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New York

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Issahaku
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland	Mrs. Chanda
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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 Ms. Lubna Alkanawati, Deputy Director of Women Now for Development.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: The Syrian people both inside and outside Syria continue to suffer acutely from the conflict in all its dimensions, and the absence of a genuine political process is deeply detrimental to their well-being. One latest indicator of suffering is the further collapsing economy. A very bad economic situation has become even worse. In three months, the Syrian pound has lost more than 80 per cent of its value. Last week, it hit an all-time low of 15,500 to the United States dollar at the unofficial market rate. Remember that, in 2011, the Syrian pound was 47 to the dollar. Prices are now spiralling out of control for essential goods, such as food, medicine, fuel and basic commodities. Every part of Syria and every community have been affected. Many are struggling to provide meals to their families. We take note of some of the steps taken to respond to the sudden deterioration, including doubling minimum State salaries to roughly \$13 a month. Yet a monthly food basket in June cost at least \$81, according to the World Food Programme, a figure that has gone up by roughly 70 per cent in just a year and is no doubt higher now in late August. Those trends speak for themselves.

The tragic reality is that, for as long as the violent conflict continues and the political process is blocked, the suffering of the Syrian people will simply get worse. Syria cannot fix its economy while it is in a state of conflict. And that applies to the many other crises that

are ravaging Syria: the crisis of displacement, of the detained, abducted and missing, of human rights abuses, of terrorism, of hostilities and violent conflict and of the de facto division of Syria undermining its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Only with movement on resolution 2254 (2015), addressing the political crisis at the heart of the conflict, can we begin to address the many crises afflicting the country. Even starting with some incremental steps on resolution 2254 (2015) could create a floor beneath the unsustainable free fall and initiate a process of trust-building and healing.

Let me echo the Secretary-General in welcoming the understanding reached on the continued use, for the next six months, of the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to millions of people in need in north-west Syria. I also welcome the extension of authorization for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months, as well as consent to cross the lines within Syria at Sarmada and Saraqib for the delivery of assistance for the next six months. It is indeed essential that the United Nations and its partners continue providing cross-border humanitarian assistance at the necessary scale and in a principled manner that allows for engagement with all parties for the purposes of seeking humanitarian access and in a manner that safeguards the United Nations operational independence. We also need to redouble efforts to secure sufficient humanitarian resources at a time when funding is more stretched than ever. This year's humanitarian response plan is funded at 25 per cent, and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan at roughly 10 per cent. We need support for all pillars, including enhancing early recovery in the humanitarian response plan and for refugees and host countries. It remains critical that any adverse effects of sanctions that could aggravate the predicament of ordinary Syrians be avoided and mitigated. The full use of existing humanitarian exemptions and active engagement by sanctioning States to counter overcompliance are essential.

We must not forget that, despite the broad military stalemate since March 2020, the violent conflict continues, causing civilian deaths and destruction on all sides in Syria. The past month saw: air strikes attributed to Israel near Damascus; reports of pro-Government air strikes in north-west Syria, an area which also saw attacks, including attempted drone attacks by listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham

on Syrian Government positions, as well as front-line clashes and exchanges of artillery; attacks claimed by Da'esh during the Ashura commemoration near the Sayyidah Zainab shrine and later on a bus carrying Syrian Government forces near Al-Mayadin; reports of strikes on a United States military base in Deir ez-Zor; reports of Turkish drone strikes in north and north-east Syria; an attack by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on a Turkish military base in Azaz; reports of clashes between factions in areas under the control of the SDF; reports of clashes and tensions in the south, in Dara'a, Tafas and As-Suwayda; and a strike by the international coalition on the radical group Hurras Al-Din in Al-Bab.

I continue to call for a genuine and sustained calm that all key Syrian and international players work to support, so as to build a nationwide ceasefire; a cooperative approach to addressing the real threat posed by proscribed terrorist groups; and full respect for international humanitarian law. The central importance of protecting civilians and upholding international law was brought home again by the dark commemoration this past week of 10 years since the shocking chemical weapons attacks in the suburbs of Damascus.

As Council members know, at present it is difficult to see that conditions are in place to bring about a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. But — and I emphasize this — I strongly believe that the status quo is untenable and that there are things that can be done to advance the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

I welcome the fact that reconvening the Constitutional Committee is a clear point of consensus among many key actors. It is important that the Committee resume, continue, deepen and gradually build some trust and move forward on substance — a first move of many. I and my team are fully engaged in the effort to unblock the impasse and find a way forward on substance and working methods.

During the reporting period, the Arab contact group met in Cairo with the Syrian Foreign Minister and expressed its aspiration to see the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee in the Sultanate of Oman with United Nations facilitation before the end of the year. That is one of a number of alternative venues that has been suggested for the Constitutional Committee. Let me stress that I continue to seek to facilitate consensus to overcome the issues that have prevented the Constitutional Committee from meeting in Geneva and to ensure that it resumes and makes

credible progress. Earlier today, I spoke with the Syrian Foreign Minister, as well as with the head of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, and I look forward to continuing those discussions. I also look forward to briefing the middle third civil society participants on any consensus that may emerge.

Let me just add that I continue to welcome enhanced attention from the region on Syria. In the past few days, I have spoken with the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and had contact with senior Turkish officials. Of course, I will continue to work with Arab players, the Astana players and the Western players too — all of whom have contributions to make towards supporting a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process. It is a simple fact of Syria that no one actor or group of actors can determine the outcome of the conflict or bring about the kind of steps needed for a political solution to emerge. A political solution will be possible only with steps from a broad range of different players and genuine verification too.

The political process must be much more than just the Constitutional Committee, as Council members well know. I have long sought to bring about movement incrementally towards a safe, calm and neutral environment in Syria — something that obviously overlaps heavily with the question of refugees and the internally displaced. That was also an issue highlighted when the Arab contact group met last week. It remains to be seen whether the Syrian Government is ready to do more to address the very real and continuing protection concerns. And for their part, donors could do more to address the concerns all Syrians have about basic services and livelihoods. A step-for-step dynamic in that regard could begin to change realities on the ground for all Syrians, including the displaced, and build confidence and political space for a broader set of issues related to resolution 2254 (2015). The close coordination of the Syrian authorities with the United Nations would be a cornerstone in that regard.

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of having an in-depth exchange with the Truth and Justice Charter representatives, who have been among the key drivers towards the General Assembly's decision to create the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (resolution 77/301). For those families and victims, the decision is a bittersweet milestone. It underlines the momentous scale of the problem: tens of thousands of men, women and children are detained or missing, with ongoing abductions

and arbitrary detentions still happening across the country. They told me how families continue to learn about their loved ones' deaths in custody only when civil registry records are updated, after having waited years with hopes of seeing their loved ones return. On previous occasions, they also relayed the risks of persecution and harassment and extortion that they face in their struggle to seek information about their loved ones. Syrians have the right to be provided full and transparent information about the fate and whereabouts of the detained and missing. We will continue to consult widely on that and other issues with Syrian civil society and Syrian women, including through the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, to ensure that their legitimate aspirations are understood and ultimately met.

