are doing what we can to provide support services to those displaced. As people leave emergency and collective shelters for more long-term settings, support for adequate accommodation will be increasingly essential.

This crisis of forced displacement, of course, extends much more widely. Across Syria, over 6.9 million people are internally displaced, many of them multiple times. The scale is staggering, but so is the duration. Some 80 per cent of that population have now been displaced from their homes for at least five years. Many were driven from their homes years ago by conflict. Now a growing portion are forced from location to location in search of basic services and livelihood opportunities.

Durable solutions are needed for this crisis, starting with an end to the conflict. Until then, humanitarian actors are seeking more sustainable ways to assist displaced persons, including by expanding early-recovery and livelihood support. Since January 2022, almost 500 early-recovery projects have been implemented across all parts of Syria, the vast majority under Syria humanitarian response plans. The total funding received for those projects exceeds \$640 million, an almost \$80 million increase since February. That is an encouraging development given the need for greater recovery assistance and livelihood opportunities.

The United Nations and its partners continue to pursue all available means to reach people in need, wherever they are located. Emergency measures implemented since the earthquakes, such as fast-tracked visas and travel permits, and blanket approvals have enabled the United Nations and humanitarian partners to rapidly adapt and scale-up operations in Government areas.

In north-west Syria, United Nations agencies and their partners continue to utilize all three available border crossings — Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai — to reach millions of people each month. The near-daily inter-agency missions have enabled United Nations staff to monitor operations, meet beneficiaries and conduct assessments to ensure that cross-border assistance responds to the most urgent needs. The United Nations hopes those modalities will be extended to continue facilitating urgent humanitarian operations.

Similar progress has not been achieved in cross-line operations to north-west Syria, despite a concerted effort. Dialogue continues at all levels to resume planned convoys in a safe manner, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs hopes to have more positive developments to report next month.

The response in support of earthquake recovery efforts from a wide collection of donors, particularly from the region, has been incredibly generous. The Syria flash appeal is almost fully funded, with more than \$384 million in contributions reported. That support for the three-month plan has been vital, particularly in allowing the United Nations and its partners to expand operations, reallocate stocks and sustain emergency programmes.

But much more is needed. The Syria humanitarian response plan remains severely underfunded, with only \$363 million received towards the \$4.8 billion required before the earthquake. That is less than 8 per cent of the

total requirements. The Brussels conference in June will be a vital moment for Syria. Generous support from a breadth of donors, as seen following the earthquake, is needed now more than ever.

Almost three months removed from the earthquakes of 6 February, the gravity of the wider humanitarian situation in Syria has only become more evident, both in its scope and complexity and the vulnerability of the Syrian population. Sustained support — from donors, authorities on the ground, Member States and the Security Council — remains essential to keep pace with the humanitarian needs of today, and even more so those of tomorrow.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. Doughten for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

We are grateful to Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Director Lisa Doughten of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

We continue to see no alternative to promoting a political settlement process in Syria, one that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, with the assistance of the United Nations and strictly in line with resolution 2254 (2015). In that context, we support Mr. Pedersen's mediation efforts to advance the Syrian settlement process in a manner that respects the principles of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and without any outside interference.

At the same time, we consider it important that Mr. Pedersen strictly adhere to the mandate enshrined in the relevant Council resolution, at the heart of which is facilitating intra-Syrian dialogue, including within the framework of Constitutional Committee as the optimal format for direct intra-Syrian dialogue. We firmly believe that the difficulties that have arisen in connection with a resumption of its work can, with political will, be surmounted taking into account the interests of all Syrian parties. The fact that there are unresolved technical aspects related to a full resumption of the work of the drafting committee should not become an excuse for any passivity. At the same time, we believe that the principal decisions on the parameters for further rounds inter-Syrian consultations should be taken by the Syrians themselves.

Against that background, the situation remains fraught with tension. There is the persistent threat of a military operation in the north. There is an ongoing illegal foreign military presence by the United States and its allies in the trans-Euphrates and At-Tanf regions. And we remain alarmed about the smouldering hotbeds of terrorism, primarily in Idlib. We are troubled by the intensification in Israeli air strikes on the territory of Syria. Since the beginning of the year, more than 10 such attacks have been committed, as a result of which Aleppo International Airport was twice disabled. That is an airport through which humanitarian aid is delivered to victims of the devastating earthquakes. Similar military actions in violation of Syria's sovereignty and that of neighbouring Arab countries, as well as the lack of any response from the leadership of the United Nations, are a cause of deep regret and condemnation.

Among the positive news, we note the accelerated pace in the natural process of Syria returning to the Arab family. With our assistance, there is ongoing normalization of relations between Damascus and Ankara by leveraging the benefits of the Astana format. Together with our partners in the Astana process — Iran and Türkiye — we intend to continue to make a contribution to the achievement long-term normalization in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Turning to humanitarian aspects of the situation in the country, as we heard today, that remains extremely difficult and continues to deteriorate. The consequences of the earthquakes along the Syrian-Turkish border have not yet been overcome. We cannot but note that growing needs and problems endured by ordinary Syrians across the country do not stop Western donors seeking to politicize the delivery of humanitarian assistance, using it as a tool to exert pressure on Damascus, as well as undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. In practice, Western aid and United Nations assistance is currently only reaching areas not controlled by Damascus. Despite all the tricks, Western countries cannot conceal that. The numbers speak for themselves. The OCHA flash appeal for the earthquakes is funded at 97 per cent, while the traditional United Nations humanitarian plan for Syria, designed to deliver assistance to Government-held territory, is only 8 per cent financed. However, the United States, which, like its European partners, has robbed Syria of its natural resources, misses no opportunity to reiterate that unless a political transition

has been set in motion it will not provide a cent to aid Syria's post-conflict recovery, lift sanctions or ease the isolation of Damascus. Meanwhile, West-sponsored militants from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham are openly undermining the cross-line convoys to Idlib and demanding bribes for allowing their passage to those in need. That kind of action is a direct challenge to the international community and the Council. We cannot accept the fact that despite the Security Council's consensus-based decisions, since August 2021 only 10 convoys have been dispatched to the de-escalation zone, of which the most recent and so far the only one this year was sent on 8 January. Apart from that there have been three restricted missions to Tell Abyad. It seems that in practice the permission that Damascus granted the United Nations to use two additional border crossings, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, for three months in addition to the permit for Bab Al-Hawa, whose mandate will expire on 10 July, has ended enthusiasm at the United Nations for unblocking cross-line deliveries.

