



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9426th meeting

Wednesday, 27 September 2023, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Hoxha (Albania)

Members:

Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Oye
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), 2642 (2022) and 2672 (2023) (S/2023/621)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), 2642 (2022) and 2672 (2023) (S/2023/621)

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; Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi, Middle East and North Africa Regional Vice-President at the International Rescue Committee.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/621, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), 2642 (2022) and 2672 (2023).

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: I have engaged in several weeks of intensive diplomacy on the subject of the Syrian Arab Republic in Geneva, Beirut, Damascus and New York, meeting with the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission several times, and all key international actors. In parallel, my Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi, and our team, have been engaging with Syrians widely, through the Women's Advisory Board, which recently met in Rome, through consultations with Civil Society Support Room

participants in Istanbul, and through holding virtual engagements with actors on the ground, including from Deir ez-Zor and As-Suwayda.

As the Secretary-General told the General Assembly, the Syrian Arab Republic is in ruins, and peace remains remote. Tragically, a comprehensive solution of the Syrian conflict remains elusive. Gaps of political will, the distance between substantive positions of the parties, deep distrust and the challenging international climate all play a part in the deadlock. The suffering and the sense of hopelessness among Syrians are deepening. We cannot simply accept the status quo, because it will get worse and worse — it could well unravel, and this will lead to new challenges. We need the political process to start to deliver on the ground and to deliver hope. We see this when we turn to the alarming trends on the ground.

Let me just remind the Council: after a dozen years of conflict, corruption and mismanagement, external economic shocks, illicit drug trafficking and sanctions have collectively seen the Syrian economy go into a free fall. This year, the Syrian pound halved in value, while food prices doubled. Half the population is food-insecure, and more than 600,000 children under five are stunted. Doctors and nurses earn less than \$20 per month — not enough to cover even transport. Many essential health-care workers are leaving the country. Whole sectors are in danger of being hollowed out.

Meanwhile, instead of conditions being created for the displaced to return voluntarily and in safety and dignity, civilians continue to be killed and injured by violence, and tens of thousands were displaced last month. Indeed, we have seen in this period some of the most serious threats to the relative calm that has prevailed since 2020. This has included some two weeks of armed clashes between Arab tribes and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Deir ez-Zor; armed opposition groups attempting to advance into SDF-held territory, prompting further clashes and exchanges of fire between the SDF and the armed opposition and Türkiye, as well as Turkish and pro-Government airstrikes; Security-Council listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham conducting multiple cross-line raids in north-west Syria, with an allied group seeking to take and hold territory from the Government, challenging the March 2020 Russian-Turkish ceasefire lines; a dramatic escalation of pro-government shelling and airstrikes on north-west Syria; further reports of Israeli airstrikes; further reports of Jordanian airstrikes;

further security incidents in the south-west; reports of infighting among pro-government forces in the north-east and among armed opposition groups and within Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in the north-west; and further reports of Da'esh attacks.

It should be no surprise that there are new manifestations of popular frustration in Syria. For well over a month, protests have continued in Al-Suwayda governorate, with participants citing economic, social and political grievances and demands. In video footage, we have seen many placards calling for the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Let me stress the need to respect the right to peaceful protest in all areas of Syria and the need for protests to remain peaceful. Let me also stress the need for an end to all violence against civilians, for full respect of international human rights and international humanitarian law and for work towards a nationwide ceasefire. Meanwhile — and as we will later hear more on this from the representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — I take note of the resumption of United Nations humanitarian deliveries from Türkiye into north-west Syria through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. All modalities, including cross-line, must be utilized. Resources are desperately needed too for all pillars, including enhancing early recovery in the humanitarian response plan and for refugees and host countries. We also need to ensure that any adverse effects of sanctions on ordinary Syrians are avoided and mitigated, including through the full use of existing humanitarian exemptions and efforts by States imposing sanctions to counter overcompliance.

Beyond that, we must focus urgently on political movement to change the dynamics that I have just described in quite some detail. Doing that requires a shift in our mindset, which I know is a big ask. But, as the Secretary-General told the General Assembly last week, politics is compromise; diplomacy is compromise; effective leadership is compromise. The Syrian parties and all key international actors need to entertain compromise in a more fundamental way than many have done to date. If they do, it will be possible to act in parallel and urgently reverse negative economic, security and political trends and relaunch a Syrian-led and -owned political process, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015). But to do that we will need concrete moves with contributions from all sides — step for step. That could help us move towards a safe, calm and neutral environment that begins to create conditions

that arrest further displacement; that opens up towards the safe, dignified and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees; that sees real measures to address the protection and livelihood concerns of Syrian civilians; and that creates some level of trust and confidence. That will require serious commitments to be implemented to begin to address the concerns of Syrian civilians within and outside the country.

Those who have been arbitrarily detained could be released, with steps taken to ensure that anyone in detention is treated in line with their right to due process. More Syrians could access their property or the birth, marriage and death certificates and other documents that they desperately need. Syrians who have fled and fear conscription would have their concerns addressed. Syrians abroad could find more ways to access the consular services they need. Power cuts could become fewer and less prolonged, and clean water made more available. Patients could access medicines that are currently unavailable. Farmers could import more supplies needed to become self-sufficient once again. Those devastated by the earthquake could access the supplies needed for recovery. Payments for legitimate humanitarian activity could flow into Syria more easily.

In short, if Syrians were to see protection concerns meaningfully addressed, donors, including those in the region, could in parallel step forward with more support and States imposing sanctions could take measures to facilitate that. Meanwhile, the various de facto arrangements for calm could be embedded in a broader nationwide and sustainable ceasefire and a common approach to supporting the efforts to combat Security Council-listed terrorist groups still active in Syria.

In parallel, the Syrian parties could be engaged in a process of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue facilitated by the United Nations, working seriously in the Constitutional Committee. They would be recommending and reacting to concrete proposals, working through the Constitution, chapter by chapter, and identifying the makings of a future social contract for all the citizens of a deeply divided country. They would put behind them any attempts to avoid dialogue with others and would be putting forward proposals designed to gain some support across the divide that exists today in Syria. At the very least, they would be working continuously and expeditiously and exploring the making of a future together. And, while all of that was being worked on, we in the United Nations would

be engaging continuously with Syrian civil society, men, women and youth from within and outside Syria, on the full range of their issues, concerns and priorities and connecting them with others and the process.

Progress on those fronts is not yet the political solution that Syrians need and deserve. But moving on them and actually achieving them would be a start to addressing core issues of concern to Syrians today and move us along the path of resolution 2254 (2015). There are also mechanisms and pathways that can help us move forward if they are utilized. As all know, I have been working with all parties and coordinating closely in particular with the Arab ministerial contact group on Syria to seek urgent progress on steps for steps. There are clear ideas on the table. There is an invitation to genuine engagement and to concrete discussions. This opportunity should be seized. For that to work, each side should engage with precision. We would need to coordinate reciprocal steps, and there needs to be verification.

With regard to the Constitutional Committee, the Syrian parties have informed me that they would like to see the Constitutional Committee reconvened. The Astana format and the Arab contact group, as well as the Western capitals, all tell me that they support its resumption facilitated by the United Nations. I believe that a way forward is possible, and I will continue in that regard to stress and seek to enhance the Syrian ownership and leadership of the process, divorced of any foreign interference or external agendas. I will also seek to ensure the substantive nature of the sessions. I am continuing my consultations with the aim of issuing invitations so that we can resume the work before the end of the year. We will, of course, keep the Middle Third apprised of concrete developments.

There is a path forward for Syria, and I appeal to all to engage. But let me issue a stark warning. If that path is not taken, the alternative is not a grim but containable status quo; it is not a miraculous change for the better from the perspective of this or that Syrian party; it is rather a future of deterioration across humanitarian, security and institutional fronts, with significant implications for all. That is a recipe for disaster for the Syrian people and the region. And it runs contrary to the common interests of the international community for stability and progress in Syria. The way forward would see genuine confidence-building via mutual and reciprocal steps — step-for-step — while addressing protection and livelihood concerns. It would

see a gradual deepening of a Syrian-owned and -led constitutional dialogue. It would see the deepened engagement of Syrian civil society. The key circles of international effort would align priorities behind this way forward. Let me appeal to all to put aside any blocking or conditioning of this or that aspect of the United Nations effort and to provide strong support for the strategy I have outlined.

In that way, we would arrest Syria's downward slide, see incremental progress and build some trust and confidence. In doing so, we would set the scene for what is ultimately needed and what resolution 2254 (2015) calls for: a fundamental attempt at conflict resolution that respects and restores the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and enables the Syrian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations. It is time to act together, determined that the Syrian people see a change in their lives and a ray of hope for the future.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Wosornu.