I am also pleased to report to the Council that the process of seeking new members for the Syrian Women's Advisory Board through a process of rotation has begun, and we look forward to concluding this process in the coming months. Existing members of the Women's Advisory Board have provided sound advice, and I remain extremely grateful for their efforts.

It is deeply troubling that, for over a year, the intra-Syrian political process has been in deep freeze. A political process is the right of the Syrian people — they are entitled to chart their own destiny. And a political process is a necessity. Syria is a country and people remain divided. There is no military victory on the horizon for any one actor, and the terrible effects of conflict continue to cascade across the region. We are all paying a heavy price for the conflict — first and foremost the Syrian people, most of whom have lost close to everything in this past decade, but also the region and the international community at large. As international attention and funding for Syria wane, the situation will become even more unsustainable.

The only path out of this is a political process that involves the Syrian parties themselves, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Alkanawati.

Ms. Alkanawati: I thank you, Madam President, for inviting me to speak today and for prioritizing the voices of civil society and survivors of war crimes.

I am at this meeting today to speak to the Security Council about the political situation in Syria, to shed

light on grave human rights violations that Council members are aware of owing to the incredible efforts of brave Syrian men and women who documented those violations and briefed the Council and other international bodies time and time again.

In response to those incredible efforts, the Security Council has afforded war criminals impunity, with many countries now normalizing relations with the Syrian regime, warmly welcoming Bashar Al-Assad, the main perpetrator of war crimes and the man who turned Syria into a narco-State, back to the diplomatic stage.

I have witnessed and survived many of those violations. I survived a mustard gas attack on Harasta and witnessed the Syrian regime's chemical weapons massacre in Ghouta in 2013. I lived under the regime's siege of Ghouta, completely cut off from all services at a time when even obtaining a loaf of bread was a battle. Starvation and dire economic conditions were the main features of that period. The regime intentionally crushed the area with no regard for the lives of the people living there. It is no wonder that the same regime does not care that 90 per cent of Syrians today are living below the poverty line. The conditions have driven brave men and women to take to the streets to demand change. I understand their pain very well and admire their courage in being willing to protest today under the threat of a very real risk of death, detention, torture or disappearance.

Over the past 12 years, 100,000 people have been detained or forcibly disappeared, the majority of them at the hands of the Syrian regime. But the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other armed forces have also used those practices as a weapon of war. Detainees are subjected to torture and rape and denied food, health services and visits. Thousands have been killed. The families of disappeared persons are waiting in anguish for any news about their missing loved ones, not knowing whether they are alive or dead. The United Nations Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, newly established with a view to uncovering their fate, is a positive step, the result of an effort led by brave women. It is now the Council's duty to ensure that the Syrian regime collaborates with it to reveal the fate of all who are missing in Syria.

Today I am a refugee in France. I wish I could go back to Syria and stand with the brave men and women protesting in As-Suwayda, Jaramana, Tartus and other areas, but I cannot, because I know that if I return to

Syria I will end up detained, tortured or killed. Today Syrian refugees in Türkiye and Lebanon fear for their lives as both countries are escalating their deportations of refugees to Syria, putting them at risk of grave human rights violations that run counter to their State commitments under international law. It is the duty of Council members to pressure host countries to protect refugees. My country is not safe. The conditions for the dignified, safe and voluntary return of refugees do not exist right now.

Many efforts are being made by the international community, including the Council, to secure humanitarian aid and cross-border access, document war crimes and more, but while they are important, they are treating only the symptoms, and the root causes of the Syrian crisis remain. There is one way out of the situation, which is a real political process that meets the demands of the Syrians and leads to a political transition. The United Nations-backed Constitutional Committee has failed to produce any tangible outcome, largely due to the Syrian regime's intentional and systematic disruption and to fading international support and commitment. The political and peace processes cannot and should not be reduced to mere constitutional debates. Accountability and justice are an essential step in any peace agreement. As a human rights defender and a feminist, I demand accountability for all the perpetrators of human rights violations and for all crimes committed by parties to the conflict. The political process should prioritize the release of all detainees. We need to activate a wider political process, ensuring a political transition at the centre within a clear timeline. That cannot happen without a strong international commitment to the process capable of countering the dominance of the Syrian regime's allies Russia and Iran over Syria's future. In addition, any political process must ensure the participation of Syrians from all sectors and parts of the country, including civil society, survivors and survivor-led groups. Women's participation must not be a box-checking exercise for the Special Envoy. An inclusive approach is vital. It is not enough to consult Syrian women. Our full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making and policy formation must be ensured.

Twelve years ago, the streets of Syria were filled with hope for change. We were part of a revolution demanding democracy, dignity and freedom. We were met with terrible brutality and abandoned by the international community. But despite all of that,

Syrians are still demanding change. They are showing unbelievable courage, and I am inspired by them to speak out today. Right now, as I speak here, Syrians are in the streets protesting, saying the same words that we said 12 years ago. It is time for Al-Assad to leave, so that we can have a chance to build a new country based on freedom, equality and democracy. It is now the turn of the members of the Security Council to show us courage.

The President: I thank Ms. Alkanawati for her briefing.

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

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for providing an overview of the political situation in the country. We also listened carefully to Ms. Alkanawati, who long ago lost her connection to Syria. I think it would probably be hard to find something further from the truth than the fabrications and claims that we have just heard from her. We regret that the United States presidency has decided to turn our meeting into a farce and a useless anti-Syrian performance.

We still see no alternative to advancing the political settlement process in Syria, led and implemented by the Syrians themselves with the assistance of the United Nations, in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015) and with respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the country. In that regard, we believe firmly in the need to continue the direct intra-Syrian dialogue, for which the primary platform remains the Constitutional Committee. At the same time, we continue to believe that fundamental decisions on the modalities of the further work of the Constitutional Committee and the venue for the next rounds of consultations should be made by the Syrians themselves without external interference. They should determine that platform in cooperation with the Special Envoy and in coordination with the Astana-format guarantor countries, Russia, Iran and Türkiye. We support the Special Envoy's proposal for holding such meetings in Oman.

Progress on the Syrian political settlement track is also particularly necessary now because the tensions in the situation remain, with the main security threats for both Syria and the entire region continuing to be related to the persistence of large-scale hotbeds of terrorism.