We want to emphasize that, if our Western colleagues on the Security Council continue to pretend that nothing is happening and ignore the fact that internationally listed terrorists are sabotaging the Council's decisions, we will draw the necessary conclusions and take them into account when formulating our position in the context of the upcoming renewal of the cross-border mechanism in July. The mechanism long ago exhausted its potential and is certainly not serving humanitarian goals, as was clearly evidenced by the tragic events in February. Furthermore, the problems created by the negative impact of Western sanctions on the international humanitarian response in Syria are worsening before our eyes. We continue to urge the United Nations not to remain silent or to sweep the issue under the rug but to evaluate it properly. At the regular informal interactive dialogue on Syria yesterday, we heard a number of examples of the direct impact that unilateral sanctions have had on the lives of ordinary people in Syria. That is why any claim by the United States and its allies about the targeted nature of sanctions and their allegedly effective exemptions will sound particularly hypocritical today.

Considering the trends and facts we have enumerated today, there can be no doubt that we are nearing a moment of truth with regard to the provision of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The double-dealing of our Western colleagues and their attempts to use humanitarian leverage as a tool for exerting pressure

on Damascus have become too obvious for the United Nations leadership to continue to ignore. It is time to call a spade a spade. Without fair assessments and genuine willingness on the part of the Security Council to help all Syrians in need, there is little point in striving to maintain the Council's current parameters for providing humanitarian aid to Syria. The choice is up to our Western colleagues.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Doughten for their briefings.

Thirteen years ago, Bashar Al-Assad responded to peaceful protests with a brutal crackdown. His regime has detained, tortured and murdered civilians, including children, and has rejected diplomatic efforts to end a war that has claimed more than 500,000 lives, destroyed Syria's economy and forced millions from their homes. The Council and the international community have an agreed pathway to ending the conflict, through resolution 2254 (2015). Despite the diligent efforts of the Special Envoy and his team, the Al-Assad regime has refused direct negotiations and has undermined the work of the Constitutional Committee for years. Russia claims to support a Syrian-led political process, but has thrown up additional roadblocks to the Constitutional Committee for reasons that have nothing to do with Syria or the Syrian people.

As a result of the lack of political progress, the Syrian people continue to face immense challenges. More than 130,000 Syrians are unaccounted for, languishing in regime prisons or detention centres or missing and believed murdered by the regime, terrorist groups such as Da'esh or other parties to the conflict. Al-Assad's April 2022 amnesty, which we hoped would be followed by additional releases, instead resulted in the release of only 500 people, many of whom were emaciated, with some having reportedly lost their memory or suffering from trauma or mental illness, while others sustained physical injuries. Since that release, the brutal practice of the arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of innocent men, women and children has not stopped. Syria continues to radiate instability to the broader

region. The regime has allowed Russia to use Syria as a logistics node to export its destabilizing activities to Africa and has flooded the region with illicit drugs.

Against that backdrop, the United States will not normalize its relationship with Al-Assad, and we have strongly discouraged others from doing so. We will not lift our sanctions on Al-Assad or support reconstruction absent genuine, comprehensive and enduring reforms and progress on the political process. We renew our call for a nationwide ceasefire and for the humane release of the unjustly detained, as well as for clarification on the fate of the missing, including those who are deceased, and for the Al-Assad regime to finally engage in the political process in good faith.

On the humanitarian front, the needs of the Syrian people are at their greatest since the conflict began. As we heard today, millions remain internally displaced or have sought refuge in neighbouring countries or further afield. We welcome reports that the United Nations has scaled its cross-border operation back up to pre-earthquake levels and that United Nations assistance is once again reaching millions in north-western Syria with food, health, shelter, water and hygiene supplies transported across the border. Clearly, that expanded access is having a positive impact on the Syrian people. It remains clear that there is no substitute for cross-border access. We are committed to supporting the implementation of resolution 2672 (2023), including delivering assistance cross-line. We urge all parties to remove the obstructions to cross-line humanitarian deliveries to all parts of Syria.

Finally, the United States continues to reject any suggestion that humanitarian assistance is being blocked by United States sanctions. We maintain robust humanitarian exceptions for those sanctions and welcome good-faith discussions with the United Nations and others to address any specific instances in which humanitarian actors have been unable to pursue humanitarian activities due to actions of the United States.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland): I deliver this statement on behalf of Brazil and Switzerland, as co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file.

I would first like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Doughten, Director of the Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,

for their valuable updates. The information they shared makes it clear that the humanitarian situation in Syria is dire, with needs more significant than ever.

The protracted armed conflict in Syria has created one of the most serious humanitarian crises of our time. The effects of the earthquake have led to additional suffering and trauma for civilians in Syria. It is important to consider the long-term impact of a natural disaster of great magnitude that will go well beyond the scope of the initial emergency response. The increasing food insecurity that is now affecting as many as 12 million people across Syria, and a growing inability to maintain their livelihoods, makes the situation of many Syrians even more challenging.

The impact that the past 12 years have had on both the water and health infrastructure of the country has contributed to the outbreak of cholera in Syria, affecting small children in particular. Limited access to water and inadequate sanitation increases the risk of disease outbreak. The erosion of the social and economic fabric risks accelerating the collapse of critical infrastructure, such as water systems, which could trigger further public health issues. The earthquakes have added another dimension of vulnerability to overburdened communities. Overcrowding in inadequate shelters, displacements and unequitable access to water and health services are inhumane living conditions and further contribute to increasing those risks.

In order for the United Nations and its partners to react to and prevent such challenges, the funding of both the Syria earthquake flash appeal and the country's humanitarian response plan for 2023 is crucial. It is important that all pillars of the humanitarian response plan receive funding, including the third pillar. Resilience and early-recovery activities contribute to enhancing livelihoods and increasing access to basic services. As clearly outlined in the Secretary-General's 60-day report (S/2023/284), cross-border assistance remains an indispensable part of ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable. The measures introduced by the Government of Syria in the aftermath of the earthquakes have contributed to broader access, including on the part of United Nations staff, to vulnerable populations. We hope that expanded and facilitated access continues for as long as necessary, in line with OCHA's assessments.

Brazil and Switzerland reiterate the calls on all the parties to facilitate timely, unimpeded and sustainable access for humanitarian assistance. All modalities

of aid, including cross-border and cross-line, are necessary. In that regard, we welcome the improved humanitarian access in north-west Syria, including the opening of the two additional border crossings and the high number of United Nations inter-agency cross-border missions. Furthermore, we once again recall that all the parties must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law. That includes taking concrete measures to prevent and minimize the effects of armed conflict on the most vulnerable, such as children. Without a political solution, there can be no lasting peace in Syria and humanitarian needs will remain prevalent. The international community has a moral and humanitarian duty not to abandon the Syrian people at a time of acute need. The Security Council should place the well-being of the Syrian people at the centre of its decisions and unite behind the humanitarian imperative.

