



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9383**<sup>rd</sup> meeting  
Monday, 24 July 2023, 10 a.m.  
New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward . . . . .	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Spasse
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
	China . . . . .	Mr. Xing Jisheng
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mrs. Sánchez Izquierdo
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon . . . . .	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Issahaku
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta . . . . .	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and 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 Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director for Coordination, 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:** For several months, we have been urging and advising that the new diplomatic context surrounding the Syrian conflict could act as a circuit-breaker — if there was substantive engagement. With substantive engagement, diplomacy could begin to see important issues addressed incrementally in a manner that would move us along the path envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015). I have sought to engage the Syrian parties, the Arab, Astana and Western players and the Security Council to build positively on that, promote coordination, coherence and complementarity on Syria and to urge everyone to be ready to offer a genuine contribution.

The goals are clear: to resume the intra-Syrian political process facilitated by the United Nations, most particularly by reconvening the Constitutional Committee and making incremental progress when we do; and, also, to elicit from all the key parties confidence-building measures — step-for-step and step-by-step — in a reciprocal and verifiable manner, consistent with my mandate in resolution 2254 (2015). I have also consistently stressed that addressing the dire and worsening humanitarian situation not only is a humanitarian necessity, but also would provide some confidence that progress on political issues is also possible.

As we remember, after the earthquakes, we did see positive humanitarian gestures. I can therefore only share the Secretary-General's disappointment that the Council could not agree to extend its authorization of United Nations cross-border relief operations — a lifeline for millions of Syrians. How are the Syrians meant to believe that some broader progress is possible, and how are they meant to be encouraged to overcome their own deep differences, if consensus on humanitarian basics among the international parties is elusive? As the political Envoy, I profoundly hope that all doors will be kept open to resolve that issue, and that the Council and all stakeholders will put the needs of the Syrians first. We must redouble efforts to find a solution that ensures that the continued delivery of cross-border and cross-line humanitarian assistance continues. Nothing is more important right now for the most vulnerable Syrians than that.

Let me also note that we need a redoubled effort to secure sufficient humanitarian resources and rapid disbursement, at a time when funding is more stretched than ever. This year's humanitarian response plan is approximately 13 per cent funded, while the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan is less than 10 per cent funded. I urge donors to step up and stand with the millions of people in Syria and in the region in host countries, who depend on life-saving humanitarian aid and early-recovery and livelihood support, after a decade of war. I also call on the sanctioning countries to continue to mitigate any effects of sanctions that could worsen the living conditions of Syrian civilians. I am glad that the European Union and the United Kingdom have extended their new humanitarian exemptions on Syria, which they issued in the aftermath of the earthquake. Such types of exemptions, together with enhanced attention to countering over-compliance, are much needed.

On the political front, let us be honest — thus far, months of potentially significant diplomacy have not translated into concrete outcomes for Syrians on the ground, whether at home or abroad, nor into real moves in the political process. I hope that they will soon, because if not, that will be another missed opportunity to help the Syrian conflict to come to a negotiated end, at a time when the impact of the crisis is deepening. Both a Syrian-Syrian track and a wider process of steps-for-steps confidence-building are needed now if we are to move forward.

I welcome the fact that reconvening the Constitutional Committee is a clear point of consensus among many key players. But I am disappointed that disputes over the venue — which have arisen entirely owing to issues unrelated to Syria — have so far prevented that from coming to pass. We need political will to overcome the issues that have prevented it, to date, from reconvening in Geneva and to ensure that it resumes and makes credible progress.

Let me pause here to remind the Council why that political will is important. While not all issues are solely in the hands of the Syrians, one that can and must be in their hands alone is their country's future constitution. That constitution will be the social contract that must underpin Syrians' ultimate reconciliation and that will establish for a post-conflict future the powers and duties of the State and the rights and obligations of its citizens. This is why the constitutional basket is core to Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which among other things sets a constitutional process for developing a new constitution. The Constitutional Committee brings together nominees of the Government, the Syrian Negotiation Commission and a middle third from civil society on the basis they have formally agreed on in the terms of reference of the Constitutional Committee, to

“prepare and draft for popular approval a constitutional reform, as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria and the implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015)”.

In the eight sessions that have been held so far, there is no denying that progress has been very slow. And there are reasons for that, reasons I have brought up in the past. But I am convinced, as I believe are most stakeholders, that it is better for all the Syrian people that the process resume, continue, deepen and gradually build some trust and move forward on substance. That last point — substance — is essential. My team and I are fully engaged in the effort to unblock the impasse and find a way forward.

A second area that I have long sought to unlock is how to move forward incrementally towards a safe, calm environment in Syria — something that would obviously overlap in many areas with the question of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), which has gained heightened attention in the region. At present, the conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns are simply not in place. And the refugees must be protected, including from refoulement — just

as all civilians inside Syria, including IDPs, must be protected. That is why we need the Syrian Government to do more to address the very real and continuing protection concerns — something that is fundamental and that I have continually underlined. At the same time, we will continue to engage donors on doing more to address the concerns that all Syrians have about livelihoods. Such a step-for-step dynamic could begin to change realities on the ground for all Syrians, including the displaced — and could also build confidence and political space for a broader set of issues related to resolution 2254 (2015), bringing us closer to a safe, calm and neutral environment. In that context, I have continued to coordinate closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Let me stress that this is one of several topics where a wider steps-for-steps discussion could be productive. There are many others, as I have flagged in the past. We need engagement on them because while diplomacy has continued, many things remain entirely unchanged in this war, as Syrian civil society constantly reminds us. Syria remains territorially divided, and Syrian society, too, is divided on many issues. Five foreign armies are present in Syria, and we have seen an alarming rise in tensions among them in the past month. Civilians continue to be arbitrarily detained, tortured and forcibly disappeared. They continue to be injured or killed, amid violent clashes and regular exchanges of mortar, rocket and artillery fire across north-east and north-west Syria. This month also saw air strikes attributed to Israel, reports of Turkish drone strikes, reports of pro-Government air strikes north of Aleppo, and reports from the United States saying that it carried out drone strikes near Al-Bab on a leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Tensions in the south-west spilled over into military escalation once again. The sustained calm that can lead to a nationwide ceasefire remains essential. In addition, the threat posed by listed terrorist groups remains very real and must be addressed in a cooperative manner.

Meanwhile, Syria's economic crisis is deepening. To give just one example, this month the Syrian pound hit a record low, with the unofficial rate for the first time exceeding the 12,000 Syrian pound mark relative to one United States dollar. The impact of that on all Syrians, 9 in 10 of whom are living below the poverty line, is extremely serious. Just to take one indicator, some workers are now earning less than \$8 a month when in

June their monthly earnings were around \$18, meaning that their families can now hardly afford one meal a day. Basic services and other critical infrastructure are on the verge of collapse. In the scorching summer heat, some households can access less than three hours of electricity and primary water supplies a day on average, while others have less access or even none at all. When they are unable to secure basic needs, some families adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing meals or resorting to child labour. And of course, as a last resort, many simply find ways to leave Syria.

The tragedy of the detained, disappeared and missing has also remained unchanged. At least on that question, the General Assembly's decision to establish the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic through its adoption of resolution 77/301 is a sign of hope. I urge the parties to the conflict to cooperate with the Institution, to share information with families on the fate of the missing, just as they would if action were taken to release detainees at scale, and to cease the practices — about which there are still many reports — of arrests of returnees and of the forcible removal of children to military training camps, as well as the torture of detainees, which has led to deaths.

If we are to move forward, I would appeal to the Syrian Government to work proactively with the United Nations in the pursuit of a political path out of the conflict. I will also continue to work with the Syrian Negotiation Commission, with which my Deputy, Ms. Najat Rochdi, met this month in Geneva. I thank the many people in the region and beyond who have sought to reinforce the core message of the United Nations in that regard, and I continue to prioritize working closely with the actors in the region. And as we have all done, we will continue to consult widely with Syrian civil society and Syrian women, including through the Civil Society Support Room and the Syrian Women's Advisory Board.