Ms. Wosornu: From the humanitarian side, allow me to begin today on a positive note. Last week saw the resumption of United Nations humanitarian deliveries from Türkiye into north-west Syria through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. Since then, 65 trucks have crossed, carrying health and nutrition items and other vital relief supplies for more than 2 million people. We expect many more trucks to cross into the north-west in the coming days and weeks. Those were the first aid deliveries through Bab Al-Hawa since 10 July, when the authorization under resolution 2672 (2023) lapsed. United Nations personnel have also been able to go through this crossing, thereby enhancing our ability to support partners, monitor projects, engage with the communities we serve and strengthen the protection environment through physical presence on the ground.

In the interim, the United Nations and our partners have also used pre-positioned supplies and deliveries through the Bab Al-Salam and the Al-Rai border crossings to sustain programmes throughout north-west Syria. Bab Al-Hawa, however, remains the central channel for cross-border assistance from Türkiye into north-west Syria. That development means that we can carry out deliveries at the scale required to meet the urgent needs of over 4 million people, 80 per cent of whom are women and children. The reopening of Bab Al-Hawa for United Nations cross-border aid is the result of an

understanding with the Government of Syria on the principled delivery of United Nations cross-border assistance, of operational and security assurances from the de facto authorities in Idlib and of consultations with a range of Member States, including the Republic of Türkiye, donors, non-governmental organizations and other partners.

The cross-border response extends beyond the movement of trucks. It means better functioning schools, health facilities and sanitation systems and improved access to safe drinking water and life-saving protection services. It also includes the delivery of cash-based assistance. Our commitment to providing humanitarian aid by all means possible, whether crossline or cross-border, remains unchanged.

As the Special Envoy said, an escalation of hostilities in northern Syria earlier this month provided a stark reminder of the criticality of sustaining humanitarian assistance. Renewed hostilities in the past three weeks in the north and north-east of Aleppo have temporarily displaced — as previously mentioned — tens of thousands of people, many of whom have had to sleep in the open due to overcrowding in displacement camps. Civilian casualties have also been reported, including among women and children. Moreover, 32 schools have had to stop educational activities, 14 of which have been used as temporary shelters. In addition, fighting in the north-east reportedly left 23 civilians killed and many more were injured in Deir ez-Zor governorate late last month, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Tens of thousands of people were displaced, while those who remained faced shortages of food and medicines. On Monday, a water station in Deir ez-Zor was damaged because of the continuing hostilities, leaving at least 17,000 people — many of them displaced from other areas — without access to safe drinking water. Humanitarian workers are focused on getting food, water, health and shelter assistance to affected people. Local organizations, including grassroots women's organizations, play a critical role in ensuring that assistance equitably reaches those in need. I strongly urge all the parties to the hostilities to uphold international humanitarian law and take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize harm to civilians.

Across the country, families are grappling with the continuing strain of a deepening economic crisis, again as Mr. Pedersen mentioned. The Syrian pound has lost more than half its value since the start of this

year, while prices of essential food commodities have nearly doubled. At the beginning of this year, half of the population — some 12 million people — was food insecure. The situation has continued to worsen, and if these economic trends persist, we will likely see millions more people slide into food insecurity.

All that is happening against the backdrop of a sharp decline in the resources available for the humanitarian response. We have just three months left in the year, and yet the 2023 humanitarian response plan for Syria remains less than 30 per cent funded. That means that many humanitarian agencies are being forced to make painful decisions. As reported in July, the World Food Programme has had to cut assistance to 2.5 million people, while halving the standard ration for others.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is having to cut and scale back essential assistance programmes, including interventions to respond to gender-based violence. In the north-west, some 17 safe spaces for women and girls were closed in the past few months, and two dozen more will be closed by the end of the year if additional funding is not received. Further cuts to already underfunded gender-based violence programmes will have profound consequences for survivors. Women and girls are paying a steep price. Their fundamental rights, including access to services that are critical for their health and well-being, have become a casualty of the conflict. Women and girls struggle to access health care, including reproductive services, because of widespread damage to health facilities, shortages of health workers, as previously mentioned, limited transportation options, a lack of documentation, overcrowding and long wait times.

UNICEF informs us that funding shortfalls are compromising access to education for millions of children and undermining urgent efforts to sustain water and sanitation systems, which are essential to preventing catastrophic public health risks, including cholera. Similarly, the World Health Organization reports cuts to health services that affect millions of people and reduce essential services, including child immunizations and disease surveillance.

The resumption of United Nations aid deliveries through Bab Al-Hawa is positive news. However, as I have highlighted today, massive humanitarian needs and protection risks persist across the country. Much more is still needed for millions of people throughout Syria to reclaim a safe and dignified life.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Jarbawi.

Ms. Jarbawi: The International Rescue Committee has been delivering aid in Syria since 2012, and in many respects it has never been so complex. Yet the truth is that very little of what I will share with the Security Council today will come as a surprise. Month on month, year on year, the Council has been briefed on the declining humanitarian situation inside Syria. Thirteen years into the crisis, we have simply run out of novel ways to describe the suffering experienced daily by so many. Forever on the brink, and yet somehow consistently able to plunge into newfound depths, the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to decline. The first outbreak of cholera in more than a decade last year, rates of malnutrition never seen before, increasingly hotter summers and unpredictable winters are all exacerbating the situation for Syrian families. It is therefore imperative for the situation to remain on the agenda of the Council, and I am therefore grateful for the opportunity to brief everyone today on behalf of the IRC, its partners and those we serve.

As the Council has already just heard from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 15 million people inside the Syrian Arab Republic are currently in need of humanitarian assistance — more than at any other point since the conflict began. The absence of progress towards a political solution and the consequences of the protracted crisis have pushed roughly 90 per cent of Syrians into poverty. Without concerted action to address the drivers of humanitarian need, those numbers will only continue to rise.

In July, the Council failed to re-authorize the United Nations-led cross-border assistance to north-west Syrian Arab Republic for a 12-month mandate (see S/PV.9371). The resulting uncertainty has highlighted the critical and continued role of the Council in promoting safe, dignified and unhindered access to assistance for populations inside the Syrian Arab Republic. The IRC's Syrian partners have highlighted to us their frustration and anxiety following the non-renewal of that mandate, including their very legitimate concerns about the future of humanitarian assistance for the millions of people that depend on it, the majority of whom are children and women. Syrian voices and civil society

are the lifeblood of that humanitarian response, and it is incumbent on all actors to ensure that they are both heard and included in decision-making.

Across the north of the country, where the IRC works, civilians continue to suffer from the perpetual conflict. Shockingly, in some areas of the Syrian Arab Republic, the IRC's clients tell us that they have been displaced more than 20 times since the crisis first began. As the Council heard from the Special Envoy and OCHA, this past week, in Idlib, in the north-west, air strikes killed a 90-year-old man and his granddaughter, who were living in a displacement camp. They had already made the impossible decision of leaving their home to live in a tent, in search of safety, yet they still paid the ultimate price. This past month, an escalation in hostilities in Deir ez-Zor saw at least 54 civilians killed, including 4 children. Such incidents have continued to cause damage to critical public infrastructure, including hospitals and water-treatment facilities, and have caused further displacements.

We cannot forget about the devastating earthquakes that struck in February. They too have further added to the layers of suffering, driving displacement, damaging and destroying yet more critical infrastructure and killing and injuring more than 13,000 people in the north-west alone.

As the economic situation worsens and food prices continue to rise, many of those we serve tell us that they can now no longer afford to feed their families. One man living in Serekaniye camp, in north-east Syria, told my colleagues that he is forced to choose between life-saving medical care and food for his family. He has diabetes and heart disease, and the lack of available health services means that he has to sell part of his food basket in order to buy life-sustaining medicine. He spoke of his distress at not having enough to feed his family as a result. That is the impossible choice facing many Syrian families in need right now.

Sadly, those choices are not limited to medical services and food alone — rather, they extend to every facet of life, including the education of children. In an assessment conducted this summer by the IRC, nearly half of the households we surveyed stated that their children were not enrolled in school. When asked why, 74 per cent of households reported that their boys were not enrolled, as they needed to work to support their families, while 46 per cent reported that early marriage

was the reason behind the non-enrolment of girls in education.