(spoke in French)

Let me add a few points on the political situation in Syria in my national capacity.

As we just heard from Special Envoy Pedersen — and I thank him for his briefing — resolution 2254 (2015) remains relevant today. The efforts currently under way in the region should focus above all on paving the way for the Special Envoy to achieve a political solution that will ensure peace and security in the country and in the region, in accordance with the criteria defined in resolution 2254 (2015). Switzerland supports the efforts of the Special Envoy in that regard, and we also remain ready to host any talks or initiatives in Geneva aimed at promoting lasting peace in Syria. After more than 12 years of conflict and numerous violations of the fundamental rights of Syrians, it is essential to enforce a ceasefire at the national level. In all regions of the country, the suffering of the population, in particular children, is exacerbated by the continuation and sometimes the resurgence of hostilities. In that respect, Switzerland calls on the members of the Security Council to remain united in their call for de-escalation.

There can be no lasting peace without justice. In the face of the serious violations of international law, Switzerland would like to reiterate its full support for the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most

Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, whose work is fundamental in the fight against impunity. The commitment of all components of Syrian society is also necessary to advance peace. In accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), Switzerland once again stresses the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of Syrian women in decisions that affect their future, needs and aspirations. That includes their involvement in political processes and all efforts to resolve the conflict. In that regard, it is essential that Syrian women be free from any fear of discrimination or gender-based violence.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) *(spoke in Chinese)*: I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Director Lisa Doughten for their briefings.

The political process in Syria is still at a deadlock. Terrorists remain active inside Syria. Special Envoy Geir Pedersen continues to work, under very difficult circumstances, to reconvene the meetings of the small body of the Constitutional Committee and encourage a rapprochement between the parties based on the step-for-step approach in order to build mutual trust. China commends those efforts. No matter how long the conflict lasts, it will ultimately require a political solution. China encourages all the parties to actively cooperate with the Special Envoy in the interests of the Syrian people and make progress on the political track as soon as possible. The recent positive interaction among Syria and the countries of the region has sent a positive signal to the wider international community. It is our hope that such progress will inject new momentum into the political process in Syria. The international community must make joint efforts to combat Da'esh, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement-Turkistan Islamic Party and other terrorist groups in Syria in order to reduce their scope of activities, control their harmful effects and work together to put a stop to any actions that condone, harbour or politically exploit terrorist forces.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire. The international community should effectively combine humanitarian assistance to Syria with post-disaster reconstruction efforts in order to promote a fundamental improvement of the humanitarian situation in the country. The cross-line mechanism must be vigorously promoted. China commends the Government of Syria's simplification of the approval process to facilitate cross-line deliveries. We urge

those in actual control of north-west Syria to stop creating hurdles to hinder cross-line operations. Sufficient humanitarian assistance must be ensured. In the face of disasters, humanitarian input should and must be scaled up — not scaled down. We call on the international community to provide adequate financial support for the humanitarian emergency response plan for Syria. Early-recovery projects must be promoted and implemented in a coordinated manner, and it is incumbent on the Secretariat to consult closely with all the parties and actively draw up plans.

Over the past month, at least 115 Syrian civilians have been killed by explosive remnants of war, and the relevant work in that regard should be incorporated into the scope of early recovery as soon as possible. Illegal unilateral sanctions must be fully lifted. The countries concerned announced a temporary easing or suspension of unilateral sanctions against Syria in the aftermath of the earthquake. However, that adjustment cannot conceal the systemic damage caused by the long-term unilateral sanctions. The relevant countries should immediately and unconditionally lift the illegal unilateral sanctions against Syria so as not to exacerbate the humanitarian disaster.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Lisa Doughten for their helpful briefings. Let me also commend the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations in the particularly challenging circumstances that have prevailed in recent months.

The earthquakes in February exacerbated the dire humanitarian situation and added further complexity to operations in the north-west. Meanwhile, as the Special Envoy outlined, the conflict continues. Between 6 February and 10 April, ground-based attacks by the Syrian regime and its allies were conducted near the camps where earthquake victims are taking shelter. A school, medical facilities, markets and places of worship were hit.

It is clear what humanitarians need to operate: regular and predictable humanitarian access through all modalities and to all Syrians. Ms. Doughten's briefing underlined that point. Not knowing if the border crossings at Bab Al-Rai and Bab Al-Salam will remain open beyond next month undermines humanitarians' ability to plan and operate safely. The people who pay the price are the Syrians who need their help. I want to

make it clear that the Council must be ready to act to ensure that humanitarians have access to all Syrians, including the 4.1 million people in north-west Syria.

As we have said many times, and will say again today, a political solution is key to ending the suffering of the Syrian people. Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the cornerstone of a future peaceful Syria that does not destabilize the wider region. Without a ceasefire, Syrians will not be able to rebuild their lives. Without national reconciliation and commitments on the release of detainees, refugees will not be assured of a safe return to their country. Without information on missing persons, families will forever suffer from not knowing what happened to their loved ones. Those elements represent a pathway towards a sustainable peace. We welcome meaningful efforts to advance that, and we urge the regime to engage immediately and in good faith.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Doughten for their briefings. I would like to stress two points.

The only thing that will put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people is a political solution to the conflict in Syria. As we repeat every month, the war in Syria is still not over. That is why France calls for an immediate national ceasefire and reminds the Council that strikes on civilian infrastructure are a violation of international law. Implementing the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) would make it possible to build the foundations for a lasting peace. However, that road map has been ignored by the regime and its allies. The regime refuses to engage in good faith in a United Nations-led political process, while the Constitutional Committee has been held hostage by Russia and has not met for almost a year. Against that backdrop of deliberate obstruction, France reiterates its full support for the mediation efforts led by Special Envoy Pedersen.

In view of the seriousness of the crimes committed in Syria, France will continue its fight against impunity. Those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be held accountable for their actions. The United Nations has widely documented the systematic practice of sexual violence in the regime's prisons and detention centres, which is just one example of the regime's brutality. The European sanctions are aimed at hindering the perpetrators' room to manoeuvre.

The drive for normalization that has begun since the recent earthquake will not stabilize Syria in a sustainable way. In the absence of a political

process, Syria will continue to destabilize the region, and corruption, terrorism, the drug Captagon and the impossibility of returning refugees will remain realities. That is why the European Union recently adopted new sanctions targeting individuals and entities involved in trafficking Captagon. The lack of prospects is unacceptable to the Syrian people, the States of the region and the international community as a whole. We will therefore continue to be demanding where the political process is concerned, which means that the regime must take tangible action to launch a genuine process.