Shifting the dynamics requires engagement in a spirit of pragmatism and flexibility, and a greater sense of urgency and pace. It requires a constructive and coordinated international diplomacy in support of genuine confidence-building. And it requires regional and international unity in support of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process to restore Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The more that Council

members can work together despite their differences, the more they can encourage and support the Syrians to do the same.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

**Mr. Rajasingham:** Let me begin with an urgent and common concern, which is the continuation of cross-border assistance to north-west Syria to provide vital support to millions of vulnerable civilians. As has been said so many times in this Chamber, cross-border aid is a matter of life and death for those millions. The future of cross-border assistance should not be a political decision but a humanitarian one. And therefore it was deeply disappointing, as the Secretary-General said, when the Security Council was unable to reach an agreement on extending its authorization of United Nations cross-border relief operations in Syria.

The United Nations and its partners stand ready to continue providing cross-border life-saving humanitarian assistance through Bab Al-Hawa at the scope and scale needed. We have taken note of the letter from the Government of Syria granting the United Nations permission to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing to deliver humanitarian aid in north-west Syria. We continue to engage on the terms outlined in that letter and the modalities that are fundamental to our principled operations. Several Council members have encouraged the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Government of Syria to undertake bilateral discussions on the modalities for humanitarian operations in north-west Syria. We will pursue that engagement to ensure we have the working modalities to enable us to fulfil our mandate in a principled manner.

In the meantime, United Nations personnel, relief supplies and protection assistance continue to enter north-west Syria via the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings. Since 10 July, 18 trucks and 10 cross-border missions have used the two crossings to replenish stocks, monitor programmes and assess needs on the ground. Our essential operations are, for now, taking place through the two crossings. In parallel, most of the United Nations agencies are currently using the humanitarian aid items that had been strategically prepositioned inside north-west Syria prior to 10 July in order to ensure continuity of the humanitarian assistance. As we have already indicated, cross-border operations in north-west Syria have always been, and must continue to be, guided by the humanitarian

principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. The overriding objective is to ensure safe and timely access to civilians in need at the speed and scale required.

The United Nations cross-border operation is among the most scrutinized humanitarian operations in the world, and the future of any monitoring mechanism at the border crossings will need to be explored to guarantee the humanitarian nature of cross-border consignments. Moreover, once assistance enters Syria, the strong monitoring of aid delivery remains. It is done at three distinct levels and is a critical component of United Nations cross-border operations. I am hopeful that the consent granted by the Government of Syria to use the two additional crossings of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings will be extended before it expires on 13 August. The crossings will remain indispensable for the foreseeable future.

Record levels of needs give even greater urgency to facilitating humanitarian access through all available routes, both cross-border and cross-line, in line with the obligation to facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of relief under international humanitarian law.

Some of Syria's most vulnerable populations live in the north-west of the country — 4.1 out of 4.6 million people who live there need humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs. Nearly 80 per cent of those people are women and children. In order to address those severe levels of vulnerability, we need greater predictability, which a three- or six-month permission does not provide. Such a short duration poses serious challenges to our operations, funding, logistics and procurement. And, in all likelihood, it could lead to disruptions in the humanitarian response. Furthermore, such short time frames do not provide us with the minimum time needed for effective early recovery programming, including support for livelihoods and the rehabilitation of infrastructure damaged by the earthquakes. We will continue our concerted effort to scale up early-recovery activities throughout Syria.

I am also deeply alarmed by the intense hostilities in north-west Syria in the past weeks, with air strikes and shelling resulting in civilian casualties. The hostilities have also left people in fear of more attacks and could fuel further displacement. Altogether, since the beginning of this year, at least 26 civilians have been killed, including five women and six children, and at least 74 civilians injured, according to monitoring

carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. As the fighting and hostilities continue, I urge the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize civilian harm.

As the Special Envoy just mentioned, throughout Syria, socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate. The rapid depreciation of the currency to a new record low in July and other forms of economic deterioration have resulted in significant food and fuel price hikes. The price of essential food commodities has surged by more than 90 per cent in the course of this year, putting basic food items and other essentials out of the reach of millions of families. Approximately 12 million people— more than 50 per cent of the population — are currently food insecure, and a further 2.9 million are at risk of sliding into hunger.

Despite the severe vulnerabilities, the 2023 humanitarian response plan for Syria is only 13.3 per cent funded. I am extremely concerned about the consequences of such acute underfunding, which means that we will have to further prioritize our response and make difficult choices once again this year. That will likely compromise life-saving assistance and curtail investments in livelihoods and essential services. They will result in more drop-outs from school, more acute food insecurity and fewer protection interventions. In order to give members of the Council an example of what that means in practice, the beneficiaries of food assistance are currently receiving only 50 per cent of the standard ration size. In addition, assistance to up to 40 per cent of them, or 2.5 million people, has been discontinued this month, owing to funding shortfalls. One month after the Brussels Conference, it is now critical that the generous pledges announced be converted into early disbursements of funding.

We are now at a moment of inflection — one of change, but also continuity. As the Secretary-General regularly reiterates, in all our discussions, deliberations and decisions, we must keep our collective focus on addressing the urgent needs of the people of Syria. That includes ensuring the delivery of comprehensive and predictable life-saving humanitarian assistance through the most effective means, advocating for the funding required to do so and demanding that the parties respect international law and renew meaningful efforts to secure a nationwide ceasefire, a political settlement and an end to the conflict. We cannot give up

on the people of Syria. The people of Syria are indeed counting on us.

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

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

**Mr. França Danese (Brazil):** I am speaking on behalf of Brazil and Switzerland, the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file. I will speak afterwards in my national capacity.

We welcome Syria, Türkiye and Iran's participation at today's meeting. We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings.

On 13 July, the Permanent Mission of Syria informed us of its Government's decision to open the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for the United Nations use for six months. We appreciate the increasing cooperation between the Syrian Government and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. While the decision by the Syrian Government can be a basis for the United Nations to lawfully conduct cross-border humanitarian operations through Bab Al-Hawa, we have listened very carefully to OCHA's concerns about the 13 July note verbale. We have also heard various other stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, in that regard. We welcome the willingness of both OCHA and the Syrian Government to discuss the terms under which humanitarian operations through Bab Al-Hawa could continue.

We reiterate that whatever solution is found to continue alleviating the plight of Syrians must fully comply with international humanitarian law and be fully consistent with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. That means that aid must reach all in need without any discrimination. According to international humanitarian law, parties are under an obligation to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief to civilians in need. Financing instruments and monitoring are key issues to take into consideration in any continued cross-border operation by the United Nations. We would like to remind everyone that all modalities for access, including

cross-line aid deliveries, remain a crucial part of the whole-of-Syria approach.

As we know, Bab Al-Hawa has been the primary hub for United Nations humanitarian operations into north-western Syria, handling 85 per cent of deliveries. We therefore note with concern that no United Nations aid has entered through it since the cross-border mechanism expired almost two weeks ago. That only adds to the anxiety of the millions of people in need in north-western Syria who do not know if they will receive life-saving aid. We must not forget the human price attached to that kind of uncertainty. We remain hopeful that an understanding can be reached so that the United Nations can resume using the border crossing, and as co-penholders we stand ready to give any necessary support.