While Syrian families are facing impossible choices between food and health care, education and sustained financial status, humanitarian agencies are also being forced to make impossible decisions regarding the services we should prioritize. Across the country, humanitarian assistance continues to provide a vital lifeline to Syrians left with few other options for survival. Yet despite the clear increase in humanitarian need, this year's humanitarian response plan is less than 30 per cent funded, as stated by OCHA. Many of our donors have already informed us to expect an additional 20 to 40 per cent budget cut next year. The substantial funding gap will simply mean even greater needs in 2024, creating a downward spiral and forcing us to make the terrible choice of which vulnerable families we should serve. The burden of that choice falls on the shoulders of humanitarian agencies—the IRC and our 27 partners — as we are asked to do more with even less.

With both efforts to bring an end to the crisis and financial support to those affected by its stalling, there are very real fears that the Syrian Arab Republic is in danger of becoming a forgotten crisis. That is why the IRC and the wider non-governmental organization community had consistently pressed for the 12-month re-authorization by the Council of the cross-border assistance. While recent progress has been made in-country, with United Nations assistance travelling again through Bab Al-Hawa after weeks of uncertainty, we remain concerned that the current agreements, which are short-term and time-bound, are not sustainable. All Syrians, regardless of where they reside, have the right to choice and dignity when it comes to access to assistance.

As already noted, we believe it is imperative for the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to remain on the Council's agenda, including through regular humanitarian briefings and written reporting. With the crisis showing little prospect of abating, we do urge the world to not forget those in need, and we continue to emphasize the Council's responsibility to protect Syrians, wherever they are.

The President: I thank Ms. Jarbawi 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 Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Geir Pedersen and Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings, and we listened attentively to the statement delivered by Ms. Jarbawi.

We remain convinced that there is no alternative to advancing the Syrian-led and Syrian-implemented political settlement process in Syria with the assistance of the United Nations, in strict compliance with resolution 2254(2015) and without external interference. On that basis, we will continue to consistently pursue our cooperation, both with the Syrians and the Special Envoy, as well as with all other stakeholders, first and foremost with our partners under the Astana format.

To that end, on 22 September, on the margins of the high-level week of the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, another meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Iran and Türkiye was held, during which the leading role and approach of the Astana troika in pursuing consolidated efforts to facilitate a comprehensive settlement in Syria on the basis of strict adherence to the principle of respect for the country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity were once again emphasized. In addition, there was a focus and an emphasis on the need to mobilize external assistance to Syria, including to ensure its post-conflict recovery, as well as to increase the pace of the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland.

The trilateral meeting was followed by consultations between the Astana format representatives and Mr. Pedersen, during which special attention was paid to the task of re-establishing the effective work of the Constitutional Committee, among other things. In that context, we would like to welcome once again the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the contact group of the League of Arab States, held on 15 August in Cairo, during which there was an agreement reached to resume meetings of the Constitutional Committee and to conduct another round of the drafting committee at an agreed venue by the end of the year.

Given the position of the Syrians themselves, both the Syrian Government and the opposition, we hope that Mr. Pedersen will focus specifically on convening a new session of the Constitutional Committee, without being distracted by other initiatives. At the same time, we continue to believe that the key decisions regarding

the modalities of the Committee's continued operation and the venue for subsequent rounds of consultation need to be made by the Syrian people themselves.

The situation on the ground in a number of regions of Syria not under Damascus' control remains fraught with tensions. That state of affairs is a consequence, first and foremost, of the ongoing illegal military presence of the United States in the area beyond the Euphrates River and in Al-Tanf. Clashes between Kurds and Arab tribes in Deir ez-Zor governorate are of growing concern, as are the escalating tensions in the south, including in Al-Suwayda governorate. Those alarming trends were a direct consequence of the foreign intervention of Washington and its allies in order to further destabilize the situation in Syria and create a border buffer strip.

Along with Kurdish groups under their control, Western countries illegally present in Syria under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have long since ceased to combat terrorism. Instead, they are actively using the fighters in service of their own aims against the Syrian military and their allies and have been attempting to whitewash the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorist group, which has seized Idlib. In addition to the provocative actions of Western countries, the Israeli authorities are also exacerbating the situation by increasing the frequency of arbitrary air strikes targeting Syria. In August alone, there were three strikes targeting Damascus and Aleppo, including from the Golan Heights airspace, as a result of which the Aleppo airport was again put out of service.

For our part, we consistently believe that long-term peace and security in Syria can be achieved only through the full restoration of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the Syrian authorities' control over their national borders and natural resources, while continuing counter-terrorism operations.

Turning to the humanitarian situation in Syria, first and foremost, we wish to welcome the agreements reached between Damascus and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the use of three border crossings on the border with Türkiye for the delivery of humanitarian supplies. The Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings remain open to the United Nations until 13 November of this year, while the Bab Al-Hawa crossing will remain open for a whole six months, that is, until 13 March 2024. Thus, the capabilities of the United Nations to deliver

humanitarian supplies to north-west Syria now exceed those provided for by the Security Council's cross-border resolutions. On the whole, the architecture for cross-border deliveries to Syria has taken the form generally accepted in world practice — henceforth, it will be within the framework of consent from the national Government and is no longer micromanaged by the Security Council.

We welcome the fact that international humanitarian assistance to Syria now aligns with the guiding humanitarian principles enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182. We believe that outstanding issues — akin to those that arise in the context of United Nations cross-border deliveries from Chad to the Sudan or from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan — will be resolved through direct dialogue between the United Nations and Damascus without external interference, including from the Security Council. At the same time, we are seriously concerned that, despite the capabilities that have long been available to humanitarian workers, humanitarian deliveries to Idlib through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing resumed only a month and a half after the agreements were reached with Damascus. In that way, people in the enclave who are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, which the United Nations and others harp on about incessantly, have once again been taken hostage by internationally listed Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists, who played pretend diplomacy with the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Mr. David Carden, who is a British citizen. That all reflects very poorly on the work of the United Nations office in Gaziantep. Next on the agenda is the resumption of humanitarian aid deliveries to north-west Syria from Damascus through the Sarmada and Saraqib crossings on the line of contact. The continued blockade by terrorists of such humanitarian deliveries is completely baseless. We see the Idlib thugs' blatant sabotage and the disgraceful silence on the situation on the part of the Secretariat and our Western colleagues.

Unfortunately, that is not the only issue that is being ignored. Against the backdrop of the suffocating unilateral sanctions imposed on Damascus by Western countries, the Secretariat appears to have preferred to attempt to sweep under the rug the report of the United Nations country team in Syria on the negative impact of those illegal measures on the humanitarian situation in the long-suffering country. That also includes the fact that the United Nations has not noticed Washington's occupation of the area beyond the Euphrates and the

looting of Syria's national resources by the United States. In the oil sector alone, Damascus' losses as a result of United States crimes are estimated at \$115.2 billion. Every day, the United States exports approximately 150,000 barrels of crude oil, in a situation where, owing to fuel shortages in Syria, humanitarian workers are forced to scale back their operations, including through the World Food Programme. That is the embodiment in Syria of the ubiquitously vaunted principle of United States humanism. The Secretary-General and the Secretariat have remained disgracefully silent on that issue.

We regard as telling the critical situation that has developed as a result of the fact that the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Syria for the current year is funded at less than 30 per cent. It is obvious that Syria, alongside a number of other countries in need, has been enduring the cruellest discrimination from Western donors, whose sole concern is to sponsor weapons deliveries to Ukraine. It is important not to lose sight of that reality as we listen to disingenuous statements from a host of our Western colleagues about their concern for ordinary Syrians, whom they are not only not helping but instead are attempting to strangle with illegal unilateral sanctions.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I deliver this statement on behalf of Brazil and Switzerland, co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file.

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Edem Wosornu, and the International Rescue Committee's Middle East and North Africa Regional Vice-President, Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi for their briefings. I also acknowledge the presence of representatives from Syria, Iran and Türkiye at today's meeting.

Switzerland and Brazil welcome the resumption of United Nations humanitarian deliveries into north-west Syria via the Bab Al-Hawa crossing since 19 September. To date, 65 trucks filled with essential aid from UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration have successfully passed through Bab Al-Hawa. We express our gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and his team, both at Headquarters and in the field, for their dedication in operationalizing the exchange of letters between the

Syrian Government and OCHA, thereby ensuring that the Bab Al-Hawa crossing can be used. That crossing remains central to United Nations efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance in Syria. The resumption of the deliveries is promising, and we are hopeful that it will remain sustainable.

We appreciate the current collaboration between Syria and OCHA. With the extension by three months of the use by the United Nations of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, United Nations outreach now spans three border crossings, assisting 2.7 million people in need every month. We also reiterate the necessity of predictable arrangements to respond to the ever-increasing humanitarian needs on the ground, and we call on all actors involved not to limit the duration of the permissions granted.