To be clear, meeting the humanitarian needs of Syrians is a moral imperative, but it does not constitute a political solution. As it has been for the past 12 years, France is mobilized to support and assist the Syrian people. We have donated €26 million since the earthquake, in addition to the 40 tons of emergency equipment that we have shipped. The 6 February earthquakes further complicated an already dire situation, and we must now deal with that new reality. It will be essential to ensure the delivery of aid by all available means. The earthquake demonstrated the need for multiple cross-border access points, but thanks to the nature of the regime, the difficulty of humanitarian operations in Syria continues. The delivery of aid through the cross-border mechanism and cross-line convoys remains a dual necessity, and France deplores the cessation of the cross-line convoys since the end of January. The brutality of the past 12 years of repression has caused the largest population displacement of the twenty-first century. The 12 million displaced persons and refugees aspire to return to their homes in Syria once the necessary conditions are in place, but that is still not the case.

The international response to the earthquake cannot eliminate the reality. The responsibilities cannot be turned back. The humanitarian situation in Syria is catastrophic primarily because the regime has committed massive crimes against its population.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Doughten for their briefings.

The Syrian people have just entered the thirteenth year of their descent into deeper despair, destitution and destruction, without an end in sight. The magnitude of the humanitarian catastrophe that has befallen them is simply unimaginable. The disastrous earthquakes and flooding and the ongoing violence only magnify

the endless misery. In such unbearable adversity, the people of Syria should be able to count on our empathy and commitment to putting their plight at the heart of our deliberations. It is never justifiable to politicize humanitarian aid and access to those in dire need. Aid must be people-centred and needs-based. It is in that spirit that we support uninhibited humanitarian access to all those in need across the Syrian territory. Needs must determine access. The reopening of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings is a welcome measure aimed at meeting the ever-growing needs, and they must be kept open for as long as necessary. We reiterate our position that aid must reach those in need through all modalities, including cross-line and cross-border assistance. We count on the Council to find the resolve and unity to ensure that all impediments to aid are removed. We will continue to work constructively with all to ensure that the Council renews the cross-border mechanism in July.

The Syrian people find themselves in this intolerable situation because of the Syrian regime and its allies, which are responsible for gross violations of human rights, including by deliberately targeting civilians. We, the international community, must renew our efforts to end the violence. We call on the Al-Assad regime to halt its indiscriminate air strikes and shelling of civilians once and for all, and to respect international humanitarian law.

We need to continue our quest for a lasting and comprehensive political solution in Syria and to pave a path towards a genuine and inclusive political transition, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and civil society, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We fully support the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to implement that Council resolution in full, including his step-for-step approach in furthering the political process and resuming the work of the Constitutional Committee. There is a need for coordinated and sustained diplomacy at the regional and global levels in order to move the political process forward.

The political transition to a democratic Syria cannot happen without transitional justice and full accountability for all the gross violations committed against the Syrian people. Without justice, the possibility of peace, democracy and prosperity remains a mere illusion. If we condone impunity, we jeopardize the future of Syria. That is why we support all efforts and mechanisms aimed at ending impunity

and delivering justice, including the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the creation of a new body to clarify the fate of missing persons.

We strongly support the Council's referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court to investigate the atrocities committed there. Our response to the legitimate demands of the Syrian people for justice and dignity is a test of our determination, as the international community, to uphold basic norms and principles. We must renew the faith of the Syrian people in the international community and redouble our efforts to meet their aspirations with concrete action, starting from within the Council.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Lisa Doughten for their important briefings.

The political situation has long failed to show any signs of diplomatic progress that would suggest the possibility of ending the Syrian crisis, which has entered its thirteenth year. We therefore stress the need to step up efforts in order to overcome the current stalemate on the political track in a way that maintains Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. In that context, the United Arab Emirates believes that Arab diplomacy can make important contributions to ending the Syrian and other Arab crises. Accordingly, we stress the outcomes of the final statement of the consultative meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, held in Jeddah this month, which reaffirms that a political solution is the only way to overcome the Syrian crisis and underlines the need for Arab leadership's role in all efforts to that end. That includes establishing the necessary mechanisms and intensifying consultations among Arab States to ensure the success of such efforts. We appreciate the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its initiative to hold that important meeting.

We also stress the importance of supporting international efforts and the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. At the same time, we reaffirm the need to end the paralysis that has been imposed on the Constitutional Committee in the recent past. The Committee is the only platform for conducting a constructive, national, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led dialogue, without external interference or imposition, in order to advance the constitutional process. In

conjunction with the efforts made at the political level, it is imperative to continue to address security gaps in order to create an environment conducive to restoring stability. That includes countering terrorism, especially as terrorist groups continue to launch attacks, as we recently saw in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor and Hama. A comprehensive national ceasefire must also be achieved throughout all regions in Syria, and foreign interference in the country must end.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, we believe that, despite its importance, urgent relief assistance has proven to be insufficient for improving the acute humanitarian crisis in Syria, because it is a temporary and unsustainable solution. Work must be done to find radically different and long-term solutions, especially given the grave impacts on the Syrian people of the 6 February earthquake. Above all, it is essential not to politicize the humanitarian situation and to support projects aimed at the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure and public utilities. Syrians deserve to live in dignity and have access to essential services, such as drinking water, electricity and health care. We note that hundreds of thousands of Syrians live in tents that lack the most basic necessities and are unreliable in difficult weather conditions. From that standpoint and in the context of the humanitarian efforts of the United Arab Emirates to support the recovery and rehabilitation phase, we have started a project to equip 1,000 prefabricated housing units to accommodate almost 6,000 earthquake-affected Syrians located across seven areas in Latakia governorate.

As we continue to explore sustainable ways to respond to the growing humanitarian needs, we stress the need to reach all earthquake-affected areas by all suitable routes. It is regrettable that cross-line assistance has not been delivered to north-west Syria since the earthquake occurred, owing to terrorist groups' arbitrary obstruction, in blatant disregard of humanitarian values and principles, which has exacerbated the suffering of civilians. We stress the need to work to ensure that cross-line assistance reaches those in need without hindrance, in accordance with resolution 2672 (2023). We also stress the need to make every possible effort to facilitate the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland safely and securely, as well as in dignity and honour. We also highlight that it is imperative to respond to their humanitarian needs and take that into account during the implementation of early-recovery and reconstruction projects.