We remain concerned about the very low funding for the humanitarian response plan. The United Nations and its partners require greater support to address the growing needs in Syria, particularly in the wake of the February earthquakes. We echo the calls for more humanitarian funding, including for early-recovery and livelihood programmes in all areas of Syria. At the same time, we recognize that donor countries need predictability for humanitarian activities and trust in the practicality and continuation of agreements for uninterrupted funding. Monitoring and reporting on the delivery of humanitarian aid plays a crucial part in building that assurance. As co-penholders, Switzerland and Brazil have been guided solely by the humanitarian imperative. We remain committed to working with Council members, OCHA, Syria and other interested stakeholders, as well as humanitarian actors. We have been doing so from the start, we have continued to do it since Tuesday, 11 July, and we will keep on doing it to ensure that the ultimate goal of assisting the Syrian population is fully met and that we can fulfil our role as co-penholders as well as we possibly can.

I will now make a statement in my national capacity.

Brazil fully concurs with the Secretary-General in his assessment that nothing would do more to alleviate the suffering in Syria and stem the tide of humanitarian needs than an inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable political solution to end the conflict, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The significance of resolution 2254 (2015) cannot be overstated, as it provides a clear road map for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, while respecting Syria's sovereignty,

independence, unity, territorial integrity and dignity. It will be crucial for all the parties involved to adhere to and act in accordance with those principles. It is also imperative to exercise maximum restraint, avoid further escalation and fully comply with all obligations under international humanitarian law. We condemn any unilateral actions that promote further violence and instability in the region. We firmly oppose terrorism and all forms of violence that jeopardize the safety and welfare of civilians.

A comprehensive ceasefire is long overdue. Some may consider a negotiated solution unrealistic. In Brazil's view, what is illusory is the idea that a military solution could bring true peace to all Syrians or be a solid basis for the reconstruction and development of Syria. Recent positive developments, such as the country's return to the League of Arab States, have opened potentially important avenues to meaningful progress that seemed impossible just a while ago. We agree with the Special Envoy that it is essential not to miss the opportunity for re-engagement created by the current positive momentum. It will also be crucial to resume a credible intra-Syrian political process with tangible results in the short term, including the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his continuing efforts in that regard and his ongoing engagement with relevant actors. We reiterate our call on all the parties to be genuinely committed to finding a path to democratic freedom, stability and development in Syria. Let us be clear. They all owe it to their fellow citizens, inside and outside the country.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings today.

Over the past month, the Council has met several times on this issue, and we have done so because the humanitarian needs in Syria are so great and the stakes are so high. As we all know, the penholders, Brazil and Switzerland, made every effort to reach a compromise resolution on cross-border assistance, but one permanent member stood in the way of Council action. Let us be clear here. Russia is fully responsible for the lapse in United Nations cross-border deliveries of humanitarian assistance through Bab Al-Hawa. Russia refused to negotiate in good faith, and its veto was yet another reminder that Russia has little or no regard for the needs of vulnerable people (see S/PV.9371). Just today, reports indicate that Russia

has carried out another round of attacks on Ukraine's grain infrastructure. Russia continues to wage war on the world's food supply, which is having devastating consequences, especially for people in Syria and in countries across the Middle East and Africa.

The Al-Assad regime's announcement that it will allow United Nations aid deliveries through Bab Al-Hawa acknowledges the need for cross-border assistance, but it includes unacceptable restrictions that would hinder relief and put humanitarians, including United Nations personnel, at risk. I note that the regime's opening of Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai did not include such restrictions. Additionally, the regime's permission is for only six months, half the minimally necessary period recommended by the Secretary-General. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths continues to engage with the Al-Assad regime on the parameters of future United Nations operations, we must remember that the regime has a record of impeding United Nations humanitarian activities in Syria. We have seen that time and again for more than a decade. The unacceptable conditions and demands contained in the 13 July note verbale are consistent with that troubling record. And for that reason, the United States has joined other major donors in making it clear that any cross-border access arrangement must include five key elements.

First, it must preserve the independence of operations. The United Nations should be allowed to engage with all parties on the ground, consistent with the way it delivers assistance around the world.

Secondly, it must maintain the whole-of-Syria response architecture. The United Nations should be able to continue to operate response hubs outside regime-held areas. And the regime should not interfere with access arrangements between the United Nations and local authorities in non-regime-held areas.

Thirdly, access should be granted for as long as possible and must not lapse in the middle of winter. Guaranteed access is essential to providing the predictability and efficiency needed by donors, United Nations partners and the Syrian people. Given the overwhelming and persistent humanitarian needs in north-western Syria, there is no justification for short-term, ad hoc access guarantees.

Fourthly, the delivery of assistance must remain consistent with humanitarian principles, and the United Nations should maintain its ability to determine its allocation, including design and targeting, based solely

on needs and consistent with the principles of neutrality and impartiality.

Fifthly, any arrangement must maintain the cross-border monitoring operation originally established under resolution 2165 (2014) and avoid new reporting requirements for local partners or beneficiaries. All five of those elements are critical. They will bolster trust among donor nations and implementing partners, reaffirm that United Nations operations will be guided only by humanitarian principles, maintain and strengthen protections for partner and donor funding, and give humanitarian workers the predictability they need to save lives.

We appreciate Under-Secretary-General Griffiths' commitment to keeping the Council and donors apprised of the progress of his talks with the regime, and we are prepared for the Council to review any understanding he reaches to ensure it contains those elements. Anything less than what I have outlined today would necessitate the Council to seek a mandate to reauthorize the cross-border mechanism.

More than 62,000 trucks full of life-saving aid — food, water, medicine and other essentials — have crossed into Syria since the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2165 (2014) in 2014. But today the humanitarian crisis has never been more dire. Twelve years of war and this year's earthquake have pushed the Syrian people to the brink. The Syrian people are crying out for support and, more than anything, for peace. The United States is deeply saddened but not surprised by Special Envoy Pedersen's briefing, which made clear that the political situation in Syria remains bleak.

Make no mistake: the blame rests on Russia and the Al-Assad regime. Russia and the regime have put the Constitutional Committee on ice. They have rebuffed Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to launch a step-for-step process, and they have opposed or obstructed most efforts to advance other aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), including by voting against the General Assembly's decision to create a new apolitical mechanism to address the fate of detainees and disappeared persons.

The bottom line is this: given Syria's shameful record, the Council cannot trust the Al-Assad regime to do the right thing on humanitarian access. The Council must remain deeply engaged on humanitarian matters in Syria. The United States is committed to doing just that. Special Envoy Pedersen asked us to stand up and

meet the needs of the Syrian people, and that is exactly what we are trying to do. We will never waver in our support for the needs of the Syrian people.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director of Coordination at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. Rajasingham, for their reports on the political and humanitarian aspects of the situation in Syria.

Today the situation on the ground in our friendly country of Syria remains fraught with tension. In addition to the illegal military presence in the north of Syria, including the presence of the United States and its allies in the trans-Euphrates region, there are other dangerous factors, such as arbitrary air strikes by the Israeli Air Force against Damascus and surrounding areas, the latest of which was carried out on 19 July. Terrorist activities in the south of the country, under the cover of the so-called security zone near Al-Tanf arbitrarily established by Washington, are also cause for concern.

We believe that the return of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Arab family and the restoration of relations with Türkiye will facilitate an overall improvement in the atmosphere in the Middle East region and an expeditious recovery from the consequences of the Syrian crisis. In that context, we consider the awkward and inappropriate attempts by Western countries to obstruct those natural processes to be counterproductive. Such unconstructive steps, in our view, constitute interference in sovereign decisions of States and the politicization of purely humanitarian issues such as early recovery and facilitating the return of refugees.

The Russian Federation has consistently and unstintingly advocated for the process of a political settlement in Syria that is both Syrian-led and -owned, with the support of the United Nations in strict accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). At the same time, we believe that the modalities for international mediation must be based on respect for the principles of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian people themselves, without external pressure, must reach agreement on all outstanding issues related to the future structure of their country.