Syria's worsening humanitarian crisis is deeply concerning. The role of the United Nations in delivering aid remains vital, especially as an increasing number of Syrians rely on humanitarian assistance. It is imperative that all aid modalities, including cross-border and cross-line, remain available to humanitarian actors, while ensuring rapid, unhindered and sustainable access across Syria.

Humanitarian operations in Syria must continue to be undertaken with respect for the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. It is vital that all parties to the armed conflict — with no exception under any pretext — uphold those foundational humanitarian norms and international humanitarian law, including their obligation to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need. Moreover, the continuous and rigorous monitoring of cross-border humanitarian deliveries is essential to ensure that those principles are lived up to.

All parties to the conflict must respect humanitarian and human rights law, while guaranteeing the safety and well-being of the people living in Syria. We also welcome OCHA's commitment to continue to appeal to donors to provide the necessary funding for the humanitarian response plan. As of 13 September, more than halfway through the year, the humanitarian response plan for 2023 was only 28 per cent funded, raising serious concerns among the humanitarian community. Sustainable funding is needed for the plan's implementation. In addition, we would like to stress the importance of early-recovery projects to contribute to the reduction of needs in the long term.

We appreciate OCHA's dedication and transparent approach to the delivery of assistance to north-west Syria under the new consent-based model. We are grateful for OCHA's commitment to keep the Council informed, as it should remain informed. Should there be hindrances in humanitarian access, knowing of their occurrence and comprehending their causes is imperative for timely responses.

Switzerland and Brazil have always been, and remain, fully committed to working in good faith within the Council and in contact with all stakeholders so that the former may fulfil its collective responsibility towards the Syrian people.

I shall now speak in my national capacity on the political aspects of the Syrian conflict.

Brazil is closely following the escalating violence in Syria. In the north-east, recent hostilities have impacted populated areas, leading to further loss of civilian lives and the destruction of essential civilian infrastructure. Renewed fighting in the north-west is equally concerning, affecting families living in camps and disrupting educational activities. We urge all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and exercise maximum restraint to prevent further escalation.

We thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his outreach efforts to re-engage key stakeholders in trying to find a solution to the current stalemate in the political process. Resolution 2254 (2015) provides elements that could lead to a peaceful end to the conflict, while ensuring Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

Addressing the Syrian refugee crisis requires a holistic approach. Collective action is always needed, taking into account the protection needs of refugees in accordance with international law.

The unfolding humanitarian crisis in Syria underscores the need for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. Amid the ongoing economic crisis, with a plunging currency value and soaring prices for essential goods, the further suffering of Syrian civilians and additional damage to critical infrastructure are simply unacceptable.

Continuous violence, a severe economic crisis with escalating hunger, human rights violations and a stalled peace process constitute, in the words of Mr. Pedersen, an "unacceptable status quo". Let us not merely hope,

but also work diligently towards a favourable political outcome for Syria, ultimately bringing about the peace, stability and reconciliation so very desired by the Syrian people.

A military solution to the Syrian crisis is not only illusory but also detrimental to the future of the country. Renewed political will is essential to resume a credible intra-Syrian political process, especially with the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. We encourage all parties to show flexibility for the resumption of the United Nations-facilitated political process. Syria and the region should move ahead and leave these painful times behind. It is high time that we see them do so.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and for his continued efforts to attain a sustainable political solution in Syria, including through his diplomacy during high-level week. I also welcome the helpful update from Ms. Wosornu. And I want to thank Ms. Jarbawi for her sobering briefing and for everything she and the International Rescue Committee are doing to expand humanitarian access in Syria.

The United States welcomes the resumption of United Nations humanitarian assistance convoys through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing — a crucial access point that allows aid to reach millions of vulnerable Syrians. If implemented, the understanding that Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and his team were able to reach with parties on the ground in north-west Syria and with Damascus will maintain that lifeline. But we are mindful of the regime's decade-long history of manipulating humanitarian assistance to all areas of Syria, including its ongoing denial of United Nations access to the Rukban displacement site. We are also concerned that the regime will try to impose new conditions on the United Nations in the future, especially in the fall and winter, when consent for the three crossings will need to be renewed and when humanitarian needs will be at their greatest.

The Council must give the United Nations the support it needs to resist pressure by the Al-Assad regime and maintain unhindered access to all Syrians for as long as needed. The Syrian people are counting on us in their time of immense need. As the single-largest humanitarian donor to the Syrian response effort, the United States supports aid through all modalities to reach Syrians in need, including cross-border and cross-line aid to all areas of Syria.

I want to underscore the importance of continued reporting to the Council on humanitarian and political developments inside Syria in line with resolution 2139 (2014). On the political front, we are monitoring reports about popular protests in Syria, and we continue to support the Syrian people's call for peace, dignity, security and justice. The United States also supports the Syrian people's ability to exercise their rights to peaceful assembly and the freedom of expression. The renewed protests in Syria underscore the need for a Syrian-led political solution.

We continue to advocate that implementing resolution 2254 (2015) remains the only viable path towards ending the conflict. To that end, we urge the Syrian regime to engage meaningfully in the political process called for in resolution 2254 (2015) by returning to the Constitutional Committee, which has not met in over a year. While simply holding another meeting of the Constitutional Committee will not end the conflict, we believe that the regime's participation would be an important signal of its intent to return to the political process. United States sanctions will remain in place until, at minimum, there is concrete, measurable progress towards a political solution.

There is no shortage of conflicts and crises on the Council's agenda, but we must not let Syria fall to the wayside — not as humanitarian needs continue to spike and not as peace efforts continue to stall. When I travelled to the border of Türkiye and Syria last year, a Syrian refugee told me that she was worried the world would forget about the plight of her people. I told her that the United States would not let that happen. The Council must send the same message to all Syrian people.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Director Wosorنو and International Rescue Committee Vice-President Jarbawi for their briefings. With humanitarian needs in Syria at their highest in years, it is critical that the Council have before it the facts and the insights from their teams.

First, the United Kingdom welcomes the news that aid is once again reaching the people of north-west Syria, 70 days after Russia vetoed cross-border draft resolution S/2023/506. We are clear that those deliveries must be secure and unhindered and delivered in accordance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

But once again the United Nations is having to develop contingency plans for when permissions for Bab Al-Rai and Bab Al-Salam expire in 45 days' time. Short-term agreements are not a sustainable solution for the people of north-west Syria who rely on the United Nations life-saving aid. And those short-term arrangements distract humanitarian teams on the ground with constant contingencies and planning for worst-case scenarios, when their most pressing priority is to engage with the people who need their support. We need a more sustainable approach for the lifeline of cross-border assistance.

Turning to political developments, we are following closely the demonstrations in Al-Suwayda in defence of their political and economic rights. It is disappointing that, despite readmission to the League of Arab States, Syria refuses to abide by the decisions of the Council and to engage meaningfully in the political process. The trafficking of large quantities of captagon across the region continues unabated. And this month we have seen some of the largest captagon seizures on record.

We therefore urge the regime to begin to engage seriously in the political process established by resolution 2254 (2015), including the early convening of the Constitutional Committee. The peace and the stability of the region depend on it.

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

I also listened attentively to the statement made by Ms. Jarbawi.

Last week, President Xi Jinping of China met with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, who was in China by invitation to attend the opening ceremony of the nineteenth Asian Games. They had an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations and international regional issues of common interest. President Xi stressed that China supports Syria in opposing foreign interference; rejecting unilateral bullying acts; safeguarding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; carrying out reconstruction; enhancing counter-terrorism capacity-building; promoting a political solution to the Syrian issue, in line with the principle of a Syria-led and -owned process; improving relations with other Arab countries and playing a greater role in international and regional affairs. His words will guide China's continued efforts to actively participate in the

international community's discussions of Syria-related questions and play a constructive role in the political settlement of the Syrian issue.

China supports and welcomes Syria's return to the League of Arab States and supports Arab countries' endeavour to seek strength through unity and to give fresh impetus to the resolution of the Syrian issue. We welcome the agreement of the Arab contact group on Syria to convene within the year a new round of meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. We look forward to positive progress from the meetings. Countries outside the region should fully respect to the will of the countries of the region and their people and create an external environment that is conducive to communication and consultation among the relevant parties.

We support the Syrian Government in taking necessary measures to combat terrorism and maintain national security and stability and welcome the positive progress in counter-terrorism campaigns led by the Government. China opposes the attempts by external forces to interfere in Syria's internal affairs and undermine security and stability. We also oppose the illegal military presence and unlawful military operations in Syria, as well as the unlawful exploitation of its natural resources.