In conclusion, it is urgent to make efforts at many levels so that the Syrian people can overcome their challenging humanitarian ordeal — which has gone on for more than 12 years — return to their normal lives and resume their historic role of enriching Arab culture and civilization.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Doughten for their remarks today.

As we just heard, the people of Syria continue to grapple with a multitude of complex humanitarian, protection and political crises. Such levels of needs are a stark reminder of the urgent need for real and just political progress in Syria. In the aftermath of the Türkiye-Syria earthquake in February, the immediate humanitarian needs have also given way to new and compounded protection needs. Examples of that can be found in the collective shelters that were rapidly set up to support families who lost their homes. According to the assessments carried out in Syria by the protection sector of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, overcrowding, the limited availability of safe spaces and the inadequate distribution of water, sanitation facilities and hygiene supplies have increased exposure to gender-based violence. Respondents also reported acute psychological stress and trauma since the earthquakes, which are especially prevalent among children, who exhibit unusual levels of crying, sadness, nightmares and fear of loud noises. While we understand the enormous scale of current needs, we call on the United Nations and all its implementation partners to ensure adequate and appropriate shelter for women and children, who require their own specific privacy and protection needs.

Within the context of the unfolding tragedy, we are once again dismayed to hear of continued shelling and air strikes in the north-east and north-west of Syria, which have led to further civilian deaths. Malta was also gravely disturbed by the brutal murders of more than 30 civilians in Hama governorate on 16 April, which were attributed to Da'esh. That incident is yet another grim reminder of the dangers that ordinary civilians in Syria face on a daily basis. Malta once again underscores the importance of rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all those who need it in Syria, including those in the Rukban camp. We are pleased to see the sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance through Bab Al-Hawa, supported by the recently authorized crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai. It is essential that those crossings remain open

and be renewed and that the flow of the life-saving and life-sustaining aid that passes through them remain free from impediments.

In that regard, we also express our desire to see an increase in the delivery of humanitarian assistance through the United Nations cross-line plan into the north-east and the north-west. We regret that no missions to the north-west have been conducted since our previous meeting (see S/PV.9291). We call on all parties and those who have influence on them to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid through all modalities in Syria. Despite more than a decade of war, no one group can resolve the conflict alone. Malta once again underscores the importance of political progress in Syria in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Such progress must include the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. Credible, inclusive and sustainable political transition is what is needed now more than ever. There is no military solution to this conflict.

We remain convinced that actions moving forward must also be rooted in the concept of a just peace. In this regard, Malta reiterates its support for accountability and transitional justice based on due process when it comes to those who have committed grave violations of international law. We call again on the parties to reconvene the work of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. The millions of Syrians who seek and deserve peace must be placed at the centre of politics.

Information on the whereabouts and fate of the missing remains critical. It is within the power of the parties to meaningfully make progress on the transparent and verifiable release of those arbitrarily detained in Syria and give information on the whereabouts and fate of the missing. Such steps would help alleviate the pain and suffering felt by thousands of families desperate to know what has become of their loved ones.

To conclude, the people of Syria require simultaneous political progress and humanitarian certainty. We in the Security Council have a responsibility to do our part in supporting that, just as the parties on the ground have a responsibility to do theirs.

Mr. Biang (Gabon): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Ghana, Mozambique and my own country, Gabon.

We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the Director of the Humanitarian Finance and Resource Mobilization Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Lisa Doughten, for their enlightening briefings.

We welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye at today's meeting.

Since 6 February, Syria, which had already been facing 12 years of conflict, descended into unspeakable chaos when it was hit, along with neighbouring Türkiye, by several earthquakes and aftershocks. The toll is extremely heavy, with loss of human lives, suffering and destruction of infrastructure. In Syria, 6,000 people died, with tens of thousands injured and 350,000 internally displaced, not counting the massive damage caused to infrastructure, which the World Bank estimates to be \$5.2 billion.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis has affected the ability of Syrians to meet their immediate food needs and maintain their livelihoods, with approximately 12.1 million people facing acute food insecurity. Reliable access to safe and sufficient water throughout northern Syrian Arab Republic remains a challenge, all against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease and cholera pandemics.

We would like to salute the unwavering commitment on the ground of the United Nations and its partners alongside the Syrians. The international community's mobilization is not to be outdone, with the international donor conference held in Brussels on 20 March, in support of the populations of Syria and Türkiye. Nonetheless, we call for broader support for the Syrian humanitarian response plan, including for early recovery and livelihoods, which unfortunately remains underfunded.

(spoke in French)

The A3 is concerned about the continuing hostilities in Syria, despite the additional suffering triggered by the earthquake and the numerous calls for a ceasefire throughout the country. In northern Syria, hostilities continue to exacerbate the suffering of civilians, exposing them to death, injury and displacement. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a total of 58 civilians, including four women and eight children, have been

killed as a result of the hostilities. In addition, at least 33 civilians, including eight women and seven children, were injured.

We therefore reiterate our call on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including ensuring that civilians and civilian objects are consistently spared in the conduct of their military operations. At the same time, we call on all States with influence over the parties to the conflict to convince them to ensure the protection of civilians in Syria.

We also reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire in Syria to facilitate the delivery of aid to victims. We urge all parties to put aside their differences at this time, when humanitarian need and urgency must prevail. For the A3, access to emergency relief is the cornerstone of the mobilization. Accordingly, we welcome, once again, the decision of the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to authorize the opening of the two new crossings, at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, for a period of three months, in addition to the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. We hope that in July 2023, given the highly elevated humanitarian stakes on the ground, the Syrian Government will authorize the extension of the cross-border delivery, in cooperation with the United Nations, of humanitarian aid to reach all those in need. We note with interest that, following the opening of the two additional border crossings, humanitarian access to north-western Syria has improved. Some 47 inter-agency cross-border missions have been carried out by the United Nations in north-western Syria since 14 February.

It is important to address the issue of detainees, including facilitating the release of such vulnerable detained groups as the elderly, women and children. Clarifying the status of missing persons would also be an important confidence-building measure. Progress in this area will further contribute positively to Special Envoy Geir Pedersen's progressive approach to the political track. Furthermore, while noting the recent introduction of permanent earthquake-related exemptions in several unilateral sanctions regimes, we reiterate our call for the lifting of these sanctions so as not to impede relief efforts for the Syrian population in need.