The only platform for such a direct intra-Syrian dialogue has been and remains the Constitutional

Committee. Any attempts to impose other frameworks, formulas and schemes on the Syrian people will only lead the situation to a dead end. The work of the Constitutional Committee will resume after the parties have chosen a convenient venue, other than Switzerland, for meetings. As far as we are aware, that process is nearing a conclusion.

As for the humanitarian aspects of the situation in Syria, only five days since the discussion of the issue in the General Assembly, we have nothing new to add to what was said last Wednesday (see A/77/PV.90 and A/77/PV.91). We are pleased that international humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria will now be carried out in the same way as in any other country's context — that is, with the consent of, and in close coordination with, the internationally recognized Government of that country. We trust that the United Nations humanitarian team will take seriously the establishment of a cross-border humanitarian supply route to Idlib under the new conditions, through the Bab Al-Hawa checkpoint, as is already the case with the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai checkpoints. Under-Secretary-General Griffiths' team has all the necessary tools to achieve that. There is no need for any further decisions by the Security Council to that end. Let us not forget that assistance to those in need should be delivered via all possible channels, including through lines of contact.

We hope that OCHA will not do the bidding of Western States, which seem to have lost sleep over the prospect of the United Nations having to cooperate with the legitimate Syrian authorities, as it should be doing.

Humanitarians now have an excellent opportunity to begin with a clean slate and finally prioritize the interests of those who need humanitarian assistance, including those residing in territories controlled by the Government, not just internationally recognized terrorists who have entrenched themselves in Idlib and their Western sponsors. That must be done as is right and proper, with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

We have heard again today how the straightforward and customary instrument that is the United Nations humanitarian plan for Syria is so severely underfunded. We urge those donors who place the interests of those in need above geopolitical considerations to respond to the call of the United Nations to help, inter alia, to finance early-recovery projects throughout Syria.

To conclude, I wish to take this opportunity to ask the representative of OCHA a number of questions.

First, what is the fate of the report of the United Nations country team in Syria on the impact of unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation in the country? That issue should by no means be overlooked by the humanitarian wing of the United Nations — after all, we are essentially talking about a form of collective punishment against millions of ordinary Syrians. Otherwise, everything that we have agreed upon here will be to no avail.

Secondly, under the new circumstances, what is the status of the Secretary-General's internal Secretariat manual, entitled "Parameters and principles of United Nations assistance in Syria"? As we know, that manual in fact prohibits United Nations structures from carrying out recovery work in Syria. This is the perfect time to consign that shameful document to history.

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

We would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the Director of Coordination at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, for their important presentations. We welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye.

The political and security crises in Syria have persisted for more than a decade. They are compounded by the humanitarian crisis and the effects of last February's earthquake, which are still being felt. As a consequence, more than 23 million people are subjected to daily suffering. Humanitarian needs are only growing, and the grief of the Syrian people is at an all-time high.

In this context, the A3 once again welcomes the Syrian Government's decision to extend emergency measures, including the opening of the two additional crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai until 13 August 2023. We take note of the Government's decision to grant the United Nations and its specialized agencies authorization to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing to deliver humanitarian aid to civilians in need in north-west Syria, in full cooperation and coordination with

the Syrian Government, for a period of six months, starting on 13 July 2023. We are counting on the determination of the United Nations and the Security Council to do everything possible to stabilize and improve the humanitarian and living conditions of the Syrian people. We must continue our efforts to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid through all modalities to those in need throughout the Syrian territories.

We note that the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/464) underscores the importance of the cross-border operations. As many as 1,068 trucks have crossed into north-western Syria from Türkiye via the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. During the reporting period, 127 trucks re-entered Syria through the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border-crossing points. The United Nations has carried out 116 inter-agency cross-border missions in the north-west since 14 February. These humanitarian operations must continue without interruption, as access to services and supplies to meet the most basic needs and to ensure the survival of millions of people, 80 per cent of whom are women and children, depends on them.

Syria is facing a number of challenges that deserve to be highlighted: lack of reliable access to drinking water in sufficient quantities throughout the north of the country; chronic fuel and electricity shortages, against the backdrop of a cholera pandemic; the total collapse of basic social services, particularly for women and girls; and such increasing protection problems as gender-based violence, malnutrition and psychological disorders among children. Given the scale of these challenges, the international community must act urgently to respond in an effective and coordinated manner. The country's humanitarian situation must not be instrumentalized.

Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique note with interest the achievement of the \$398 million funding target for the emergency appeal for the earthquake in Syria. We also welcome the results of the seventh Brussels Conference on Syria and the region, held on 14 and 15 June, which recorded financial pledges of over \$4.9 billion dollars for 2023 and over \$1 billion dollars for 2024. We renew our appeal to the donors to honour their pledges.

On the political front, the A3 remains convinced that only a concerted political solution will enable the Syrian people to regain their peace, security, stability and dignity, which implies the cessation of hostilities,

the restoration of State authority over the entire Syrian territory and an inclusive good-faith dialogue involving all of Syrian society, including women, youth and minority groups. The current divisions within the Syrian political class and the crisis of confidence between the parties make the prospect of an intra-Syrian dialogue within the Constitutional Committee seem very remote. We urge all parties to set aside their differences and give fresh impetus to the political process. The A3 also encourages the role and support of regional players and all other States with influence on either side in the quest for peace and stability. The strong commitment and good faith of the countries in the region is fundamental to achieving this objective. In this regard, we welcome Syria's return to the Arab League.

We are convinced that resolution 2254 (2015) remains the main road map for achieving a political solution to the crisis in Syria, while respecting the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We remain deeply concerned by the persistence of hostilities, particularly in northern Syria. We reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire in the interests of the Syrian people and the stability of the region.

The parties to the conflict must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular by ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Cases of arbitrary detention by parties to the conflict are a violation of fundamental freedoms, and we urge all stakeholders to strictly respect the right of all to the freedom of expression.

The A3 remains concerned about the presence of foreign military forces on Syrian territory, which undermines regional and international security. We reiterate our position that Syria should not be used as a battleground for geopolitical rivalries.

The A3 reaffirms its support for the Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen. We appreciate his efforts to bring an end to the conflict that has been tearing Syria apart for over 12 years. The Syrian people continue to pay a heavy price. All the parties involved, and the international community as a whole, must do their utmost to tackle the humanitarian situation, setting aside all political considerations and guided solely by the interests of the Syrian people.

**Mr. Spasse** (Albania): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

As we have just heard, the humanitarian demands of Syria remain the largest worldwide. We anticipate a dramatic increase in needs, exacerbating an already immense humanitarian crisis resulting from more than 12 years of conflict in Syria. The funding of the humanitarian response plan is at an all-time low.

The cross-border authorization of Bab Al-Hawa was the lifeline for more than 4 million people in north-west Syria. The use of the veto by Russia on the renewal of resolution 2672 (2023) was a terrible setback. The sovereign decision of the Syrian regime, with conditions, does not provide sufficient predictability for the United Nations and humanitarian partners to deliver humanitarian assistance in a timely and efficient manner. Syria remains an emergency, and the Al-Assad regime, with the complicity of Russia, has managed to politicize every humanitarian aspect of the crisis. There is no doubt — Russia is weaponizing humanitarian aid for political gain.

In support of the humanitarian imperative, we again underline the need to ensure humanitarian access via all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line humanitarian aid and early recovery. I reiterate Albania's firm position that humanitarian realities on the ground must drive us to find a solution through a Security Council resolution.

We deplore the lack of progress by the regime to allow the political transition in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which remains stalled despite the tireless efforts by the Special Envoy. By preventing the Constitutional Committee from reconvening and making substantial progress towards the constitutional framework for Syria, as Special Envoy Pedersen underlined, the Al-Assad regime is reconfirming its lack of goodwill and good faith.