On 10 August, in Deir ez-Zor governorate in eastern Syria, Islamic State terrorists attacked a bus carrying Syrian Arab Republic soldiers. Several dozen people were killed and injured as a result of the attack. We strongly condemn that terrorist act and express our solidarity with the leadership and people of the Syrian Arab Republic in their fight against terrorism. I would like to stress once again that terrorist threats to Syrians emanate from areas outside of the control of the country's Government. At the same time, one of the main destabilizing factors remains the illegal United States military presence in the trans-Euphrates region and around Al-Tanf in south-eastern Syrian Arab Republic, where the active recruitment and training of fighters for various terrorist groups, including Da'esh, is under way.

Against that backdrop, the Western States' flirtation with the terrorist elements and attempts to use them for their own geopolitical purposes does not stand up to any scrutiny. Washington's policy aimed at maintaining the de facto occupation of vast areas in north-eastern Syria, which are rich in oil, gas and agricultural resources, and at continuing the illegitimate sanctions pressure on Damascus is leading to a further deterioration of the social and economic situation and contributes to mobilizing the extremist underground in Syria.

In that connection, we stand in solidarity with the legitimate demands of the Syrian authorities for the withdrawal of all military contingents illegally present in the country's territory. We believe that achieving sustainable stabilization in the Syrian Arab Republic is possible only through an end to the foreign military presence in violation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the unconditional cessation of regular air strikes by the Israeli Air Force, the most recent of which hit the suburbs of Damascus shortly before today's meeting — the twenty-second such attack since the beginning of this year. Such actions, in violation of the sovereignty of Syria and neighbouring Arab countries, in addition to the lack of any proper response from United Nations leadership, are deeply regrettable and condemnable.

We believe that the return of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Arab family and the mutual steps towards restoring relations with Türkiye contribute to the overall improvement of the situation in the Middle East and to swiftly overcoming the consequences of the Syrian crisis. In that context, we are convinced that the persistent attempts by Western countries to hinder

those natural processes are counterproductive. We consider such unconstructive steps as interference in the sovereign decisions of States and as a politicization of purely humanitarian issues, such as facilitating the return of refugees, whose host countries — Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye — have been clear about the limits of their capacity to further accommodate them. Meanwhile, western donors, who loudly lament the misfortunes of the Syrians, in reality stubbornly refuse to help them to return to their homeland, preferring to pay for their stay in host countries. We see that as yet another example of the double standards of our Western colleagues.

For our part, we believe it is necessary to ensure the fundamental right of return of refugees, as stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015), provided that such efforts are carried out in strict coordination with Damascus.

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

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his important update and commend his efforts in search of peace and stability in Syria. We listened with attention to the briefing by Ms. Lubna Alkanawati.

The A3 expresses its concern about the paralysis of the country's political process, despite the consensus on the importance of reconvening the meetings of the small body of the Constitutional Committee. In that regard, we welcome the proposal by the contact group of the League of Arab States to hold the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Oman as a step in the right direction and call for consensus among key stakeholders on the various proposed venues for the resumption of the Committee's meetings as soon as possible. The A3 underscores the need for the parties to build trust and deepen discussions on substantive issues in order to improve the prospects of a fruitful dialogue within the Constitutional Committee. Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique therefore urge all the parties to set aside their differences and give new impetus to the political process.

The threat posed by terrorist acts and the prevalence of arrests, forced disappearances and torture continue to undermine efforts towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. As the world witnesses 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 A3 holds the view that the presence of foreign military forces undermines regional and international security, and we reiterate our position that Syria should not be used as a battleground for geopolitical rivalries.

The strong commitment and good faith of the countries in the region are essential. In that regard, we reiterate our appreciation for Syria's return to the League of Arab States. We believe that that path encourages a diplomatic strategy for resolving the Syrian conflict by signalling a willingness to engage with Syria. It may also contribute to the promotion of improved relations among Arab countries, acting as a bridge between diverse regional actors. 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 country.

The A3 remains convinced that the solution to the conflict in Syria lies in the hands of the Syrians themselves and that peace can be achieved through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned genuine, comprehensive and inclusive dialogue that produces consensus. That process must be carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. Needless to say, a political solution to the conflict is the only desirable alternative. To that end, it requires necessarily the cessation of hostilities, the restoration of State authority over the entire Syrian territory and an inclusive good-faith dialogue involving all segments and actors of Syrian society, including women, young people and minority groups.

To conclude, we reaffirm our full support for Special Envoy Pedersen and his relentless efforts, including his step-for-step process towards ending the conflict that has been tearing Syria apart for more than 12 years and taking a toll on its people, who continue to pay a heavy price. All the parties involved and the international community as a whole must do everything possible to bring this conflict to an end.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and commend the tremendous efforts he has made in implementing the resolutions of the Security Council and advancing the political process in Syria. I also listened attentively to the briefing made by the civil society briefer, Ms. Alkanawati. I would like to make the following three points.

First, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be respected. One certain country has continued to strengthen its illegal military presence in Syria. China is deeply concerned about that. We urge the foreign forces to immediately put an end to their illegal presence and unlawful military operations in Syria and to stop the illegal plundering of its natural resources.

Secondly, a political solution is the fundamental way out of the Syrian impasse. China supports Special Envoy Pedersen in adopting a step-for-step approach and in engaging extensively with all parties on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We look forward to a speedy resumption of the meetings of the Constitutional Committee, which should be based on the principle of Syrian leadership and ownership. China welcomed the successful convening of the Arab ministerial contact group on Syria and hopes that Arab countries will unite in full solidarity to provide greater support for a political settlement of the Syrian issue. Countries outside the region should refrain from any acts or rhetoric that could obstruct or interfere with reconciliation and should seek to create an enabling environment for dialogue and consultation among the countries of the region.

Thirdly, resolute action must be taken to combat all terrorist forces in Syria. The counter-terrorism situation in Syria remains challenging, and terrorist organizations such as Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front have recently been running rampant there. The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement/Turkistan Islamic Party, which has been listed by the Council, has also continued its terrorist activities in the country. China supports the Syrian Government in taking all the necessary measures to combat terrorism and maintain security and stability. In accordance with international law and the relevant Council resolutions, the international community should take a zero-tolerance approach to combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and completely cut off such groups' sources of weapons, personnel and financing. We urge the relevant parties to stop condoning, shielding and exploiting terrorist forces for political purposes.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the Council has considered the question of Syria three times this month, which is not the best way to approach the issue. The Syrian dossiers should rather be consolidated and considered together or addressed in a more appropriate format.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Alkanawati for their briefings.

Twelve years ago, the Syrian people peacefully took to the streets to demand freedom, political reform and a Government that respects and upholds human rights. The Al-Assad regime met those demands with brutality. The ensuing conflict has cost the lives of more than half a million people and left more than 12 million displaced. Through its adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), the Council agreed unanimously on a political path out of the conflict that would protect the rights of all Syrians, with civil society, women and minorities playing a critical role. Eight years on, there has been next to no political progress. The conditions that drove the conflict, including the behaviour of the Al-Assad regime, have not changed. The regime's complicity in the production and trafficking of Captagon is a recent example. As ever, the regime and its allies profit while the Syrian people and the region suffer the consequences.