Since July, we have seen new progress in humanitarian assistance to Syria. On 19 September, cross-border assistance through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing was fully resumed, marking the full operationalization of the new cross-border humanitarian assistance arrangement thanks to the joint efforts of the United Nations and Syrian Government. All parties must strive to maintain the current positive momentum, create a sound atmosphere for healthy interactions between Syria and the United Nations and make greater efforts to resume and scale up cross-line assistance as soon as possible.

The relevant donors should honour in earnest their commitments to ensure that humanitarian activities throughout Syria receive adequate and non-discriminatory funding. At the same time, the international community should support the Syrian Government's capacity-building in humanitarian relief, expand the scope of humanitarian activities in Syria, increase investments in early recovery and support its pursuit of autonomous and sustainable economic and social development.

The negative impact of unilateral sanctions on Syria's humanitarian situation cannot be ignored or denied. They must be lifted unconditionally as soon as possible.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank both Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Edem Wosornu for their valuable briefings. We also thank Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi for her statement, which shed light on the difficult living conditions of the brotherly Syrian people.

In the context of today's meeting, I would like to begin with the political track in Syria.

The United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of continued dialogue and building confidence among the Syrian parties and ensuring a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political solution, which is the only way to end the crisis. The United Arab Emirates also stresses the importance of continuing the Arab diplomatic momentum that we witnessed in the past months to support a peaceful solution in coordination with the United Nations, especially in the light of the absence of any serious movement on that track for a long time. We believe that the role played by the Arab contact group on Syria is important and must be supported by the international community, for all those Arab endeavours are aimed at supporting and strengthening the United Nations track and the Special Envoy's efforts.

In that context, we welcome Mr. Pedersen's remarks about convening a meeting of the Constitutional Committee at the end of the year. We hope the Committee will be able to resume its work and overcome the prolonged stalemate.

On the security level, we express our concern about the escalation of tensions in Syria this month, as well as the flare-up of all the front lines, which demand a continued call for de-escalation in all Syrian regions and the cessation of acts of violence, especially with the fragility of the situation and the continued lurking by the terrorist organization Da'esh in any security vacuum in order to re-establish its control over the liberated areas.

We reiterate our firm position on the need to preserve Syria's independence, unity and territorial integrity and establish lasting security and stability.

As for the humanitarian situation, the United Arab Emirates welcomes the resumption of the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing

this month. Those important and positive developments exemplify the results that can be achieved through constructive dialogue and mutual understanding. In that context, we appreciate the efforts of the Syrian Government and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and their close cooperation over the past months to reach the desired understanding at a time when relief aid is most needed.

We look forward to the continuation of such cooperation and coordination, in a manner that serves the interests and needs of the brotherly Syrian people, with whom we continue to stand in solidarity. We stress the importance of the continued delivery of aid through the other two border crossings, with the most recent being the entry of six trucks through the Bab Al-Salam crossing. That helps to ensure entry of the largest possible amount of aid through all available means.

We continue to underscore the need to ensure the regular and unhindered delivery of cross-line aid and to increase such aid to a level commensurate with considerable needs on the ground, especially given the Syrian Government's approval to open the Sarmada and Saraqib crossings until February 2024. The international community must consider all means to halt economic collapse in Syria and reduce its tragic repercussions on the humanitarian and social conditions of the brotherly Syrian people, in particular given the unprecedented decline of the Syrian currency.

We stress that reconstruction and helping Syria to recover and prosper will also contribute to enhancing security and stability in the entire region, not just in Syria. Therefore, we must focus on early-recovery projects, which remain the best way to bring about tangible change on the ground, especially in terms of infrastructure rehabilitation. That will help to provide Syrians with the necessities for decent living and create the conditions conducive to the voluntary and safe return of refugees. We again emphasize the need to support demining activities in Syria as part of those projects to protect civilians.

In conclusion, we underline that the current stage is a critical one for the Syrian people. We must put their interests above any other considerations, pave the way to end their severe suffering and enable them to live in security, peace and dignity. Allowing the Syrian file to remain hostage to geopolitical disputes will not be in the interests of any party. Instead, it will result in further deterioration of humanitarian, security

and economic conditions, whose repercussions will affect the entire region. As the organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security, we must prevent that outcome.

Before I end my statement, as this is the last meeting in which the Permanent Representative of Syria, Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh, will participate, I would like to congratulate him on his new position and wish him every success in his new duties.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique (A3).

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and the Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Edem Wosornu, for their briefings. Our appreciation also goes to Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi for her perspectives, and we welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye in today's meeting.

More than a decade after the Arab Spring, Syria is still marked by political instability and violence, with devastating consequences for civilian lives and well-being. It is regrettable that there has been no meaningful change in the situation in Syria, notwithstanding international and regional efforts to end the conflict.

We are particularly concerned about the recent uptick in violence in the northern part of the country, including between rival militias, which has resulted in the loss of 23 civilian lives and displaced more than 20,000 people. Equally worrisome is the reported heavy shelling on the front lines earlier this month in northern Syria.

The vast majority of the victims of the continuous conflict are women and children, as well as humanitarian workers. We deplore that unnecessary violence, which undermines peace efforts. It is vital that all parties honour the nationwide ceasefire and respect the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure, in line with international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

As we have often said, there is no military solution to the inordinately protracted crisis in Syria. We therefore reiterate that the most viable avenue for sustainable peace and stability is a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned inclusive political process. Such a process must involve

all segments and actors of Syrian society, including women, and meet the aspirations of the Syrian people, undertaken with the facilitation of the United Nations and the support of the international community.

Now more than ever before, we implore the parties and stakeholders to inject a new lease on life into the fragile political process, including through three elements.

First, we urge a return to the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated small body of the Constitutional Committee meetings. The parties need to agree on the modalities for the resumption of talks as soon as possible to create the right conditions for the much-awaited political process. They must demonstrate political will and commitment to address key and substantive issues of concern to move the process forward.

Secondly, we call for an enhanced role by regional stakeholders in support of the political process. It is our hope that the contact group of the League of Arab States on Syria will work closely with the Special Envoy to give fresh impetus to the political process. That should be in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which remains the foremost road map for working towards the desired political solution, in a manner that takes into account the interests of the widest spectrum of the Syrian population, including women and civil society.

Thirdly, while we welcome the role of the various stakeholders in the quest for a solution to the Syrian crisis, we underscore the need for coordination of the various efforts, such as the Astana format and the contact group of the League of Arab States, under the auspices of the Special Envoy, to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the various interventions. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy, particularly his step-for-step initiative, and call on the parties to engage constructively with him in his quest to find a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict.

Regarding the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, the A3 notes with concern that it has been compounded significantly by the deteriorating state of the economy. Consequently, millions of Syrians remain food insecure and, as we have heard during today's briefing, almost half of the population is considered food insecure, while others require nutrition assistance and have no access to potable water.

Recent cuts in assistance by the World Food Programme are further exacerbating the plight of many Syrians, with millions no longer benefiting from critical support, while those who benefit have only half of their needs met. It is worrisome that the dire situation has become a driver of other social ills that compel people to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including early marriage.

The humanitarian situation in Syria demands our urgent and collective action. The Syrian humanitarian response plan remains 70 per cent underfunded, and we urgently appeal to the international community to come to the aid of the Syrian people. The people of Syria deserve our support, especially at such a critical time as they recover from the devastating impact of the February earthquake and the coronavirus diseases pandemic, amid the unrelenting violence. With that in mind, the A3 reaffirms its steadfast support for the use of all modalities to deliver aid to every person in need in Syria. The cross-border aid mechanism, as well as cross-line deliveries, remains crucial to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. We renew our call on the parties to work closely with the United Nations to create a safe and secure environment for the expansion of cross-line support.

In that regard, we were pleased to learn that cross-border missions to north-west Syria have continued despite the Council's inability to renew resolution 2672 (2023). We welcome the delivery of humanitarian assistance through the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam crossings. Given the dire humanitarian situation in the north-western part of the country, the 49 and 16 trucks that have entered Syria through the two crossing, respectively, since 19 September will provide life-saving support and help alleviate the suffering of many people. In order to reduce continued dependence on external aid, we renew our call on donors to increase funding for early-recovery and livelihood activities as a medium- to long-term alternative to periodic support.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates the fact that resolution 2254 (2015) remains the most workable solution to the conflict. Progress on the political process will open the much-awaited pathway to peace, which can be realized through a nationwide ceasefire and a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned United Nations facilitated political process. As the country's crisis has entered its second decade, the A3 expresses its solidarity with the Syrian people, as they continue their search for peace, and reaffirms its support for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Special Envoy Pedersen; the Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ms. Wosornu; and Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi, regional Vice-President of the civil society organization the International Rescue Committee. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Syria, Türkiye and Iran at this meeting.