We all know that the root cause of all suffering in Syria is political, and it can be alleviated only through a lasting political solution. Syrians have lost hope in the political process, and there is tremendous uncertainty about what the future holds. We remain convinced that respect for human rights and justice and ending impunity for serious crimes are indispensable for lasting peace in Syria. In that regard, we welcome the adoption, on 29 June, of General Assembly resolution 77/301, for the establishment of a new mechanism dedicated to clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria and for addressing the humanitarian imperative. We must prove to the people

of Syria that they have not been abandoned. They need help now more than ever.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Rajasingham for their contributions.

The war in Syria continues, as does the suffering of the Syrian people. Twelve million people have been displaced, millions of whom have found refuge in neighbouring countries or elsewhere, and 130,000 have disappeared. In that connection, France welcomes the adoption, on 29 June, of General Assembly resolution 77/301, establishing an independent international humanitarian institution to help the families of missing persons in Syria.

France is also concerned about the regional destabilization caused by the production and export network of Captagon. That is now one of the main financial resources of the Syrian regime, which has now become a narco-State.

France and Europe express their solidarity with the Syrian people in the face of this tragedy. Since 2011, France, the European Union and its member States have funded United Nations agencies and civil society actors to the tune of €30 billion in Syria and neighbouring countries. The seventh Brussels Conference on Syria, held on 14 and 15 June, mobilized €5.6 billion for 2023 and beyond. I should point out that over 90 per cent of the aid comes from Europe, the United States, Canada and Japan. Russia, for its part, provides virtually no aid, here or elsewhere. The countries of the region, despite the challenge this represents, are taking in refugees. It is our duty to help them.

Only a political solution can put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. While the earthquakes of 6 February have only worsened the humanitarian situation, Russia has not hesitated to take more than 4 million Syrians hostage by opposing the renewal of the cross-border aid mechanism. We support the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs to promote access to aid at a time when needs have never been so high.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our position — the humanitarian response must not and cannot replace a political settlement. A return to stability in Syria and the region will be possible only through a solution that meets the aspirations of all Syrians. Resolution 2254 (2015) is a road map with

clear parameters. The Syrian regime must commit to a political process as defined by that resolution, which was adopted unanimously by the Council. The regime must make concrete gestures so that a genuine political process can begin. No normalization, reconstruction or lifting of sanctions can be envisaged in the absence of a political transition within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). Incidentally, by blocking cross-border access a few days ago (see S/PV.9371), Russia at the same time blocked the mandate given to the United Nations to engage in early-recovery activities. France reaffirms its full support for the mediation led by Geir Pedersen and calls on all players to support his step-for-step approach.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I associate myself with the statement made by our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Brazil, and our co-penholder on the humanitarian issue.

I would like to add a few points in my national capacity on the political situation in Syria.

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen — not only for his briefing, but also and above all for his ongoing efforts in the implementation of his mandate.

Switzerland regrets that the regional and international dynamics that emerged in the aftermath of the earthquakes on 6 February have not yet led to a convergence of efforts to improve the political, security, humanitarian or economic situation in Syria. On the contrary, the current dynamics have unfortunately failed to de-escalate the military situation, improve humanitarian access or relaunch the political process.

We regret that the Council was unable to renew the mandate for cross-border humanitarian aid. We recall that not only allowing, but also facilitating the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid to civilians in need is an obligation under international humanitarian law. The United Nations and its partners must be able to continue to provide assistance to those in need.

Despite the current dynamics, we welcome the convening, on 16 August 2023, of the first meeting of the Contact Group set up on the sidelines of the 7 May meeting of the League of Arab States. We recall that the States parties to the Contact Group have expressed their willingness to support a step-for-step approach towards a political solution, in coordination with the efforts of the Special Envoy.

Switzerland once again stresses the relevance of the Council's resolution 2254 (2015) to achieving a just and comprehensive solution that ensures peace and security in Syria and the region. The relaunch of the work of the Constitutional Committee would give an important signal of support for the search for a concerted approach to peace. Switzerland remains ready to make Geneva the Organization's main headquarters in Europe, available to host meetings of the Constitutional Committee, as well as any other type of talks and initiatives aimed at promoting a lasting peace in Syria.

It is vital that the ceasefire is respected at the national level. Already affected by a humanitarian, social and economic situation that has never been so critical, civilian populations are still too often the victims of this armed conflict. According to the Secretary-General's latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363), Syria is one of the countries with the highest number of verified serious violations against children. All the parties to the conflict have committed violations against children such as recruitment, killing and maiming, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals. Those violations must stop immediately, and we welcome the Secretary-General's ongoing dialogue with the various parties to the conflict in that regard.

Switzerland calls on all the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, in particular measures to protect the civilian population. Respect for human rights is also essential to protecting the dignity, life and freedom of every individual. Switzerland would like to reiterate its full support for the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, whose work is fundamental to the fight against impunity.

**Mrs. Sánchez Izquierdo** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and by the Director for Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. Rajasingham. I welcome the presence of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye at today's meeting.

We are concerned about the lack of unity in the Security Council on the situation in Syria, at a time when the humanitarian crisis has worsened as a result of the protracted war and the effects of the February

earthquakes. My delegation reiterates the need to maintain formal access to ensure predictability, certainty and planning in the provision of humanitarian assistance, as established in previous Council resolutions on the humanitarian issue in Syria. We support the efforts of the Secretary-General, through the United Nations agencies, as the sole mediator capable of establishing a strict monitoring scheme that can contribute to increasing the transparency, efficiency and accountability of operations on the ground. We also support the dedicated work of the Special Envoy and the specialized agencies and partner organizations working on the ground. We call for ensuring that the treatment of refugees and displaced persons always complies with human rights law, especially with regard to voluntary, dignified and safe returns.

On 19 July, during the General Assembly's meeting on the implementation of its resolution 76/262 (see A/77/PV.90), Ecuador expressed its regret about the use of the veto on draft resolution S/2023/506 (see S/PV.9371). In that regard, we encourage the co-penholders, Switzerland and Brazil, to continue their efforts and deliberations to find a mechanism that would enable the Council to adopt a resolution ensuring cross-border humanitarian assistance and allowing the teams on the ground to fulfil their mandates, in accordance with the framework established by international humanitarian law. OCHA's figures reflect the urgency of returning to a dialogue so that humanitarian supplies entering north-west Syria can serve the 80 per cent or so of the people who depend on it, nearly all of them women and children.

We believe it is important to strengthen cooperation and the coordination of regional and United Nations actions to curb violent extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking, which affect the civilian population, especially women, children and people with disabilities, and we hope that the Special Envoy's negotiation efforts will lead to the reactivation of the Constitutional Committee.

We insist on the need for the Government of Syria to provide answers on the fate of missing persons and the situation of people who have been arbitrarily detained. The Council must continue to implement measures to put a definitive end to the violence, address the enormous humanitarian needs of the population and undertake inclusive political negotiations based on the principles of sovereignty, independence, unity and

territorial integrity, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. Xing Jisheng** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Rajasingham, the Director for Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for their briefings.

China supports the Special Envoy's efforts to continue advancing a Syrian-led and -owned political process, as mandated by resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome Syria's return to the League of Arab States. We support the Arab countries in their spirit of strength through unity, playing a greater and more constructive role in finding a political solution to the Syrian issue. Countries outside the region must fully respect the will and desires of the countries and peoples in the region, cease all rhetoric and actions that stand in the way of dialogue and reconciliation and create a favourable external environment for engagement and consultation. We are concerned about the security situation in Syria. The international community should take a zero-tolerance approach to all elements of terrorism on Syrian soil. One country has recently ramped up its illegal military presence in Syria, which is concerning. The illegal presence of foreign armed forces in Syria must be ended without delay.