As Ms. Alkanawati has clearly articulated, despite the untold hardships faced by women in Syria, many continue to play vital roles in the pursuit of justice, accountability and peace, often in the face of harassment, intimidation and fears for their own safety. We commend them for their courage.

The United Kingdom recognizes the enormous generosity of the States of the region that are hosting Syrian refugees and will continue to support them in doing so. While we hope that Syrian refugees will ultimately be able to return home, we agree with the United Nations assessment that the current conditions in Syria do not permit that. It is essential to ensure that international law is respected and that any refugee returns are voluntary, safe and dignified. The onus must be on the Al-Assad regime to substantively change its behaviour and provide verifiable protection assurances for prospective returnees, many of whom fear prosecution if they return. If the regime wants to show that its behaviour has changed, genuine engagement on the issue of the missing and detained would be an important step towards demonstrating a safe environment for refugee returns.

As the recent conclusions of the Arab contact group have noted, resolution 2254 (2015) remains the only viable route to a lasting and inclusive settlement in Syria. While we welcome the recent efforts to make progress on the political track, proof of the regime's

good faith will be a concrete step in guaranteeing the rights of the Syrian people and in engaging substantively in meetings of the Constitutional Committee.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We commend his work and that of his team and share his concerns about the urgent need to make political progress. I also thank Ms. Alkanawati for enriching today's discussion with her important insights and experiences.

The support and solidarity we have witnessed in the aftermath of the February earthquake must translate to the political track. Only a political solution can put an end to the suffering that the Syrian population are enduring. Resolution 2254 (2015) clearly outlines the only viable pathway for a political solution to the conflict. Malta remains supportive of a genuine Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations, with all key stakeholders working constructively and coherently for the people of Syria, as provided for in the resolution. We thank the Special Envoy for his unwavering commitment to its implementation and for his continued engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to try to find a way out of the current impasse. The single most relevant element in advancing the stalled political process is a resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. The deadlock affecting the Committee is deeply regrettable, particularly as it remains the only format that convenes all the parties together for dialogue. We also stress that much greater investment is needed to support the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and to ensure that substantive gender equality remains a priority. Similarly, Malta encourages sincere engagement between all stakeholders and the good offices of the Special Envoy when it comes to the step-for-step initiative. The efforts must be reciprocal and verifiable, and a breakthrough in that regard would have a substantial effect as a confidence-building measure.

Without a safe, calm environment on the ground in Syria, the conditions will not be right for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin. Refugees must be protected from refoulement. It is imperative that we see the political will from Damascus that is so urgently needed, as well as from all the key regional and international stakeholders present in Syria, to ensure that a nationwide ceasefire can take effect. That would facilitate desperately needed confidence-building measures and enable real progress to be made.

One such confidence-building measure relates to establishing the fate of the detained, disappeared and missing in Syria. Political will from all parties is essential to addressing that serious and urgent issue. Malta reaffirms its support for the newly established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and emphasizes that the implementation of its mandate must be gender-responsive and survivor-centred. We also note the continued practice of arbitrary arrests, forced detention and torture and the recruitment of children into the military. Malta denounces such practices in the strongest terms and calls for an immediate stop to them. We urge Damascus to swiftly develop and adopt a comprehensive action plan to end and prevent such grave violations against children.

In conclusion, we urge all parties to engage with the Special Envoy to ensure that the opportunities that arise from the renewed diplomatic attention to Syria are not wasted. We reiterate that stability in Syria and the region will be achieved only through a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), that meets the aspirations of all Syrians.

Ms. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Lubna Alkanawati for their briefings.

Switzerland joins the Special Envoy in following with interest the dynamics currently at work in the region. In particular, we welcomed the first meeting of the Arab contact group on Syria, held in Cairo on 15 August, following on from the Amman, Cairo and Jeddah declarations in May. We welcome the fact that the declaration issued at the end of that meeting makes clear reference to the Council's resolution 2254 (2015). We note that the group wishes to ensure good coordination with the United Nations, including in preparation for a forthcoming meeting of the Constitutional Committee. The convening of a Committee meeting as soon as possible would be an important step in the step-for-step approach. Switzerland hopes that such a meeting can enable substantial progress to be made towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

Switzerland shares with the Special Envoy and Ms. Alkanawati a sincere belief that the women and peace and security agenda is central in Syria. In accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), Switzerland once again stresses the importance of the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of Syrian women in the political process. Throughout the country, civil-

society organizations, many of which rely on the voluntary involvement of women, play a key role in the quest for a lasting peace in Syria. In that regard, we welcome the close collaboration between the Office of the Special Envoy and the Civil Society Support Room, a platform which ensures the broad participation of civil society in the political process and in which women account for 43 per cent of participants. The Support Room ensures that women's priorities and realities are taken into account on the ground and in the political process.

We note with concern the way in which the very deep humanitarian and socioeconomic crises afflicting the country are affecting women. In that respect, it is essential to ensure people's access to humanitarian aid throughout the country. In addition, women are often subjected to forced or early marriages or made to operate in an informal labour market that exposes them to all sorts of abuses. In the worst cases they have no protection from sexual and gender-based violence. We call on all parties to the conflict and every country to respect their obligations and immediately end all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights committed against civilians in Syria, including women. To that end, we reiterate our full support to the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, whose work is fundamental to the fight against impunity.

Finally, Switzerland remains very concerned about the precarious security situation in several areas of the country, where hostilities continue to affect the civilian population with a disproportionate impact on women and girls. As resolution 2254 (2015) and the Council itself have repeatedly emphasized, the imposition of a nationwide ceasefire and respect on the part of all the parties for such a ceasefire remain priority measures for enabling the implementation of peace efforts and humanitarian assistance operations. The Syrian people need them desperately.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his thorough briefing. We also listened attentively to Ms. Alkanawati's presentation. I welcome the representatives of Syria, Türkiye and Iran to today's meeting.

Brazil, a country that is very proud of its illustrious and hardworking community of Syrian descent, continues to support the Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate a Syrian-led and -owned political settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), which urged all parties to the United Nations-facilitated process to adhere to a number of principles in their talks. They include a commitment to Syria's unity, independence and territorial integrity. They also highlight the need to ensure the continuity of governmental institutions, non-sectarianism and the protection of the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination. We reiterate that call and those principles. In our view, clarity on the part of all parties on the requirements of resolution 2254 (2015) could facilitate a resumption of the political dialogue and support progress in the substantive discussions once they are resumed.