Mozambique, Ghana, and Gabon believe that the parties to the conflict must seize the momentum of support and attention generated by the earthquakes to engage in a political process to resolve the fundamental issues that fuel the conflict in Syria. This means engaging

in the path of Syrian-Syrian dialogue in an inclusive manner under the auspices of Special Envoy Pedersen, with a view to a comprehensive settlement of the Syrian crisis in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

We closely follow Special Envoy Pedersen's consultations with civil society, including women, as an essential component of the political process and the building of a lasting peace. We encourage the Syrian Government to develop legislative and policy measures to ensure gender equality, and we call for respect for the human rights of women and girls by all parties.

In conclusion, the A3 calls on all stakeholders and the international community as a whole to act within a strictly humanitarian framework, far from any politicization, in the interest of the Syrian people.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Doughten for their insightful briefings.

The Syrian crisis is now entering its thirteenth year while the devastation stemming from February's earthquakes continues. The plight of the people of Syria, living amid cholera and lacking shelter, water, and electricity, remains desperate.

The opening of the two additional border crossings of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai since February, in addition to Bab Al-Hawa crossing, has been a lifeline for delivering emergency aid to the affected areas. Still, the scale and lingering effects of the disaster means greater international support is urgently needed.

The initial three-month period for those two additional crossings agreed between the United Nations and the Syrian Government will expire in mid-May. Given that the majority of people in north-west Syria are utterly dependent on United Nations assistance, we strongly appeal to the Syrian Government to extend its decision.

This month, Japan hosted the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers' meeting, where we reaffirmed our continued support for the earthquake victims and stressed the importance of unhindered humanitarian aid. The recent visit of our colleague Mr. Miyake, Special Coordinator for Syria, to Aleppo with the support of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, gave us first-hand experience of the dire conditions on the ground. We call on international donors to engage more with Syria's humanitarian response plan in addition to the United Nations flash appeal.

Only a political settlement can truly resolve the Syrian crisis, and Japan remains committed to the process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore regret that the political track remains stalled with no resolution in sight. We urge all relevant parties to constructively engage with the step-for-step approach of Special Envoy Pedersen. We are also concerned that the Constitutional Committee has not been convened in almost a year. That body is an important platform to achieve a comprehensive political solution, and it should not be undermined for any political reasons unrelated to Syria.

Finally, the issue of more than 100,000 missing Syrians remains a key concern. Japan is grateful for the Special Envoy's continued prioritization of this file, including his engagement with the Syrian Government. We also appreciate the Secretary-General's report (A/76/890) proposing to establish a new body through the General Assembly to clarify the fate of the missing and to provide adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing, and we will constructively engage on that proposal.

There is no magic wand to solve the Syrian crisis, but we must seek to aid those in need while building trust among the parties to finally achieve a political resolution. The Security Council must send a strong and united message that it will not abandon the Syrian people.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Brazil thanks Special Envoy Pedersen and Director of Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Ms. Lisa Doughten for their informative briefings and updates.

On the humanitarian file, Brazil aligns itself with the intervention delivered by the representative of Switzerland in the name of the co-penholders. I will now speak in my national capacity regarding the political aspects of the conflict.

Brazil remains deeply concerned about the overall situation in Syria. We are appalled by the fact that hostilities continue, especially in the north-east, causing suffering to civilians, exposing them to death and injury and further displacement even in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Brazil echoes the Secretary-General's calls on parties to exercise maximum restraint, respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and maintain the agreed-upon

ceasefires. All attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure must immediately cease in accordance with international humanitarian law.

As the Secretary-General points out in his most recent report, the situation in Al-Hol and other camps in the north-east of Syria remain tragic. We echo, in that regard, the Secretary-General's call to support the voluntary return of residents of those camps to areas of their choosing in safety and dignity.

Brazil firmly believes that only a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process will lead to a lasting political resolution to this long-lasting conflict. Resolution 2254 (2015) provides a road map that could pave the way to sustainable peace, restoring Syria's unity and sovereignty. We thank the Special Envoy for the efforts put forward to promote the implementation of its provisions, including the continuous engagement with key stakeholders.

Re-establishing the path for genuine dialogue among the parties is key and that includes reconvening the small body of the Constitutional Committee. Brazil, nonetheless, agrees with Mr. Pedersen's assessment that counting formal meetings is not enough. We need renewed political will. If the small body resumes its activities it should be to genuinely engage in bridging differences and working towards results conducive to peace, stability and reconciliation. Concrete outcomes are long awaited. We note with appreciation that the Special Envoy continues to promote Syrian-Syrian dialogue through the Women's Advisory Board and the Syrian Civil Society Support Room.

In his most recent report (S/2023/284), the Secretary-General expresses the hope that the support and attention in the aftermath of the earthquakes be channelled into renewed energy and meaningful progress on the political track to address the fundamental issues driving the conflict. That is also our hope. Brazil believes that the collaboration seen in the aftermath of the earthquakes, including within the regional arena, demonstrates that a way forward is possible. We expect that the current dynamics in the region will contribute positively to Syria's stability.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the information provided by Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and by Director of the Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Ms. Lisa Doughten.

As predicted, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate dramatically. The prolonged war and the effects of the earthquakes have left 8.8 million people affected in a multidimensional crisis situation, the costs of which amount to \$5.2 trillion, according to the World Bank.

In this complex scenario, in which we are seeing an increase in cholera cases, a crisis over access to safe water sources and the collapse of health-care services, my delegation recognizes and supports the work of Special Envoy Pedersen and the United Nations teams on the ground to continue assisting the Syrian people who depend on humanitarian support to survive.

We commend the results of the earthquake response plan, thanks to which schools have been reopened, debris has been removed from densely populated areas, emergency shelters have been set up and interventions to ensure the water supply and sanitation have been carried out, in addition to the early-recovery projects, which promote the re-establishment of productive activities through the opening of small businesses.

However, we are concerned about the high number of people who have been forced to move throughout Syria. It is estimated that 350,000 Syrians do not have a permanent place to live. The risks and threats for those in a situation of human mobility, particularly women and unaccompanied children, are one of the greatest challenges.

We also see a growing number of people facing food insecurity, escalating prices of basic necessities, the lack of decent employment and hopelessness about the real prospects of creating conditions conducive to a political solution to the conflict, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

We join the Secretary-General's call for the Syrian Government to provide urgent answers on the fate of approximately 100,000 missing persons.

Ecuador stresses the urgent need to ensure that existing mechanisms can carry out exhaustive, independent and impartial investigations into violations of human rights and international humanitarian law so that the responsible parties are prosecuted before the competent entities.