China supports the international community in providing assistance to all Syrians who have humanitarian needs, provided that Syria's sovereignty and its Government's ownership are fully respected. We welcome the Syrian Government's recent sovereign decision to open the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing. OCHA has confirmed that this permission by the Syrian Government can indeed be a basis for the United Nations to legally conduct humanitarian operations. We encourage the United Nations to sort out any subsequent operational issues with the Syrian Government through dialogue and consultation. We also reiterate that the cross-border rescue mechanism was a temporary arrangement made under special circumstances, and there is a need to speed up the transition to cross-line assistance so that the cross-border mechanism can be phased out and eventually discontinued.

Fostering Syrian-owned capacity to ensure its socioeconomic recovery and development will go a long way to easing the country's humanitarian problems. To that end, it is essential to ensure the availability of adequate, balanced and sustainable funding to all parts

of Syria, further broaden the scope of early-recovery programmes and support sustainable development projects in key areas. Unilateral sanctions against Syria must be lifted without delay or preconditions.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings today.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the humanitarian situation that we have witnessed over the past two weeks and its repercussions for our brother people of Syria. The sudden and unexpected end of the cross-border aid delivery mechanism to Syria was shocking both for the international community and the Syrian people. Although we expected the mechanism to end eventually, given that it was always an exceptional and temporary solution, we had hoped that it would be terminated in coordination with the United Nations, so that humanitarian workers on the ground would have appropriate and sufficient time to plan gradually for future humanitarian operations.

In the circumstances, it will be important for the international community to take practical steps during this transitional stage to ensure that assistance is delivered to the Syrian people through all available means. In that context, the United Arab Emirates once again welcomes the Syrian Government's decision to grant the United Nations permission to deliver humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for a period of six months, especially considering that both sides have continued their constructive discussions on finding common ground and reaching an understanding on several related issues. The interests of the Syrian people must remain at the core of all humanitarian work.

In the meantime, we find it encouraging that aid is flowing easily through the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings. I also stress that the Council must continue to discuss the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis, despite the fact that the mechanism has not been renewed, with joint meetings on the political and humanitarian dossiers. We believe that is important, especially within the framework of the Council's work and its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. More than 15 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, half of them women and girls. We also underscore the importance of the Secretary-General's reports, which keep the Council informed about relevant developments.

In view of the continued deterioration of the humanitarian and security conditions in Al-Hol camp, we stress the need to find a sustainable and prompt solution to the situation there. We welcome Iraq's recent repatriation of a new group of about 200 of its citizens from Al-Hol. In addition, we stress the importance of supporting demining activities in Syria as part of early-recovery projects there, both to protect civilians from the danger posed by mines and to create the conditions necessary to ensure the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Turning to the political situation, we hope that the recent visits of Arab officials to Syria, especially from neighbouring countries, will help strengthen coordination and cooperation in addressing several issues of common interest to the countries of the region, including the return of refugees and the fight against terrorism and drugs. We look forward to continued Arab diplomatic efforts within the framework of the outcomes of the Jeddah Summit, and in close coordination with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, in order to pave the way towards a settlement of the Syrian crisis, which has witnessed no tangible progress for many years. We believe that empowering women in Syria and strengthening their participation at every stage of the peacebuilding process, especially in mediation and dialogue, are critical to ensuring that those efforts will be successful and sustainable.

While we stress the need to preserve the independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, we also stress the need for de-escalation across every region of the country. De-escalation will contribute to its security and stability and enhance regional security. As for the security situation, it remains a source of concern as Da'esh continues to carry out attacks in Syria, killing and injuring civilians and obstructing the efforts and imperilling the lives of humanitarian workers.

In conclusion, it is crucial to move from managing the Syrian crisis to resolving it. Fragmented approaches have been shown to be unsuccessful and will not achieve the progress we all desire.

**Ms. Gatt** (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director of Coordination Rajasingham for their briefings.

We agree with the sentiment expressed by the Special Envoy when he says that if progress cannot be made on ensuring the continued principled delivery of humanitarian support to Syria, what hope do we have

when it comes to the international cooperation needed on all aspects of the Syrian political file? The Council is holding its monthly meeting on Syria today against the backdrop of a failure to renew the humanitarian cross-border mechanism on 11 July (see S/PV.9371). All across the country, wholesale destruction, conflict, a lack of basic services in education and health and recent scorching temperatures and wildfires have further exacerbated the mounting humanitarian needs. However, while Syrians continue to face this cascade of deprivation and hunger, which exposes women and girls to disproportionate risks of sexual violence and vulnerability, the ability of the international community to deliver aid effectively has been called into question.

Russia's veto of draft resolution S/2023/506, ending the cross-border mechanism, and Damascus's offer of access to the United Nations with unacceptable conditions attached are worrisome developments. We continue to believe that such decisions create too much uncertainty at the present juncture in such a highly volatile context. Civilians and humanitarian aid workers on the ground need all the support, stability and predictability they can get right now, not unrealistic, eleventh-hour arrangements. The conditional offer of a short-term authorization by Damascus exposes Syrians in the north-west to the same interference in and manipulation of humanitarian aid they experienced before the creation of the cross-border mechanism. It is an attempt to obfuscate reality and contort international law in order to achieve a political objective.

The text presented by Brazil and Switzerland represented a well-crafted compromise. Following weeks of negotiations, the co-penholders struck a delicate balance that should have been acceptable to all sides. The renewal would have expanded humanitarian assistance, early-recovery projects, mine action and cross-line aid, in addition to supporting rehabilitation in various areas, enabling the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, all of it done in full accordance with international law and the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality and humanity. Malta reaffirms the need for the Council to come together once again to renew the cross-border mechanism in order to allow the continued delivery of principled humanitarian assistance to the people most in need in the north-west. We urge the Russian Federation to engage in negotiations to find a workable outcome.

On the political front, Malta remains concerned about the continued lack of progress on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). While we have taken note of the decision of the League of Arab States to invite Syria to resume its participation in meetings, it is critical that actions taken at the global level, including those agreed on by the Council, be supported at the regional level. Progress on resolution 2254 (2015) is the only way to achieve a just political solution and lasting peace in Syria. Malta once again calls for the Constitutional Committee to reconvene. Meaningful progress must be made to benefit the lives of the millions of Syrians who have continued to endure more than a decade of conflict. Amid the current situation across the country, we reiterate that the conditions are still not in place for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. It will be crucial for Damascus to cease its arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture and ill treatment of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that the Council has the ability — and the responsibility — to find a compromise that can deliver for the Syrian people. We also stress that the Council must do so while maintaining the principles of humanitarian action, which safeguard the operational independence of the United Nations and of its specialized agencies and humanitarian partners.

**Mr. Ishikane (Japan):** I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings.

It has been nearly two weeks since Russia vetoed draft resolution S/2023/506, which would have extended the cross-border mechanism for aid delivery. With needs in Syria at an all-time high, such an outrageous act politicizes humanitarian assistance and is a painful betrayal of the Syrian people, including women and children, for whom the continued provision of aid is a matter of life and death. Japan continues to believe that cross-border assistance provided under a Security Council resolution is the best way to ensure the necessary predictability, transparency and accountability required by donors and humanitarian actors, including the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all of which in turn facilitates the early-recovery assistance that the people of Syria so desperately need.

The fact is that Council members have continued to make every possible effort to adopt a new resolution

extending the mechanism under the coordination of the co-penholders, Switzerland and Brazil, but so far there has been no breakthrough. The United Nations operations there remain suspended, and cross-line assistance has not yielded sufficient results. As we stand idly by, the situation on the ground worsens by the day. In the circumstances, the delivery of assistance to the Syrian people, who are surviving daily hardships, must be the top priority. For that reason, Japan is extending its assistance not only through the cross-border mechanism but to all parts of Syria. We therefore fully support Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths' efforts to explore options with the Syrian Government on specific modalities for the timely resumption of assistance via Bab Al-Hawa, pending a new Security Council resolution. We strongly encourage such efforts so that aid can be delivered without constraints and at the same scale and speed as before.