We welcome the role of the League of Arab States in facilitating a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Syria's reinstatement as a full member of the Arab League constitutes a positive development in the region in support of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political settlement, as has been said. Coordination between the Arab League's ministerial contact group on Syria and the good offices of the Special Envoy may strengthen the prospects for reconvening the Constitutional Committee. We encourage all the parties to show flexibility in overcoming differences, including regarding location and logistical arrangements, in order to enable the United Nations-facilitated process to resume.

Brazil underscores the need to address the situation of Syrian refugees in cooperation with the Syrian Government. The countries hosting refugees, particularly those neighbouring Syria, bear a significant burden. The international community can facilitate the voluntary and safe return of refugees, including by supporting development and livelihood projects for the returning population in Syria. Support for initiatives throughout Syria that alleviate the human suffering resulting from economic hardship should not be politicized. Early-recovery projects and adequate funding of the humanitarian response, without geographic discrimination, would help to create an environment conducive to social stability in the whole country. We took note of the statement by the Deputy Special Envoy concerning possible fraud in support of membership applications to the Syrian Women's

Advisory Board in exchange for money. If that is the case, such fraudulent behaviour is unacceptable.

The latest report of the United Nations Monitoring Team regarding the threat posed by Da'esh and Al-Qaida and their affiliated groups (S/2023/568) states that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham remains the terrorist group exerting effective control in north-western Syria. The report also indicates that Da'esh views the north-west as a potential gateway for expanding its presence beyond Syria. Brazil reiterates its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations regardless of any justifications or pretexts. We emphasize the need to coordinate counter-terrorism operations in Syria with the Syrian Government, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and with full respect for Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Resolution 2268 (2016) established the 30-day reporting cycle justifying today's meeting. In 2016, when that resolution was adopted (see S/PV.7634), the Council recognized that a cessation of hostilities in Syria constituted a step towards a lasting ceasefire, with a close linkage with the parallel political process. Brazil considers that that linkage between peace and the prospect of a successful political settlement requires a commitment to peace within Syria, but also outside Syria and towards Syria, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his valuable briefing. We also listened attentively to the statement delivered by Ms. Lubna Alkanawati.

Twelve years after the outbreak of war in Syria, the situation in the country remains extremely complex. That is why we need a comprehensive, prompt political solution that can bring an end to the Syrian people's suffering and maintain Syria's independence, unity and territorial integrity. We once again stress that a political solution is the only way to resolve the crisis.

It is our hope that progress can be made on the political track against the backdrop of some positive recent developments in that regard, including the strengthened, constructive Arab role in assisting Syria in recovering and restoring stability. In that context, we believe that the inaugural meeting of the Arab ministerial liaison committee on Syria, attended by the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs,

is a positive indicator of strengthened cooperation and understanding among Arab States. The meeting also served as a follow-up to the implementation of the Amman declaration and further supports efforts to find a settlement to the Syrian crisis while addressing its humanitarian, political and security consequences.

We welcome the communiqué issued by the Arab ministerial liaison committee on Syria regarding the Syrian constitutional track, in which it looks forward to holding the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of the year. My country hopes that the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee will help to overcome the long-standing impasse. We stress the importance of the full and meaningful participation of Syrian women in all discussions related to the constitutional track, especially given the centrality of their role in developing and building Syrian society.

With regard to the security situation, we reiterate the need for de-escalation throughout Syria, especially in the north-west and north-east regions. Such efforts will be crucial for establishing security and stability, strengthening regional security and creating the necessary conditions for improving the deteriorated humanitarian situation in Syria. Moreover, the persistent gross security threat posed by the Da'esh terrorist organization against Syria must be addressed. Despite continued efforts to combat terrorism and the tangible progress that has been made, Da'esh continues to reorganize its ranks, acquire weapons and recruit additional fighters, especially in the camps in north-east Syria. That threat must be seriously addressed. In that regard, we stress the need to continue strengthening and coordinating all international efforts to counter terrorism everywhere. We support the call of the Arab ministerial liaison committee on Syria for increased cooperation among Syria, the countries concerned and the United Nations to combat that scourge in the country.

In conclusion, it is imperative to focus all efforts on supporting the political track by finding a solution to the crisis rather than merely managing it. Furthermore, we must support Arab and international efforts, including those made by the Special Envoy for Syria.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Lubna Alkanawati of Women

Now for Development. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Syria, Türkiye and Iran.

My delegation acknowledges the work of Mr. Pedersen and echoes his recommendations to strengthen coordination and cooperation among Syria, neighbouring countries, regional organizations and the United Nations in order to gradually move forward in a constructive political negotiation process.

We know that 2023 has been a particularly difficult year for the Syrian people, owing to the February earthquakes. However, it has left us with a valuable lesson that should be capitalized upon by the parties concerned: when there is political will, tangible results can be achieved. The Syrian Government's decision to allow humanitarian aid access through the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings and the determination of the League of Arab States to readmit Syria as a full member are advances that must be reflected in the political and humanitarian arena. Such momentum towards concerted action must be harnessed to facilitate the implementation of diplomatic and political strategies aimed at resolving the conflict and initiating the transition to institutional, economic and social recovery in Syria.

In that regard, we encourage the Special Envoy to not tire in his efforts to regain the trust of the parties, unblock the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva and resume the step-by-step negotiation plan. We hope for the resumption of the political negotiation so that it can include the representation of the greatest number of social and political sectors and that it can consider the full, equitable and meaningful participation of women and young people at all its stages. Increasing political stability and good governance indicators and creating strong State institutions to ensure accountability, a democratic system and respect for human rights will undoubtedly improve the humanitarian situation of the Syrian population, which has deteriorated significantly after 12 years of war.

My delegation reiterates its support for any initiative aimed at resuming diplomacy to achieve peace within the framework of an intra-Syrian process, based on the principles of sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, as set forth in resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Alkanawati for their informative briefings.

The Syrian people have dealt with more than 12 years of bloodshed, compounded with the aftermath of a devastating earthquake. Japan is grateful to the Special Envoy and his team for their relentless efforts to engage with all relevant stakeholders inside and outside of Syria through active dialogue and diplomacy. It is critical for the Security Council to continue supporting a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and United Nations-facilitated political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

However, as clearly stated by the Special Envoy, it is deeply regrettable that the intra-Syrian political track remains stalled, including the Constitutional Committee. As the political track, the economic situation and the humanitarian situation are tightly intertwined, the situation in Syria, without the progress of even an incremental political process, can become, or continue to be, a free fall, as described by the Special Envoy. All of us around the table need to keep that in mind.