My delegation deplores that security incidents continue to be recorded amid this precarious situation for the civilian population. Such incidents include air strikes, detonations of improvised explosive devices,

selective assassinations, kidnappings, bombings and attacks on checkpoints, all of which threaten the life and security of civilians and strategic infrastructure and are contrary to the provisions of international humanitarian law.

Ecuador urges the parties to establish a definitive ceasefire in all regions of the country, thus allowing untrammelled humanitarian assistance to those who need it most. We also hope that the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings will remain open indefinitely in order to guarantee the permanent distribution of humanitarian aid through all possible means.

My delegation once again reaffirms its commitment to support the initiatives of the Security Council that contribute to the settlement of the grave situation of the Syrian population. The political will of the Syrian Government and the commitment of the countries of the region and the international community, as a whole, are indispensable to start the path towards sustainable peace and the improvement of living conditions in that country.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Doughten for their briefings.

At a time when the Syrian people are struggling to face the difficult and complex humanitarian situation and the repercussions of the devastating earthquake that hit Syria on 6 February, the Israeli occupation forces have intensified their attacks on the sovereignty of Syrian territories over the past weeks and days. American forces illegally present in the north-east of the country have persisted in their attacks on Syrian sovereignty and the looting of Syrian resources and wealth. In addition, various terrorist groups continue to attack civilians, thus preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching our people in the affected areas in the north-west of Syria. Moreover, measures of economic terrorism and collective punishment continue to be imposed on the Syrian people as a result of illegal unilateral measures that prevent the improvement of the humanitarian situation and the fulfilment of the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

In the spirit of Syria's commitment to forging brotherly relations with Arab countries, Syria is working to strengthen its relations with them. This serves an Arab and regional interest and plays a necessary role in

supporting and helping the Syrian people to overcome the current challenges, including restoring stability throughout Syria and liberating all of its lands.

Syria has sought to engage in a process that would lead to joint Arab action. It has sought to strengthen its bilateral relations with brotherly Arab States. To that end, the President of the Republic made important visits to the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and other Syrian officials also made work visits to Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Tunisia, during which they discussed unifying Arab efforts made to reach a political solution to the crises facing our peoples in a manner that preserves their unity and territorial integrity and supports their State institutions. During those visits, the importance of enhancing security and stability, combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and enhancing cooperation in countering drug smuggling and trafficking was also emphasized.

Israel has continued its attacks on Syrian territories, which have affected residential buildings, civilian airports and infrastructure in and around Damascus, the southern region, Aleppo, Homs and its countryside. This has led to innocent civilian deaths, injuries and significant material damage. And in a clear coincidence, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) terrorist organization has continued to repeatedly target unarmed civilians. It launched an attack on the people in the eastern countryside of Hama while they were collecting the truffle crop, during which 26 citizens were killed.

Those simultaneous and coordinated attacks reveal similarities between ISIS terrorism and Israeli terrorism and prove that they are two sides of the same coin, aiming — beyond a doubt — to prolong the Syrian crisis and deplete Syria's resources.

The Syrian Arab Republic once again warns Israel and its sponsors of the dangers of these reckless policies, which are pushing the region towards a large-scale escalation and another phase of insecurity and instability. It calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities in condemning those violations, working to stop them, ensuring that they are not repeated and holding Israel accountable for them.

In a related context, the forces of the United States of America, illegally present on Syrian territory, launched an attack on some areas in Deir ez-Zor governorate, which

led to several victims and material damage. This is a true embodiment of the crime of aggression, from which various other crimes and violations stem — committed by those forces against Syria and its people. Any pretexts used by the United States Administration in that regard are a failed attempt to justify its flagrant violation of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, the Charter of the United Nations, the rules of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

My country renews its call on the United States to stop its hostile approach against Syria, to end its illegal military presence on Syrian territory, to end its sponsorship of terrorist entities and separatist groups and to stop its systematic looting of natural resources and national wealth.

Syria calls on the Security Council to condemn all forms of violations of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and interference in its internal affairs, including repeated attempts to infiltrate Syrian territory by delegations of Western States, some of which are members of the Security Council. The most recent such attempt was the illegal infiltration by a number of French senators, on 31 March 2023, of the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic in the north-eastern region of the country. It is an example that reflects the colonial mentality of Europe generally and of France specifically. It is a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and a clear violation of relevant Security Council resolutions.

The efforts made by Syria to deliver cross-line humanitarian assistance to all those in need, including our people in the north-west, especially following the earthquake, have faced a major challenge, as terrorist organizations present in that region refused the passage of assistance convoys. In addition, they attacked safe areas and Syrian forces present in the de-escalation zone. What is unfortunate is the suspicious silence and paralysis shown by the Security Council in the face of all these practices. The Syrian Arab Republic has made exceptional efforts to deal with the repercussions of the earthquake, including the opening of two additional border crossings, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, by a sovereign decision, for a period of three months to ensure the flow and delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance to our people in the north-west of Syria. It has provided blanket approvals for the delivery of assistance from within, in addition to granting visas at a record speed to allow United Nations staff and humanitarian workers to enter to perform the tasks assigned to them.

However, the humanitarian response to the repercussions of the earthquake is much more complex and is broader than simply meeting the urgent needs of those affected. Therefore, it is important to intensify efforts and to take real initiatives to expand the scope of humanitarian activities, including by doubling the size of early-recovery projects. Yesterday, the Syrian Government adopted a comprehensive plan to deal with the repercussions of the earthquake, aiming at unifying the efforts of State institutions, civil society actors and international organizations to rehabilitate the affected areas. The national work plan is human-centred and seeks to ensure the conditions for a life of dignity.

Illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States and the European Union on Syria continue to represent a growing challenge to improving the humanitarian situation and represent a tool of collective punishment against the Syrian people. The talk, by those States, about a partial and temporary suspension is a propaganda attempt to mitigate the pressure and criticism directed at them. The complexities of the sanctions regimes do not help dispel the uncertainty of Member States, humanitarian actors, donors or financial institutions that may wish to engage in the process of providing assistance to Syria. Therefore, these exceptions are not tools that are adequate or sufficient to respond to humanitarian needs, especially in emergency situations and natural disasters, which require a more comprehensive response.

Syria demands that the United States of America and the European Union respect the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and human rights instruments and immediately and unconditionally lift their illegal coercive measures imposed on it.

Before I conclude my statement, I would like to refer to the continued attempts by some States to interfere in the internal affairs of Syria. The most recent attempt was an attempt made by a group of States seeking to impose a new, politicized mechanism. Those States are claiming that this mechanism would clarify the fate of missing persons in Syria. They are relying on lies propagated by the United States and their Western allies. My country has expressed its rejection of the establishment of any mechanism that does not serve the best interests of the Syrian people and without the consent of the Syrian Government.