The recent decision by the Syrian Government to allow United Nations cross-border aid via Bab Al-Hawa includes impractical restrictions on humanitarian actors. We would like to ask the Government to show maximum flexibility in dealing with what is a purely humanitarian issue. If an agreement on such modalities can be reached between both parties and a certain level of transparency ensured, including through a monitoring mechanism, that would be an important step for donor countries in encouraging them to continue their assistance to Syria. In that regard, we want to continue to receive the Secretary-General's bimonthly report. Furthermore, the United Nations funding scheme for NGOs needs to be continued, pending the Council's adoption of a new draft resolution.

Lastly, we must also consider the country's long-term future. While we are aware of Arab efforts in the region to advance the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015), the political track remains frozen, including the Constitutional Committee. Without a fundamental political solution to the Syrian crisis, the impoverishment of almost 90 per cent of Syrians living below the poverty line will continue to deepen, and the issues of refugees, the internally displaced and missing persons will remain difficult to resolve.

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

I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings and for the work of their teams on the ground.

Two weeks ago, Russia vetoed the nine-year-old United Nations mandate to provide humanitarian assistance to the 4.1 million people in need in north-west Syria (see S/PV.9371). Those 4.1 million people are now living in a state of limbo, not knowing if food and medicines will reach them in the coming weeks and months. As we have heard, during those two weeks not a single truck has crossed the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, where 85 per cent of United Nations assistance had previously transited. Not one truck. Although Syria has said that it has given the United Nations permission, the conditions that Al-Assad has set out make it unsafe to do so. The United Nations has been clear that the conditions that Syria has set out are inoperable and unworkable. They also undermine the neutrality, impartiality and independence of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai that the United Nations now has to use instead are currently open for only another 21 days and are not set up for the capacity that was using Bab Al-Hawa. When I was there myself on 8 June I saw 60 trucks cross, which is in contrast to the total of 18 that the United Nations has managed to get across in the past week. Russia and Syria's claims that they are driven purely by humanitarian considerations are therefore simply not supported by the facts on ground. North-western Syria is an active conflict zone where all parties, including the regime and Russia, continue to launch attacks, with civilians caught in the crossfire.

The United Kingdom supports the ongoing discussions between the United Nations and Syria on lifting the conditions and letting the aid flow. It is critical for humanitarian access to be negotiated with all conflict actors, and to ensure that aid can reach the most vulnerable in accordance with humanitarian principles. The lack of a Security Council mandate also affects the longer-term early-recovery work that the Council has agreed is essential across Syria. We therefore continue to believe that action by the Council, with politics set aside, is the best way to ensure that access can continue to those who need it. Meanwhile, we urge Syria to live up to its obligations under international law and engage with the United Nations in good faith. Ultimately, the people of Syria, and the wider region, need a sustainable end to this conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore encourage a resumption of Constitutional

Committee talks in Geneva, without further delay or excuses.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Against the backdrop of the serious and ongoing escalation in our region, Israel's occupation forces have continued their aggression against the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and their criminal practices against our populations in the occupied Syrian Golan. On 19 July, they carried out a new air strike by launching a barrage of missiles from the northern occupied Syrian Golan that targeted areas around Damascus and resulted in injuries to two soldiers and material damage. Furthermore, they once again violated resolution 497 (1981) by planning the demolition of the remaining homes in the village of Ayn Fit — destroyed in 1967 by the occupying Power, which forced its population to flee — and transforming the area into a military position for Israeli forces.

Syria condemns all of those barbaric acts by Israel and urges the Security Council to do the same and to fulfil its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. It should act promptly to stop the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation authorities and launch a serious process for ensuring their accountability and the prevention of such incidents in the future. It is deplorable that the Council continues to be paralysed when it comes to reacting to such violations, owing to the protection that the United States provides to Israel. The unconditional support it gives Israel should make it responsible for such serious violations of international law, international humanitarian law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

While all of the Security Council resolutions on Syria reiterate the need to respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, certain Council members continue to seriously violate them. In that regard, I would like to draw members' attention to the fact that my delegation has informed the Council that a delegation of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs illegally and unofficially entered Syrian territory and met with representatives of the so-called self-administered Syrian Democratic Forces and their separatist militia. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns that irresponsible behaviour a flagrant violation of its

sovereignty and evidence of the direct involvement of the Government of France, a permanent member of the Council, in supporting terrorist groups and separatist militias and their devastating role in Syria.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, the Syrian Arab Republic is committed to guaranteeing the provision of humanitarian aid to those in need in the north-western part of our country. Given the intransigence of certain members of the Security Council and their refusal to respond to Syria's legitimate and repeatedly expressed concerns regarding the cross-border mechanism — thereby preventing the extension of the implementation of resolution 2672 (2023) — the Syrian Government made a sovereign decision to grant permission to the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing in order to provide that part of the country with humanitarian assistance for a period of six months starting on 13 July. We affirm that we have not imposed any conditions. We are fully open to cooperating bilaterally with the United Nations generally, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in particular, with regard to establishing parameters for action based on the permission we have granted. That should ensure cooperation and coordination between the two parties, based on the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance and reiterated in General Assembly resolution 46/182, and on strengthening our partnership in order to improve the humanitarian response, based primarily on respect for the sovereignty of the State concerned and its approval. Complementary actions via the three border crossings approved by the Syrian Government, based on Syria's sovereign decision and the Syrian Government's internal crossing lines through Sarmada and Saraqib, will ensure the provision of sufficient humanitarian assistance to meet the people's needs. However, that demands that maximum pressure be put on the terrorist organizations and their commanders in north-western Syria if we are to ensure that the humanitarian aid can reach its destination. In addition, necessary and predictable funding must be provided for the humanitarian operations.

My delegation reiterates that improving the humanitarian situation requires that sustainable solutions for supporting the Syrian people be provided, particularly following the devastating earthquake of 6 February. They will reduce Syrians' reliance on life-saving humanitarian assistance and foster their resilience, while creating the conditions needed for their

safe and dignified return to their towns and villages, including by launching early-recovery projects, funding efforts for demining and removing explosive devices and immediately and unconditionally lifting the inhumane and immoral unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States and the European Union on Syria and its people. According to the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the negative effects of unilateral coercive measures on human rights, issued at the beginning of this month,

“The comprehensiveness of existing unilateral sanctions regimes against the Syrian Arab Republic and the growing overcompliance, in particular following the imposition in 2019 of the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act by the United States of America, have placed the country in a straitjacket with serious adverse effects on a broad spectrum of human rights” (*A/HRC/54/23/Add.1, summary*).

The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/419) shows that the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people have increased and that their access to basic services is even more restricted, especially with regard to the deterioration of medical care and a serious water crisis that has been followed by a cholera epidemic. The mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Damascus has informed us that it was recently able to visit the Ghwayran prison in north-eastern Syria, an area controlled by separatist militias affiliated with the United States forces that are present there illegally. The ICRC noted the gravity of the situation in the prison, where a majority of the detainees are suffering from acute malnutrition and tuberculosis. The ICRC warned of the spread of disease, not just within the prison itself and the surrounding area but more broadly throughout Syria and beyond its borders.