We acknowledge that regional engagement has been intensifying, including the so-called Arab contact group, which is seeking to find a path for a comprehensive resolution of the Syrian crisis. In that regard, Japan takes note of the contact group's recent proposal to hold the next round of Constitutional Committee meetings in Oman by the end of the year. We believe that the selection of the venue should be closely coordinated with the Special Envoy and all relevant Syrian stakeholders. It is high time for all Committee participants to put their broader political disagreements aside and seriously reconsider a more substantive approach that includes all relevant stakeholders, including Syrian women. Meaningful political progress is also key to regional stability. National reconciliation should be in everybody's interest after decades of conflict and the unnecessary sacrifices of innocent people.

The security situation in Syria remains deeply alarming. The persistence of terrorist attacks, air strikes, drone strikes and other violent clashes only fuels tensions and pushes the Syrian people further away from peace and stability. We must ask ourselves how we could possibly guarantee the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their native land if Syria remains an active war zone. In addition, concerns persist about their

fate upon returning to their homes. Those conditions are simply not in place right now. In that regard, a nationwide ceasefire and reconciliation remain essential components of a political process, but until then, civilians will continue to bear the brunt of the war and require urgent protection.

Finally, to address the dire economic and humanitarian situations, there is no option but an inclusive and comprehensive political solution that will end the suffering of the Syrian people. Japan, as a responsible member of the Security Council and a major donor to the Syrian crisis, will spare no efforts in working towards that end.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Geir Pedersen and Lubna Alkanawati for their statements.

I would like to emphasize two messages.

The Syrian regime is behind the suffering of the Syrian people and the destruction of the country.

Since the peaceful uprising of Syrian demonstrators in March 2011, the regime has not stopped its killing, repression and torture. The record is grim: more than 500,000 dead, more than 130,000 forcibly disappeared and 12 million Syrians have been displaced or have become refugees. What is more, Syria is now a global hub for drug trafficking, which is a major source of instability for the entire region and one of the main sources of income for Bashar Al-Assad's regime.

The United Nations has extensively documented the regime's systematic use of torture and sexual violence against women, children and men in the prisons under its control. The day before yesterday marked the tenth anniversary of the atrocious sarin gas attack carried out in the Ghouta district of Damascus by Bashar Al-Assad's regime against its own population, killing more than 1,400 people, many of them children. France pays tribute to the memory of the victims of that heinous crime.

The events I have just described constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those responsible must be held accountable for their actions. That is necessary if Syria is to rebuild itself socially and politically. The sanctions adopted by the European States are aimed precisely at preventing those crimes and reducing as far as possible the financial capabilities and freedom of movement of their perpetrators.

Only an inclusive political process can guarantee the lasting and just peace to which Syrians aspire. The war continues for want of political progress. The deliberate obstruction practiced by the regime, supported by Russia, is preventing any political discussion. The work of the Constitutional Committee has ground to a halt because Russia alone has decided, in defiance of the terms of reference agreed by the Syrians, to oppose the holding of its meetings in Geneva. Geir Pedersen, whose efforts we commend, has also underscored that the Committee's working methods need to be reviewed to enable it to start carrying out the genuine work which the regime is deliberately refusing to undertake.

On the ground, the situation remains volatile, as evidenced by the absence of a nationwide ceasefire. As we know, the chaos and scorched earth policy methodically implemented by the regime have provided fertile ground for the spread of terrorism. We strongly condemn all attacks carried out by Da'esh and recall that France itself has on several occasions been the victim of murderous attacks on its territory by that terrorist group, which takes advantage of the war to prosper. However, Bashar Al-Assad's regime is not a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism. His regime feeds on the instability that reigns in Syria and fuels it.

In conclusion, only a lasting and just peace based on the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), adopted unanimously by the Council, will make it possible to put an end to the war in Syria and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. That is why we remain adamant: no normalization, reconstruction or lifting of sanctions will be possible without tangible gestures on the part of the regime, notably towards a credible and inclusive political process; the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees and the fight against drug trafficking.

Ms. Dautlari (Albania): I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen for his insights and his tireless efforts to advance all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), including his step-for-step approach in advancing the political processes, and I assure him of our full support. I also would like to thank Ms. Lubna Alkanawati for her briefing and for sharing her views with us on the situation in Syria.

As we heard once more today, the key to ending the conflict and suffering of the Syrian people is a Syrian-led and United Nations-facilitated political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrian people. Such process, based on resolution 2254 (2015), should

provide a clear road map for an inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable political solution.

Unfortunately, the Syrian regime continues to hold that process hostage, although it is clear that a military solution could never bring a true peace and that humanitarian aid cannot provide lasting options, nor replace the need to build trust among the divided Syrian people. Thus, we urge the regime and its allies to allow for a genuine political process to resume.

Albania also takes note of the meeting of the Arab contact group held in Cairo on 15 August. We support the call for the Constitutional Committee to reconvene within this year and stress the need for it to achieve substantial progress. The irrational arguments related to the impartiality of the venue must not be used any longer. More than a year since the convening of its most recent meeting, a lot of critical issues remain to be addressed. Multiple reports serve as a sobering reminder that the regime has never stopped committing atrocities against its people.

Albania reiterates its call for Damascus to implement resolution 2401 (2018), end the indiscriminate air strikes and shelling on civilians and respect international humanitarian law. We also call for the implementation of the nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Those are urgent first steps which would bring us closer to a safe and calm environment, which would allow us to engage with pragmatism with a view to ensuring the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and IDPs once the conditions are met.

Syrian people have little hope for a better future, given the economic collapse, rising prices and the inability of families to secure basic needs. Women and children, who are the future and backbone of any society, are suffering the most. In that context, we reiterate that ending impunity and ensuring accountability are a must for peace in Syria, and a Syrian-led and United Nations-facilitated political process is the only way forward.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his sobering briefing, and I thank Ms. Alkanawati for calling attention to the unique challenges facing women and men in Syria and the role that Syrian women must play in the peace process. I also want to take this opportunity to apologize to Ms. Alkanawati for the unprofessional attack on her credibility by one Member State and

encourage her to continue to raise her voice in defence of the voiceless.

More than 12 years after the beginning of the Syrian revolution, some want to pretend the conflict is over. But the Syrian people continue to suffer the daily reality the briefers detailed — air strikes, surface-missile attacks, torture and detention and the denial of humanitarian aid.

And let us be clear: the Syrian conflict radiates instability across the region. Millions are unable to return to their homes. And the regime facilitates drug trafficking.

In recent days, we have seen peaceful protests in cities such as Dara'a and Al-Suwayda, where Syrians have called for political changes and for all parties to uphold resolution 2254 (2015). Those are areas where the revolution started, and it is clear that peaceful demands have not been met.

The Council has repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of the full implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). It is our shared road map, but progress is elusive. We appreciate Special Envoy Pedersen's persistent efforts to encourage renewed momentum towards a political settlement in the face of steadfast opposition by the Al-Assad regime and its backers, including Russia.