My delegation acknowledges the efforts of the Special Envoy in ensuring that peace diplomacy is the only way forward in the political negotiation process to resolve the conflict, which has upended the lives of the Syrian people for 12 years. It is important to regain the trust of the parties to establish an environment that enables relaunching the meetings of the Constitutional Committee, the step-for-step negotiation plan and the implementation of other measures in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We believe that, at the very least, political action must result in stability and good governance through the implementation of national, regional and global strategies; relaunching economic activity in order to decrease the dependence of millions of people on humanitarian assistance; the establishment of accountability and transitional justice mechanisms to provide answers to the families of those who have been murdered, disappeared or arbitrarily deprived of their freedom; and the re-establishment of the social fabric, based on the inclusion of the greatest number of social and political sectors at all stages of the negotiation, including in particular the full, equitable and meaningful participation of women and young people.

We hope that the unconditional opening of the cross-border operations for access to north-west Syria, as well as the guarantees for the security and the freedom of movement of the personnel of the United Nations and its partner agencies on the ground, will continue indefinitely. Within that framework, we believe that the information that OCHA can provide to the Security Council continues to be important. The lack of access to safe water sources, the spike in the number of cholera cases, the increase in the number of people suffering from food insecurity and the growing number of displaced women and girls at risk of gender-based violence are realities that will only get worse with the onset of winter. Given the situation, we urge donors to continue to honour their pledges to the humanitarian

response plan. The funding crisis threatens to cut short food and medicine delivery operations, as well as the implementation of early-recovery projects.

Lastly, we reiterate the call on all actors to contribute to national reconciliation and development cooperation.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings before the Security Council today. I also thank Ms. Jarbawi for sharing her experience and valuable insights.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains one of the gravest in the world, with conditions for millions of people continuing to deteriorate. Over the summer months, heat waves have compounded the suffering of the population across the country, especially those displaced and living in camps in the north-east and north-west of the country. Water shortages, primarily driven by the ongoing fuel shortages, hostilities and the reduction of humanitarian services, have pushed families to their limit. Across Syria, acute hunger continues unabated; 12.1 million people are facing acute food insecurity and, due to underfunding of the humanitarian response plan, approximately 2.5 million are no longer receiving food or cash support through the United Nations. Children are suffering from chronic malnutrition, poor sanitation and the absence of education. Early and forced marriages persist — negative coping mechanisms for families that are often used to alleviate financial hardship or mitigate risks to family honour amid growing rates of sexual violence.

The outlook for the rest of 2023 looks bleak, as sharp increases in food basket prices, the non-renewal of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and currency depreciation are pushing an even greater number of Syrians towards economic calamity. Women and girls remain disproportionately impacted by the worsening situation. As such, an urgent increase in humanitarian funding is now required to prevent the total collapse of basic humanitarian, medical and social services throughout the country. Unimpeded access and scaled-up operations are critical to stave off the most acute cumulative humanitarian consequences ever faced by the Syrian people.

Malta is pleased by the resumption of humanitarian cross-border operations at Bab Al-Hawa. That vital crossing is critical to providing for the almost 4 million Syrians in acute need in the north-west. We expect that the agreement between the United Nations and Damascus for all three crossings will be respected and

extended for as long as those needs persist. We also call on all relevant stakeholders to comply with their obligations under international law to facilitate the unimpeded passage of aid to all areas of the north-west through Bab Al-Hawa.

At the heart of the many and varied humanitarian needs is the continued political paralysis and military conflict that drives them. Across the country, we note the recent demonstrations in the south, the troubling tensions in the north-east between the Syrian Democratic Forces and tribal communities, as well as continued air strikes in the north-west. Only a United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), will allow for the change needed to address the root causes of the crisis that Syria continues to face. All actors, including the League of Arab States, must support the efforts and engagement of the Special Envoy in encouraging Damascus to positively respond to the steps-for-steps initiative. Most relevant to advancing the stalled political process is the resumption of the Constitutional Committee. The deadlock that has characterized the Committee is deeply regrettable, as it remains the only format that convenes all parties together for dialogue. In that respect, we are pleased to hear today plans to reconvene that vital format before the end of the year. We sincerely hope that all stakeholders, especially Damascus, can find the political will to engage in a meaningful manner and make significant steps towards ending this devastating and seemingly endless war.

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

The war continues in Syria with complete impunity, and the violence remains widespread. This war has repercussions on the entire region, which hosts several million refugees and is suffering the repercussions of the captagon trafficking orchestrated by the Syrian regime. Instability also fuels terrorism. I reiterate France's support for Mr. Pedersen's actions and mediation efforts. There will be no just and lasting solution in Syria until a credible and inclusive political process is initiated based on resolution 2254 (2015). The voices of those demonstrating in Al-Suwayda and throughout the rest of Syria is consistent with the same. The international community expects concrete and verifiable actions from the regime. The conditions for the return of refugees must be met. Damascus has still not presented concrete commitments in that direction. France reiterates its support for the countries that welcome those millions of Syrians.

The resumption of the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point is good news. I commend the efforts of Martin Griffiths and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which made that possible. However, Russia's position on the renewal of the cross-border mechanism last July arouses legitimate concern among humanitarian actors, in a context that has grown considerably worse since the 6 February earthquakes. It is essential that the Security Council remain seized of this file, and it would be desirable for the Secretariat to be able to report regularly and in writing on the humanitarian response in Syria.

Finally, those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be held accountable for their actions. France welcomes the work of the international, impartial and independent mechanism. It also supports the recently created independent humanitarian institution on missing persons, which aims to help the families of the disappeared in Syria to learn the fate of their loved ones.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Ms. Wosornu and Ms. Jarbawi for their valuable inputs.

Syria continues to be in a severe multifaceted crisis. Its people have endured over 12 years of war, perpetual displacement, terrorism, devastating earthquakes and a deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation. Despite the acceleration of regional diplomatic efforts, including Syria's return to the League of Arab States and the efforts of the Arab contact group, we see little sense of urgency from the Syrian Government to genuinely pursue the political process. We therefore strongly urge all parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, to engage more seriously in good faith with Special Envoy Pedersen's step-for-step approach and to implement resolution 2254 (2015). We hope to see the Constitutional Committee, regardless of venue, reconvened at the earliest.

Given continued insecurity and instability, conditions are not yet in place for the dignified, safe and voluntary return of refugees. Host countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, are reaching their capacity. King Abdullah of Jordan clearly stated during high-level week that "the fact is that refugees are far from returning. On the contrary, more Syrians are likely to leave their country as the crisis persists". With no prospect of a political solution, the humanitarian

situation remains dire. Japan is encouraged by United Nations efforts for the recent resumption of cross-border aid operations via the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, the good news of which we have just heard from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We are also pleased that so far this year over 4,000 trucks with aid have crossed into north-west Syria using the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings. However, it is crucial that all United Nations aid deliveries, particularly at border crossings, be transparent, consistently verified and sufficiently monitored to ensure their humanitarian nature. Japan strongly encourages a collective effort to respond to OCHA's appeal and to contribute to the humanitarian response plan, which will help enable United Nations aid operations in the north-west, including cross-line deliveries and early-recovery and livelihood projects. We are seriously concerned that the international community's attentiveness may wane as the crisis drags on.

Lastly, justice is one of the vital components of a comprehensive and inclusive political solution. The fate and whereabouts of all missing people must be clarified to achieve national reconciliation and sustainable peace. In accordance with the General Assembly's decision to establish an independent institution on missing persons in Syria, Japan looks forward to soon receiving more updates from the Secretary-General and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, including proposed terms of reference.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join my colleagues in expressing our thanks to Special Envoy Pedersen, Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and Ms. Jarbawi for their briefings.

Switzerland associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Brazil, our co-penholder on the humanitarian issue. I would also like to echo the thanks expressed to OCHA for its significant commitment.

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

As all the briefers confirmed, the situation in the country remains very worrisome. The security situation, particularly in the north of the country, has a major impact on the civilian population, who are all too often the victims of direct or indiscriminate attacks. Switzerland calls on all parties to respect, and ensure

respect for, international humanitarian law and the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities. The introduction of a nationwide ceasefire, as prescribed by resolution 2254 (2015), is more necessary and urgent than ever if the country is to emerge from the deep humanitarian, social and economic crisis in which it is plunged. We also recall that Syria has an obligation to respect and protect the human rights of every individual.