We are particularly concerned about the continued suffering of our citizens in the city of Al-Hasakah and all the populated areas along the Allouk water station pipeline, caused by cuts to the water supply carried out by the occupying forces, terrorist groups and separatist militias along with their sponsors. The cuts have deprived more than a million Syrians in the area of drinking water. That is a war crime and a crime against humanity. It poses a serious threat to public health, especially owing to the current unprecedentedly high temperatures. Syria calls on the United Nations and its agencies to take immediate action to ensure a resumption of water supplies from the Allouk station

by allowing technical teams to reach the station and supervise the work of ensuring that it is functioning sustainably. It is an outrage that some delegations have ignored those facts and have attempted to politicize the discussion and undermine the Syrian Government efforts rather than working urgently to resolve those vital humanitarian issues.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its demand for an end to the illegal presence of foreign forces, especially those of the United States, on its territories. We insist that they stop interfering in Syria’s internal affairs and supporting terrorist groups that continue to pillage Syria’s natural wealth and resources, especially oil. We also call for the complete, immediate and unconditional lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people, which constitute a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of the Security Council’s resolutions on Syria.

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

**Mrs. Özgür (Türkiye):** We would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

The Security Council is meeting for the fourth time this month to address the humanitarian situation in Syria. Meanwhile, 4.1 million Syrians who depend on United Nations cross-border aid to survive continue their weeks’ long wait to see if that life-saving aid will or will not continue to flow. As one of Syria’s immediate neighbours and the main partner of the United Nations for cross-border assistance, we would like to emphasize once again that in the current circumstances, the Security Council-mandated cross-border humanitarian mechanism is the most viable, transparent, impartial and predictable method of aid delivery to north-western Syria. We therefore regret that the mandate expired two weeks ago and that the Security Council has not yet been able to agree on its renewal. Adding to our concern is the fact that this is happening at a time when the humanitarian needs in Syria, which the earthquakes exacerbated, are now at their highest level since the conflict in the country began. The cross-border mechanism is now more essential than ever to addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria effectively and to maintaining critical regional stability.

We share the concerns expressed by the United Nations about the Syrian regime's conditional and time-limited permission for the use of the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing. We underline that the absence of a Council-mandated cross-border mechanism will affect the predictability, accountability and effectiveness of aid deliveries. The lack of predictability, which defines the situation today, will make it harder to secure funding for humanitarian activities in Syria. Predictability is also key in the planning and execution stages of humanitarian action, without which early-recovery and resilience projects, for instance, will also be jeopardized.

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria is at its highest. Now is not the time to risk the access of millions of Syrians to uninterrupted and predictable humanitarian assistance in a safe, transparent and accountable manner. We therefore renew our call on the members of the Security Council to engage in further efforts to reach a practical and realistic consensus that would ensure the continuation of the United Nations cross-border aid mechanism.

The deeply worrisome humanitarian situation in Syria constantly reminds us of the increasingly heavy toll of the ongoing conflict on the Syrian people. Efforts towards the political settlement of the conflict urgently need to be stepped up. The international community, especially those countries with influence, should act now and urge the regime to take concrete steps in the political process. A lasting solution to the Syrian conflict will be possible only with the participation of all Syrian parties in the political track. Therefore, it is essential that the Syrian opposition be included in efforts towards a political solution to the conflict.

As Special Envoy Pedersen underlined, the Constitutional Committee — the most effective platform that brings together the Syrian opposition and the regime — should continue its work in a way that will produce tangible results. The revitalization of the political process is also among the objectives of our engagement. Similarly, we expect our friends in the region to also keep in mind the importance of the political process in resolving the Syrian conflict as regards their engagement with the regime and to provide encouragement in that direction.

Terrorism emanating from Syria is a major threat that requires an urgent solution. Türkiye is among the countries undertaking the greatest efforts in the fight

against Da'esh and was effective in ending its territorial control in Syria. Türkiye also continues its fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) terrorist organization with the same determination. The PKK/YPG terrorist organization has conducted more than 70 attacks on our borders, in particular from Tell Rifaat, since the beginning of this year alone. Like any country whose borders and citizens are attacked, Türkiye will not remain silent and reserves its inherent right to self-defence.

Before concluding, I would also like to draw attention to the ongoing ceasefire violations in Idlib, where an escalation coupled with current difficult humanitarian circumstances may expose a new risk of mass migration, which must be avoided. Therefore, we would like to emphasize the importance of maintaining the ceasefire in Idlib.

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

**Mr. Irvani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Special Envoy Pederson and Mr. Rajasingham, Director of Coordination at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their updates and informative briefings.

The escalating humanitarian situation in Syria demands urgent and impartial humanitarian aid. The delivery of assistance to all regions of Syria, devoid of any political influence, is paramount to saving lives and reaching the most vulnerable individuals. Despite the Security Council's failure to reach an agreement on a draft resolution for a cross-border mechanism, the United Nations has continued to use all available access modalities to reach people in need. In that context, Bab Al-Salam, and Bab Al-Rai continue to be in use for the cross-border movement of United Nations aid delivery, which has significantly improved direct and efficient access to affected individuals, enabling enhanced humanitarian operations.

In the meantime, the Syrian Government, in a sovereign decision on 13 July, granted permission for a six-month period to the United Nations and its relevant specialized agencies to utilize the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point, thereby creating a legal basis for delivering humanitarian assistance to the north-west region of the country.

Respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity throughout the process is crucial in addressing

the humanitarian crisis effectively. As such, preventing the diversion of aid by terrorist organizations in the north-west region and ensuring the transparent and non-discriminatory distribution of aid are essential aspects that need careful consideration.

Iran commends the tireless efforts of United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners in their work towards alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. In addition to providing immediate relief, aid operations in Syria must focus on infrastructure restoration, reconstruction initiatives and overall economic recovery. Such an approach has the potential to create an environment favourable for the voluntary return of refugees and displaced people to their homes. Given the burden that neighbouring countries, particularly Lebanon, have carried during the crisis, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in Syria should not be politicized or used as leverage against the Syrian Government.

To that end, it is imperative that international donors fulfil their obligations and provide the necessary funding for the activities and programmes of the United Nations. That support is crucial for the implementation of projects outlined in the humanitarian response plan and the strategic framework for cooperation between Syria and the United Nations. Those projects are aimed at revitalizing the economy and facilitating the dignified and voluntary return of refugees and displaced individuals to their homes.

The continuation of unilateral sanctions against Syrians is a key impediment to improving Syria's humanitarian and economic plight. We firmly reiterate our call for an immediate end to those illegal and cruel measures, which have damaged the economy and people's daily lives while limiting the Government's ability to provide essential services. The recent report by the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, dated 3 July 2023, sheds light on the dire

situation in Syria resulting from unilateral sanctions and overcompliance (A/HRC/54/23/Add.1). The findings, based on Ms. Douhan's visit to Syria from 31 October to 10 November 2022, highlight the severe damage caused to the economy, leading to grave human rights violations and immense humanitarian challenges. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/419), submitted in accordance with resolution 2672 (2023), also underlined the devastating consequences of sanctions on humanitarian relief delivery and access to essential services.

Iran remains committed to cooperating with its partners in the Astana process to achieve long-term and sustainable normalization in Syria. We continue our support for the ongoing Syria-Türkiye dialogue, while recognizing its crucial role in those broader efforts. We support the resumption of Constitutional Committee meetings at the earliest opportunity to continue the progress made towards resolving the crisis. In that context, we remain committed in our support for the Special Envoy's efforts and his engagement with all parties.

Iran once more condemns the continuous acts of aggression and military attacks by the Israeli regime against Syria, particularly those that target civilian infrastructure, as well as the persistent occupation of the Syrian Golan. The Security Council must address the malicious activities and acts of aggression by the Israeli regime, which clearly contravene international law and international humanitarian law and violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Moreover, those malign activities not only destabilize the region, but also exacerbate tensions.

In conclusion, Iran reaffirms its commitment to continue supporting the Government and people of Syria in overcoming the threat of terrorism. We stand ready to assist them in rebuilding their country, ensuring its unity and preserving its territorial integrity.

*The meeting rose at noon.*