Syria affirms that it will continue to play its national role in searching for persons who went missing at the hands of terrorist groups or as the result of the crimes

and attacks of American forces and their allies illegally present on Syrian territory. It will also continue its engagement in the Astana format, which includes a special focus on the issue of missing persons.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Doughten for their updates and informative briefings on the most recent situation on Syria.

Despite the diligent efforts of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains challenging, particularly after the 6 February earthquake, as highlighted in today's briefings. We are concerned about the current level of funding of the Syrian humanitarian response. According to the most recent United Nations report, as of 20 March, only 5.6 per cent of the total funding requirement for 2023 has been received.

The provision of impartial and non-politicized humanitarian assistance to all regions of Syria is crucial for saving lives. However, it is also essential to plan humanitarian assistance in a way that helps restore infrastructure, rebuild and strengthen the Syrian economy, and support sustainable, long-term development in the country. The continued imposition of unilateral sanctions is a major obstacle to improving the humanitarian and economic situation in Syria. These illegal measures have had a detrimental impact on the economy and living standards of the people and have limited the Government's ability to provide basic services. The recent earthquake in Syria has made it even more critical to lift these unjust measures.

We reiterate our call for the full and balanced implementation of resolution 2672 (2023) and stress the importance of focusing on early-recovery projects to meet the urgent needs of all Syrians affected by the crisis. Also, significant efforts are required to enhance cross-line delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, as emphasized in the resolution. Despite the importance of increasing cross-line delivery, the United Nations report shows that no progress has been made in cross-line relief operations, particularly in north-west Syria, where affected areas are under the control of terrorist organizations.

We emphasize that any assistance mechanism should be delivered in coordination with the Syrian Government and with full respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We commend the Syrian Government for its

commitment to assisting the United Nations and other international organizations by providing facilities to aid in the delivery of relief and support to areas affected by crises.

In a sovereign decision, the Syrian Arab Republic has opened two additional border crossings to facilitate the humanitarian response in areas impacted by the conflict, including those under the control of terrorist organizations. The Secretary-General's report indicates that the opening of these two additional border crossings has improved humanitarian access to north-west Syria. We appreciate these efforts and call on all parties to continue working towards ensuring safe, timely and effective humanitarian access to all those in need.

We are steadfast in our support of the Special Envoy's efforts and his active engagement with all parties. We support the resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings at the earliest opportunity to continue the progress made toward resolving the crisis.

Iran, along with its Astana format partners, is committed to working towards long-term and sustainable normalization in and around Syria. We express our support for the continuation of the Syrian-Turkish dialogue as part of this effort. Iran also supports efforts and cooperation within the Astana format to reveal the fate of missing persons. It is also of utmost importance to make every possible effort to facilitate the safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees to their homeland and to meet their humanitarian needs.

The illegal presence of foreign military forces, including the United States forces in Syria, constitutes a blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law and is the primary source of insecurity in the country. We call for the immediate and complete withdrawal of these unlawful forces, which is essential to creating a conducive environment for resolving the crisis and restoring peace and stability in the region.

We welcome improvement of Syria's diplomatic relations within the region and beyond, especially with our brotherly Arab countries, to ensure Syria's security, stability and prosperity. Strengthening these relationships can also facilitate the safe and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons. We are committed to supporting these efforts.

In conclusion, we strongly condemn once more the ongoing violations of Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Israeli regime through its continued aggressions and terrorist attacks. These attacks have

caused significant harm to Syrian civilians and critical infrastructure. The Security Council must abandon its double standard and respond constructively to Syria's repeated appeals for action to put an end to these acts of aggression.

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

Mr. Önal (Türkiye): I too would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Doughten for their briefings.

The earthquakes in February in Türkiye and Syria worsened the humanitarian situation in Syria. The catastrophe demonstrated once again the urgency of a settlement of the conflict in all its dimensions. Since the beginning, Türkiye has advocated that a lasting solution can be found only through a political process that addresses, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), the fundamental issues underpinning the conflict. The ongoing deadlock in the political process compounds the gravity of the situation on the ground and increases the prevalent sense of despair.

Türkiye's long-standing priorities in Syria are clear and consistent: overcoming the deadlock in the political process, combating terrorism, preserving the territorial integrity and political unity of Syria, facilitating uninterrupted humanitarian access and creating conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Quadrilateral meetings that we have launched in Moscow are aimed at realizing these priorities through a process without preconditions and in a results-oriented manner.

In the aftermath of the earthquakes, we are witnessing signs of a tendency toward greater engagement in the region. We think that every initiative is important and valuable insofar as it is part and parcel of a holistic and coordinated approach to find viable solutions to the existing problems through a credible political process. In this connection, I would like to underline once again the need for increased alignment of the positions of all main stakeholders.

The United Nations cross-border assistance mechanism remains a vital lifeline for millions of Syrians and an indispensable modality for meeting increasing humanitarian needs in the country. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, its functionality has become all the more important. The operationalization of two additional border crossings, namely, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, for the delivery of humanitarian aid has

proven to be useful in terms of expanding the scope of the cross-border humanitarian response. We call on the international community, including the United Nations, donors, implementing partners and non-governmental organizations, to make better use of all these border crossings in order to scale up the desperately needed humanitarian aid. In this connection, I would like to emphasize the importance of extending the mandate of the cross-border mechanism in such a way as to ensure predictability and reliability for donors and implementing partners. This step would also facilitate more effective implementation of early-recovery and resilience projects, which in the medium to long term could help to mitigate the overall humanitarian grievances.

Similarly, we support the delivery of cross-line assistance inside Syria, in line with resolution 2672 (2023). And we continue to encourage all relevant parties to carry out these activities on a regular basis.

The disasters that befell Türkiye and Syria might indeed have a silver lining if the cooperation in the humanitarian dimension could also help to create a renewed political momentum for the settlement of the Syrian crisis. We hope that this can open a window of opportunity and that it can be seized by all stakeholders.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of France has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mrs. Dime Labille (France) (*spoke in French*): My delegation apologizes for taking the floor again.

We do not want to respond to any particular accusations, but to provide some clarification. It is not a matter here of giving a lesson on the law or constitutional law, but it was mentioned that French deputies were present on Syrian territory. A democratic country such as France is based on what we call the separation of powers, between the executive, legislative and judiciary. I wanted to clarify that the French Government did not exercise any control over French parliamentarians, their actions or their movements. But it is true that you must be a democratic country that respects fundamental freedoms and the rule of law to know that.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.