This week we marked the tenth anniversary of one of the most horrific events in recent history, when the Al-Assad regime launched rockets carrying the deadly nerve agent sarin into the Ghouta district of Damascus. The attack killed more than 1,400 people and injured many more. Ms. Alkanawati herself was a survivor. The United States remembers and honours the victims and survivors of the attack and of the other chemical attacks carried out by the Al-Assad regime. We continue to call for long-overdue justice and accountability for those horrific attacks.

Even in the face of those disturbing human rights violations, many brave Syrian women like Ms. Alkanawati have continued to speak out and promote a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable political solution. They have called for dismantling discriminatory laws and systems and building an equal Syria. We must ensure that those women have not just a seat at the table but one at the head of the table, especially because the conflict has had a unique and devastating impact on Syrian women, many of whom are the sole

breadwinners of their families. Pre-existing gender inequalities, discriminatory laws and social injustices exacerbate the challenges that women face. We call on all parties to the conflict in Syria to end restrictions on women and grant equal access to education, legal rights, civil documentation and property records.

It is also high time for the Al-Assad regime to take the necessary steps to improve the lives of the Syrian people, including Syria's youngest and most vulnerable population. Across the country, millions of children remain out of school, putting them at high risk of child labour and early or forced marriage. The bottom line is this. Until conditions improve, the safe and dignified return of the displaced will not be possible. Syrians will not return so long as they risk being drafted into the army, unjustly detained, tortured or forcibly disappeared. We have also seen many cases of returnees being harassed or worse. We welcome the General Assembly's establishment through its resolution 77/301 of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, aimed at helping to clarify the fate and whereabouts of at least 155,000 missing and unjustly detained Syrians. We hope that all parties to the conflict will participate in that important new body and reiterate our call on them to release those arbitrarily detained, provide human rights organizations with access to detention facilities and the people in them and share information on missing persons with their families.

We saw the statement on 15 August by the Arab ministerial contact group on Syria expressing a desire for a resumption of the Constitutional Committee in Oman by the end of the year. It has been more than a year since the Constitutional Committee last met. We all know who is holding up progress — it is Russia. Russia claims to support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, but we know that it is only trying to exploit the situation for leverage. While we see no need to change the venue from Geneva, we support any effort that would press the Al-Assad regime to return to the Constitutional Committee. Any selection of the venue must be decided by the parties themselves and must include input from the Syrian Negotiations Commission. There must also be meaningful participation by the regime, regardless of location. In that regard, we continue to support Special Envoy Pedersen in his efforts to resume a process that will make genuine and verifiable progress towards a political solution. The regime's lack of action on broad

political transition initiatives, as well as the dire day-to-day issues facing the Syrian people, demonstrate Al-Assad's contempt for Syrians, which we have seen time and time again over more than a decade of war — a war in which Al-Assad has used chemical weapons and committed countless atrocities.

In response to those evils, the United States will continue to promote accountability for the regime's abuses, including by applying and enforcing sanctions on those who deserve them. United States sanctions will remain in place until there is, at a minimum, concrete, measurable progress towards a political solution. I want to make it clear that our sanctions do not target humanitarian assistance.

The Council must not look away, or worse, move away — not when atrocities continue, when the humanitarian needs are greater than ever before and when a political solution and accountability are still out of reach. The Syrian people deserve our full support. They deserve peace and security and justice. We will continue to stand with them in their time of need.

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*): I listened attentively to the briefing by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and would like to make the following remarks.

The Israeli occupation forces have continued their attacks on the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and persist in their criminal practices against our people in the occupied Syrian Golan as part of their dangerous and continuing escalation of the situation in our region. On Monday the Israeli occupation forces carried out another missile air attack from the occupied Syrian Golan, targeting points in the vicinity of the city of Damascus, injuring one soldier and causing material losses. That was preceded by another attack by the Israeli occupation forces on 7 August, resulting in the martyrdom of four soldiers, injury to others and material losses. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms all those attacks and criminal practices and calls on the Security Council to break its silence, fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, put an end to Israel's policies of occupation and aggression and hold the perpetrators

accountable. Syria considers the protective umbrella that the United States and other Western countries on the Council provide to Israel makes them complicit in the responsibility for those serious violations of international law, international humanitarian law and the Charter.

Despite the fact that all of the Council's resolutions on the Syrian issue affirm respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, certain Member States — both within and outside of the Council — are still flagrantly violating them. The United States forces continue to have an illegal presence on Syrian territory, violating Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. Those forces support terrorist organizations and separatist militias. A significant number of Syrian soldiers were martyred recently as a result of a terrorist attack on a bus carrying them, and that act of aggression comes in the context of the United States' support and sponsorship of terrorist organizations, with Da'esh foremost among them. The United States uses Da'esh and the separatist militias as a tool to implement its hostile plans aimed at Syria and the region.

In today's meeting and the others held on Syria this month, we have seen the United States exploit its presidency of the Council in the service of its malicious policies, by inviting speakers associated with those policies and by spreading lies and misleading information and using inappropriate language. Such wrongful practices distort the participation of civil-society representatives in the Council's discussions, damage the Council's image and divert it from its true goals, in contradiction of the responsibility that the United States bears as a permanent member of the Council.

Turning to the continued illegal presence of Türkiye's military forces on Syrian territory, those forces are obstructing the process of stabilizing Syria as a result both of their continued support and protection of terrorist groups, which include organizations designated as terrorist by the Security Council, and of their Government's policies of Türkification and demographic change in the service of Türkiye's interests. In addition, representatives of some Western countries continue to illegally infiltrate Syrian territory and hold meetings with representatives of separatist militias and of the so-called autonomous administration. We were recently informed about a Canadian delegation, headed by the Director of Operations at Canada's Foreign

Ministry, that was violating the sanctity of Syrian lands and conducting illegal meetings with illegitimate representatives. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns all those blatant violations of Syrian sovereignty, which represent a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of the Security Council's resolutions related to Syria. They are a clear example of the West's colonial behaviour and mentality and new evidence of their Governments' direct destructive role in Syria.

The illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people by the European Union and the United States, and the looting of national wealth by their forces illegally present on Syrian territory, have had a negative effect on the economic situation and stability in Syria. That is why my delegation stresses that in order to improve Syrians' economic and living conditions and to create an environment conducive to stability in the country, we need an immediate and unconditional lifting of those illegal and inhumane measures and an end to the illegal United States military presence on our territory, which is preventing our people from benefiting from their national resources and wealth.

Within the framework of activating the essential Arab role in supporting Syria, overcoming the effects of the war and achieving stability in the country, a meeting of the Arab Liaison Committee on Syria was held in our sister nation of Egypt on 15 August, with the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic. The situation in Syria was discussed in the meeting, based on transparent and direct dialogue and mutual respect for common interests. The final communiqué issued by the meeting affirmed respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, a resolve to end the presence of terrorist groups and to see the withdrawal of all foreign forces illegally present in Syria. It also expressed a desire to see a resumption of work on the constitutional track and to hold the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Oman before the end of this year, with the facilitation and coordination of the United Nations. We need to see respect for that position, which expresses the determination of the Arab countries to support Syria, their emphasis on the importance of unity for the land and people of Syria and end to interference in its internal affairs.