Switzerland welcomes Special Envoy Pedersen's recent contacts in the region, including in Damascus. We hope that those contacts will advance his step-by-step approach, according to the mandate conferred to him by the Security Council and put forward by regional players in the wake of the Amman, Cairo and Jeddah declarations this year. A substantial meeting of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible, under the auspices of the Special Envoy, would be an important step towards relaunching the political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). The Council must also play a role in the fight against impunity, which is another sine qua non condition for lasting peace in Syria.

The demonstrations that have been taking place in Al-Suwayda for several weeks now show that a political solution to the conflict is still essential. Switzerland calls for respect for the right to demonstrate freely and to make one's voice heard without being subjected to repression or violence.

Switzerland consistently supports close cooperation between the Office of the Special Envoy and the Civil Society Support Room. The aspirations, grievances and expectations of civil society, and of Syrian women in particular, some of whom I have had the pleasure and honour of meeting with on several occasions, and whose tremendous commitment and courage I have always admired, must be included in the efforts to achieve a lasting political solution. Those platforms act as important channels for communicating the reality on the ground in Syria to international bodies. In that respect, Switzerland reiterates its support for civil society organizations active inside and outside Syria, which play a crucial role in easing the persisting tensions and conflict in the country.

Switzerland takes note of Syria's decision on 4 September to abolish its military field courts. We call for that measure to be effectively implemented in order to prevent future arbitrary arrests and forced

disappearances of civilians, and for it not to undermine the search for missing persons. Furthermore, the implementation by all the parties of confidence-building measures, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), as well as the release of detainees and the clarification of the fate of missing persons, are essential to pave the way for reconciliation in the country.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Wosorنو for their briefings. We value the perspective brought by Ms. Jarbawi, which gave us a glimpse of the painful reality that is daily life in Syria.

After more than a decade, Syria remains a security nightmare, a humanitarian catastrophe, an economic abyss, a financial ruin and a geopolitical mess — a most bleak prospect. Since our most recent meeting on this topic (see S/PV.9403), the overall situation has not improved, and progress is nowhere to be seen. The reality continues to be marked not only by the continued instability, political stalemate, atrocities, human suffering and grief, but also by the regime's persistence to cling to power at all costs. It is the very same leadership that initiated what became a tragedy for an entire nation, and which stands as a major impediment to change by systematically undermining the political process as foreseen in resolution 2254 (2015).

The humanitarian situation needs no further description. Albania has repeatedly called for aid delivery to be based on United Nations principles, including monitoring and reporting mechanisms — which should continue — and for humanitarian-access authorizations not to be politicized. An absurd veto terminated the Security Council's authorization for cross-border delivery in the north-west of the country, adding insecurity to the unpredictability.

The humanitarian needs will not stop on 31 December. But any future renewal of the use of Bab Al-Hawa will be subject to the mood in Damascus. And knowing what it has been capable of — namely, the worst — we, and those dependent on it, have reason to remain utterly worried. With that in mind, we have supported the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the continuation of life-saving humanitarian deliveries through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. The recent resumption of those deliveries is most welcome. Nonetheless, we continue to believe that a product of the Council is needed in order

to provide, in a predictable and sustainable manner, the delivery of the humanitarian aid by the United Nations and its international partners.

We support the efforts of the Special Envoy and his step-for-step approach to bring the political process back on track based on resolution 2254 (2015). We consider that a window to the future, the key to unlocking the path to sustainable peace and a viable exit out of this never-ending conflict — which must be done through a functioning and active Constitutional Committee. Peace and stability in Syria will not come about if all stakeholders do not come together and act genuinely and in unison under the guidance of the United Nations to secure a nationwide ceasefire, advance the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and create the conditions necessary for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees.

Albania remains deeply worried about the Government forces' continued arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture and ill-treatment of people and about the whereabouts of the more than 130,000 Syrians missing as a result of systematic enforced disappearances. We fully supported the General Assembly's establishment in June of an independent institution to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons. That issue affects millions of Syrian victims, survivors and families, who are seeking to clarify the fate of their missing loved ones. And until that closure is achieved, it will remain an obstacle to peace.

Despite the propaganda of the regime, people in Syria are unhappy and remain without prospects. There is a huge gap between the regime's rhetoric and the ordinary people living in fear of an insecure tomorrow as they try to survive the economic abyss. The protests in southern Syria are a wake-up call as to the urgent need for political change. Let us not forget that, 13 years ago, peaceful protests, which were met with brutality by the regime, led to conflict, civil war and to the situation the endures to this day. People are crying out for food on the table, affordable medicine, fuel, electricity and water and other basic commodities, while the regime is investing in drug production and trafficking.

I would like to conclude by reminding the Council that we should never forget that Syrians have been victims of violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law on a massive and systematic scale. Hundreds of thousands have been

killed, half the population has been forcefully displaced and deep scars are everywhere. Therefore, in order to secure a path to sustainable peace, there must be no impunity for crimes committed. Peace in Syria will be built through sustained efforts, and accountability is a part of that.

Many times, including today, many of us have highlighted what would happen if all the actors in Syria came together to work in good faith for their future. Unfortunately, we are, and continue to be, left with the desolate assessment of what Syria is and would further become because of the stalemate if — as Special Envoy Pedersen said earlier — there is no shift in the mindset. Both aspects are clear, and a clear choice needs to be made — by the Syrians, first. We reiterate our unwavering support for the just quest of Syrians for a better future by rebuilding a decent life in freedom and dignity for themselves, their families and their children.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Sabbagh (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): For years, the Syrian Arab Republic has been facing serious challenges caused by terrorism exported from different regions of the world, the illegal military presence of United States and Turkish forces and repeated Israeli air attacks. All of that has been accompanied by brazen interference in our internal affairs and has coincided with the imposition of an economic blockade and illegal and inhumane unilateral sanctions.

All those challenges are flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, along with all the Security Council resolutions on Syria, which stipulate respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, leading to instability and insecurity in Syria and the entire region.

The Israeli occupation forces continue their aggression against Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity by targeting and bombing infrastructure, vital civilian facilities and airports. Since the beginning of this year until present, the Israeli occupation forces have carried out 30 air attacks on such civilian targets. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms all those crimes and attacks by Israel. We equally

condemn the continued silence in that regard by some States that declare themselves protectors of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which makes them complicit with the perpetrators of those crimes and clearly shows the extent to which they apply double standards.

Certain permanent members of the Council have committed — and continue to commit — flagrant violations against Syria. The United States of America maintains an illegitimate and unjustified military presence on Syrian territory. It is supporting separatist militias that violate Syria's territorial integrity and is using terrorist groups in the Al-Rukban camp to play a destructive role and cause an unnecessary humanitarian crisis. The United States is also sending its delegations to illegally sneak into north-eastern Syria, the most recent of which was the visit by a United States delegation headed by Ethan Goldrich, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. It is also plundering Syria's national resources, stealing Syrian oil, gas, and wheat in broad daylight and depriving their Syrian owners of them. The United States has caused the Syrian oil sector direct and indirect losses totalling \$115 billion. We therefore call for the United States to be held accountable and compelled to pay compensation for those losses.

Concurrently, the United States and its European allies continue to impose unilateral coercive measures on all vital sectors, preventing the Syrian people from having access to food, health services, energy, transportation, agricultural production and causing great and unprecedented economic and humanitarian suffering.

In addition to all that, this very morning, the United States representative reaffirmed before Council members the illegal, illegitimate and shameful position taken by the Administration of former United States President Donald Trump announced in March 2019, which recognized Israel's sovereignty, the occupying Power, over the occupied Arab Syrian Golan, in clear violation of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981).

All those illegal and illegitimate practices that we have drawn attention are only a few examples of what the United States is doing in Syria. The United States lectures us at every meeting about the need to abide by the Charter of the United Nations and the importance of defending the principles of international law. It simply tries to fling mud at others while shamefully evading

the devastating repercussions of its policy of creative chaos and destruction that it has spread in our region and in other regions of the world.

We listened to the briefing given by Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy to Syria. Mr. Pedersen recently visited Damascus and met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, who affirmed to Mr. Pedersen Syria's commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, free from external interference and on the basis of respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. In that regard, I would like to note that we continue to participate in dialogue and coordination with the Special Envoy. We hope that his efforts will allow the Constitutional Committee to resume its meetings as soon as possible.

We also listened to Ms. Wosornu's briefing. I would like to point out that, while the Syrian Government granted permission to the United Nations on 13 July to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing to ensure the continued delivery of humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians in the north-west of the country, the first convoy used the crossing only on 19 September, in conditions detrimental to the United Nations — more than two months after permission was granted — owing to obstruction by the terrorist groups that are present in that area and that have taken the Syrian civilians there hostage. In the meantime, we have not heard a word from those countries that have caused us headaches by repeatedly proclaiming themselves eager to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrians.

While my delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for the efforts he has made in this area, it stresses that the Syrian Arab Republic, by permitting the use of that crossing, in addition to granting permission to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, along with using the Sarmada and Saraqib crossings, for the delivery of cross-line humanitarian shipments internally, is guaranteeing sufficient humanitarian access to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrians in north-west Syria as is required. However, maximum pressure must be exerted on terrorist groups in that area to prevent them from exploiting those in need of the humanitarian aid or diverting it from its intended purpose. It will also be necessary to provide sufficient, sustained and predictable funding to the relevant United Nations programmes and agencies, given that the issue of declining funding has become a matter of genuine concern regarding the capacity of those programmes and agencies to fulfil their mandates.

Out of concern for its citizens, the Syrian Government has opened five crossings, while it was demanded of us that we open only two crossings. Do Council members remember that?

With regard to the issue of the return of refugees, I would like to underscore that Syria welcomes the return of every Syrian refugee who has been forced to leave the country because of armed terrorist groups. The Syrian Government has taken several decisions to that end, and we are cooperating with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Arab contact group to achieve that objective. In that context, we call on Western countries to work to create conditions conducive to the voluntary and dignified return of Syrians to their cities and villages, including by implementing early-recovery projects and financing efforts to clear mines and explosive remnants, instead of obstructing the return of refugees and politicizing that dossier to serve their narrow political agendas.

My delegation stresses that improving the humanitarian situation in Syria requires providing sustainable solutions to support Syrians, which would reduce dependence on life-saving humanitarian aid and increase their resilience. It also requires the immediate and unconditional lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union on Syria and its people.

Finally, before I conclude my statement, and given that this statement is my final one before the Security Council in my capacity as the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to those sisterly and friendly Council members that have provided support to Syria and spared no effort in standing by its side in the face of interference in its internal affairs and all attempts to exploit and politicize the humanitarian situation in the country. I call on other Council members to reconsider their way of dealing with Syria and to adopt a constructive approach that would truly contribute to finding solutions to the problems we face, rather than fuelling the situation and destroying what has been achieved.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Ms. Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their updated briefings. We also note the statement made by Ms. Jarbawi.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains extremely dire. One of the most pressing challenges facing Syria today is its deeply troubled economy, which is primarily the result of unilateral sanctions and illicit resource exploitation — both of which disproportionately affect women, children and other Syrians.

It is vital that humanitarian aid and efforts to rebuild Syria not be used as tools of pressure against the country. Iran has consistently supported the provision of aid to the Syrian people and underlines the importance of delivering humanitarian assistance in a fair and transparent manner. We commend the United Nations and its partners for their unwavering commitment to assisting the Syrian people and working diligently towards alleviating their immense suffering. We firmly believe that the primary solution to the Syrian crisis lies in political means, as military actions will only further complicate the situation.

We stress the significance of resuming the meetings of the Constitutional Committee as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process. We hope that differences regarding the Committee's meeting venue can be resolved promptly, allowing its work to resume. The continued functioning of the Committee is vital, with its venue being of lesser importance. The role of the United Nations should remain supportive, with the entire process under Syrian leadership and ownership. In that context, we support the ongoing efforts of Mr. Pedersen and his engagements with the parties concerned to resolve the impasse within the Constitutional Committee.

Unfortunately, after 12 long years of the Syrian crisis, we continue to witness the presence of active terrorist groups within Syria, posing a severe threat to both its security and that of its neighbouring countries. While recognizing the legitimate security concerns of Syria's neighbouring countries, it is essential to emphasize that the fight against terrorism should not be utilized as a pretext to violate Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the meantime, the illegal presence of foreign military forces within Syria has only added to the instability of the country and the broader region.

We strongly condemn the ongoing attacks by the Israeli regime on Syrian territory. The Israeli regime commits such aggression to divert the attention of the international community from the daily atrocious crimes it is committing against the Palestinian people.

We reiterate our principled stance of supporting the expedited return of refugees to Syria. At present, there exists a significant number of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan. Their return should be facilitated through the cooperative efforts of all host Governments.

Addressing the challenges faced by Syrian refugees requires the establishment of essential infrastructure, including electricity, water, housing and education. The role of the United Nations, particularly the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is pivotal in that regard.

Iran is committed to collaborating with its partners within the Astana process, striving to achieve lasting and sustainable normalization in Syria. The Astana process, serving as a framework for peaceful dialogue, has achieved significant milestones. It remains the collective duty of our three countries as guarantors to uphold and enhance that framework.

During the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly on 22 September, Iran hosted a ministerial meeting with Russia and Türkiye as guarantor countries of the Astana format, with the participation of the Special Envoy. Among various priorities, the Foreign Ministers stressed the importance of facilitating the dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their respective homes in Syria. They also expressed their shared concerns over the dire humanitarian situation in Syria and called for unconditional humanitarian assistance devoid of political considerations. They support the bilateral agreement between the United Nations and the Syrian Government, which allows for the delivery of essential humanitarian aid via Bab Al-Hawa for a six-month period, providing crucial relief to those in dire need.

To conclude, we warmly welcome and totally support the recent positive developments in Syria's diplomatic relations, both on the regional and international fronts.

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

Mr. Önal (Türkiye): I thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Ms. Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and Ms. Jarbawi for their statements.

Last week, we all listened to world leaders as they addressed the most urgent problems affecting international peace and security, global prosperity and human

rights. Sadly, despite its grave political, humanitarian and security repercussions, the 12-year Syrian conflict has not been placed where it should be on that list of global priorities. The reality is that the Syrian crisis is not a frozen conflict, and it would be collectively remiss to treat it as such.

Active conflict is still ongoing on the ground in Syria today. The population is faced with deep economic deprivation, on top of a humanitarian crisis of catastrophic proportions where 7 out of every 10 people depend on international humanitarian assistance for survival. The situation is further exacerbated by the earthquakes in February. Since the beginning of the conflict, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed. Millions have been forced to flee their homes and have become refugees or internally displaced.

Just as worrisome is that the territorial integrity of the country has come under imminent threat due to terrorist organizations, primarily now the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG). As the conflict remains unresolved, new elements of instability are added to the picture. Recent developments on a wide spectrum, ranging from ongoing anti-regime protests in the south to armed clashes in the north-east and the spread of captagon production and trafficking, once again highlight the necessity to accelerate the efforts to find a viable solution to the Syrian conflict.

A comprehensive settlement of the Syrian conflict requires simultaneous progress in various areas. Those include revitalizing the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015); disrupting the malign and separatist agenda of terrorist organizations in order to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and unity; and creating conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees. Without national reconciliation and a new social contract, Syria will continue to be prone to conflict. Therefore, it is essential that the Syrian opposition be included in all efforts towards a political solution.

The Constitutional Committee, which was created as a result of the efforts of the Astana guarantors, is the most effective platform to bring together the Syrian parties. As we reiterated in the ministerial meeting of the Astana platform last week in New York, we are committed to engaging and working together for the reactivation of the Constitutional Committee so that it will start producing tangible results. We continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to make progress on the political tract.

The continued presence of terrorist organizations in Syria poses a vital threat to the country and its neighbours, primarily Türkiye, as well as to the wider region. In fact, the threat of PKK terrorism to Syria's territorial integrity has never been more alarming than it is today. Recent clashes between Arab tribes and PKK/YPG have shown once again that the activities of that organization and the external support it continues to receive is a major source of instability in Syria. The oppressive and discriminatory practices and human rights violations of that organization are a matter of public knowledge now and have also been extensively reported by the United Nations. We urge all sides to adopt a holistic, long-term approach and disengage from those separatist entities, which do not have any place in the future of Syria.

For almost a decade, the United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism has played an indispensable role in delivering urgent humanitarian assistance to millions of Syrians in need. The mechanism, authorized by the Security Council, was unique in terms of the level of predictability, transparency and effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the United Nations cross-border assistance continues to function in line with its long-standing modus operandi.

All sides will benefit from maintaining the reporting and monitoring elements of the mechanism, which are critical for the neutrality and oversight of the operation. We are pleased that aid deliveries through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing have finally resumed after a weeks-long halt. All parties must fulfil their responsibilities for the uninterrupted flow of cross-border aid as long as it is needed, including through scaled-up donor funding. Türkiye, for its part, will continue to coordinate and closely cooperate with the United Nations and its partners towards that objective.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Türkiye is entitled to take appropriate measures against direct and imminent threats posed to its security by terrorist organizations operating in Syria. As such, we will continue to exercise our inherent right of self-defence, as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

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

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.