The communiqué welcomed the agreement reached between the Syrian Government and the United Nations on 7 August regarding the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for a period

of six months, and the Syrian Government's decision to extend the opening of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings for a period of three months. The communiqué also stressed the importance of addressing the refugee crisis and giving it the necessary priority and attention, contributing to ensuring conditions suitable for the voluntary and safe return of refugees as a humanitarian priority and intensifying efforts to accelerate the implementation of early-recovery projects, especially in areas to which refugees are expected to return. In that regard, Syria reiterated its welcome to all Syrian refugees returning to their country and its desire to engage constructively with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on issues of refugee return.

While welcoming the communiqué, the Syrian Arab Republic calls on the countries that have supported terrorism and imposed sanctions on Syria to cease those practices if they want Arab efforts to succeed.

Finally, I would like to point out that since its inception the Astana process has made significant achievements in terms of reducing the area where terrorism has a presence in Syria. The countries of the Astana process have repeatedly affirmed their firm commitment to the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and to the goals and principles of the Charter, as well as their determination to pursue joint action to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and stand up to separatist agendas. They have also condemned the activities of the terrorist organizations and affiliated groups that operate under different names in various parts of Syria.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his updated briefing.

Terrorism remains a significant threat to Syria and the wider region, with its epicentre situated in areas beyond the control of the Syrian Government. The unhindered movement of terrorist groups, including Da'esh, into Syrian territory where foreign forces are illegally present poses a serious threat to both regional and global peace and security. Moreover, Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity are being persistently and gravely violated both through the occupation of certain areas by illegal foreign forces and aggressions by the Israeli regime and terrorist groups. Those violations have inflicted sustained suffering on

the Syrian people, further exacerbated by the imposition of unlawful and inhumane sanctions.

The fight against terrorism must not be used as a pretext for undermining Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We support the legitimate demands of the Syrian Government for the complete withdrawal of all illegal foreign military forces from its territory. The illegal presence of such forces has created conditions favourable to terrorist activities within Syria. We believe that sustainable stabilization in Syria can be achieved only by upholding its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We strongly condemn the repeated aggressions and violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Israeli regime. Those reprehensible acts, including the recent terror attacks on Damascus and its surrounding areas on 21 August, deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure, constitute a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations. They also pose a grave threat to regional peace and stability. The international community's inability to address those ongoing violations is deeply disturbing. The Security Council must take a strong stance condemning such egregious violations and compelling the Israeli regime to cease its aggressions and end its occupation of the Syrian Golan.

On the political track, there is no alternative to pursuing a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned settlement with United Nations assistance. We emphasize the importance of resuming Constitutional Committee meetings as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process. It is crucial that the Committee's work strictly adhere to its terms of reference and rules of procedure, without external interference and pressure or artificial deadlines. The role of the United Nations should remain facilitative, with the process being entirely Syrian-led and -owned. We support the ongoing efforts by Mr. Pedersen through his contact with the parties to overcome the Constitutional Committee's impasse. We are actively engaged in maintaining communication channels with the Syrian Government, the Special Envoy and our partners, with the primary aim of resolving the crisis and alleviating the immense suffering endured by the Syrian people.

We applaud the recent bilateral agreement forged between the United Nations and the Syrian Government on delivering essential humanitarian aid via Bab Al-Hawa for a period of six months, offering critical relief to those in dire need. We also commend the Syrian

Government for its constructive cooperation, which is pivotal to enabling the expansion of the humanitarian operations. Its decision to extend the operation of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings for another three months, until 13 November, has the potential to significantly enhance direct and efficient access to individuals in need of assistance.

We believe firmly that a secure, stable and prosperous Syria is not only in the best interests of the Syrian people but also serves the broader interests of the region and the international community. In line with that belief, we actively support Syria's growing regional presence and applaud the recent positive developments in its diplomatic relations, both regionally and globally. Syria's return to the Arab League and resumption of relations with Arab countries, exemplified by the meeting in Cairo on 15 August, represent significant steps forward in bolstering Syria's security, stability and prosperity. We also emphasize our support for the ongoing dialogue between Syria and Türkiye, recognizing its pivotal role in those broader efforts. We hope to see Western countries swiftly reassess and correct their policies regarding Syria. That would have the potential to contribute significantly to a restoration of stability, peace and prosperity in the region. Iran remains steadfast in its commitment to collaborating with its partners in working to achieve long-term and sustainable normalization in Syria.

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

Mr. Önal (Türkiye): I too thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing.

We are now in the thirteenth year of the conflict in Syria and the Syrian people's living conditions are worsening by the day as their economic hardships increase. It has therefore become all the more urgent to give impetus to the international efforts to find a lasting solution to the Syrian crisis. That can be achieved by advancing the political process in compliance with resolution 2254 (2015). The Constitutional Committee has proved to be a unique platform capable of bringing together the Syrian opposition and the regime. However, the Committee has not been able to convene for more than a year. The Syrian regime should stop holding the process hostage and should resume and advance the Committee's work within the context of a broader political alignment. Close consultations with all stakeholders, especially the United Nations and the

legitimate Syrian opposition, are of vital importance to that end.

I would also like to respond to the references to my country's role where the situation of refugees is concerned. My country has been generously sheltering millions of Syrians for more than a decade and continues to host the largest number of refugees in the world. The facilitation of the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees should be an integral part of our overall efforts to settle the Syrian crisis. We therefore need to increase our engagement in creating conditions conducive to the fulfilment of those criteria.

As we discussed in the Chamber two days ago (see S/PV.9401), the unimpeded delivery of cross-border United Nations humanitarian assistance remains vital for millions of people in need in north-western Syria. In the current circumstances, the Council's sustained engagement is essential to the predictable and effective continuation of that mission, with the *modus operandi*

of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs unchanged.

The preservation of calm on the ground is important for many reasons. However, we are concerned about the recent ceasefire violations in Idlib. In view of the already fragile situation, any escalation must be avoided to pre-empt new humanitarian tragedies.

Counter-terrorism is a crucial dimension of the settlement of the Syrian crisis. All of us must commit to making the protection of Syria's political unity and territorial integrity a priority. The elimination of threats to neighbouring countries is also of critical importance. Based on its right to legitimate self-defence as outlined in the Charter of the United Nations, Türkiye will continue to fight terrorism in Syria in all its forms and manifestations, disrupting the destabilizing and separatist agendas of such entities as Da'esh and the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Unit.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.