



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

*Provisional*

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New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Zhang Jun/Mr. Geng Shuang . . . . .	(China)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Ms. Dautllari
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon . . . . .	Ms. Bouanga Ayouné
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamanaka
	Malta . . . . .	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Bambissa
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): 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 the meeting: Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

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

I give the floor to Ms. Rochdi.

**Ms. Rochdi:** It is an honour to brief the Security Council once again. Special Envoy Pedersen is currently in the region, in Muscat.

Let me start with the ongoing and urgent need for de-escalation in Syria and across the region, which remains the most pressing matter at hand. We remain deeply concerned about the prospect of a potentially wider escalation in Syria. The effects of the tragic developments in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel continue to be felt inside Syria. Just this weekend, Israeli air strikes once again hit Damascus airport, once again temporarily halting the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, which operates from the airport and services Syria's humanitarian programmes. Targeting civilian infrastructure is prohibited under international law. That came after several other airstrikes attributed to Israel on other locations across Syria — Al-Quneitra, Dara'a, Damascus, Al-Suwayda and Homs — with Israeli artillery fire reported into southern Syria. Syrian State media say that the strikes caused material damage and killed a civilian airport worker. Those airstrikes have coincided with reports of rocket and missile launches from southern Syria over the occupied Syrian Golan towards Israel. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claims that a drone strike in Eilat, in southern Israel, came from an organization

in Syria against which the IDF says it carried out air strikes in response.

Near-daily reports of attacks on United States forces in north-east Syria continue, mostly claimed by the so-called Islamic Resistance in Iraq, although none have been reported in the past few days. The United States, which claims that groups behind those attacks are backed by Iran, carried out two more rounds of what it says are retaliatory strikes on facilities in Syria that it claims are used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and groups that it backs. Iran denies claims that those groups are affiliated with it.

Meanwhile, the Syrian conflict continues in all its other dimensions, with this reporting period seeing significant military activity and further civilian casualties. That included pro-Government air strikes on north-west Syria; artillery exchanges and clashes between Government forces and the listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham; drone attacks on Government areas attributed to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham or other actors based in Idlib, with several reportedly intercepted by Government forces; Turkish drone strikes on north-east Syria, with further artillery exchanges between Turkish and armed opposition forces, on one side, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), on the other; further attempts by some members of Arab tribes to attack SDF positions in Deir ez-Zor; ongoing attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, in particular against Government forces in the desert; and multiple security incidents in the south-west, including assassination attempts.

Let me reiterate the four messages the Special Envoy conveyed to the Council last month. First, we need to de-escalate within Syria towards a nationwide ceasefire and cooperative approach to countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups, in line with international law. Secondly, all actors — Syrian and non-Syrian — must exercise maximum restraint. Thirdly, all actors must operate in full compliance with international humanitarian law. Fourthly, international cooperation must refocus on the neglected political process.

In the regrettable absence of a common forum for all key stakeholders on Syria to speak frankly, the Special Envoy has been pursuing every occasion and every channel to press those messages — in meetings in Geneva with the Iranian Foreign Minister, with key members of the ceasefire task force from Russia,

Türkiye and the United States; with senior officials from the United Kingdom and European Union member States; and in the region with senior Arab ministers, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and senior Chinese and United States officials.

We hear from all concerned parties a clear message — that they do not seek escalation. But that is simply not enough. Violence continues in Syria, including spillover from Gaza and Israel. To continue such violence is to play with fire. Just one miscalculation, one stray artillery shell or misjudged air strike, could ignite a dozen different powder kegs that lie within Syrian borders. We need more than just good intentions; we need sustained de-escalation operationalized through robust channels among all stakeholders. We need the killing, injuring and displacement of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure not just to decrease, but to end. Such a de-escalation of violent conflict would be a vital start. But it is not enough. The situation remains simply unsustainable in so many other ways.

The humanitarian situation is ever more alarming, as we will hear shortly from my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We can guess that it will only worsen, not least with winter and funding cuts looming and a disastrous economic situation. Of course, we welcome Syria's extension of its authorization for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months.

We have not seen verified, concrete progress on the ongoing unlawful detention of tens of thousands of individuals in relation to the conflict. We continue to seek information from the Syrian Government on all the amnesties they issue, including the latest decree issued earlier this month. We continue to call for the release of all arbitrarily detained individuals, especially vulnerable categories.

Refugees and the internally displaced still do not see conditions emerging for them to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity. The protection and livelihoods concerns central to that issue still need to be fundamentally addressed, and we continue to hope to see action on them. Against that backdrop, it is no surprise that popular frustrations remain extremely high, as we see in continuing protests in As-Suwayda.

The only way to tackle this unsustainable status quo is through a credible and comprehensive approach to a

political solution that puts all of the issues of concern to stakeholders on the table, allowing Syrians to realize their legitimate aspirations and chart a path to restoring Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

One dimension of that is resuming the Constitutional Committee and enabling it to proceed at pace and make progress on substance. The Special Envoy is consulting in the region for the second time this month to ensure that no stone is left unturned regarding possibilities for a regional venue. There is nothing new to report on the search for consensus on a venue. Venues that have been floated are not currently on offer or are not the subject of consensus. The Special Envoy is continuing to speak with all concerned about how, in these circumstances, the non-Syrian issues that have so far prevented reconvening the Committee in Geneva should be put aside in the interest of the process. Those issues should not take priority over the resumption of a United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process.

We also continue to seek further engagement with all relevant stakeholders on the proposals for step-for-step confidence-building measure already aired, as well as further ideas in that regard.

The Special Envoy was pleased to discuss all of those issues in detail with the Syrian Negotiations Commission earlier this month in Geneva, as well as the broader political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015). He looks forward to continuing to engage the Government on the same sets of issues.

Today we meet at the halfway mark of the annual campaign to end violence against women and girls. I want to echo the words of the Deputy Secretary-General last week, who called for creating conditions where women and girls can thrive. In Syria, a political process to end a 13-year conflict is an obvious place to start in that regard — one that takes note of the conflict's consequences for women and girls and lays the foundations for women and girls to leave behind the horrors of war and rebuild their lives and their country.

We look forward to continuing to engage with Syrian women from the parties to the political process, civil society, academia, the private sector and the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. We remain grateful to all of those women for their active commitment to all dimensions of the politics required to end this conflict. They too are alarmed by the potential of

regional spillover into Syria and hope that the broader regional crisis does not reduce the attention needed to find a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Syria. The Special Envoy and I also continue our constant engagement with Syrian civil society. This month the Special Envoy met with the leadership of Madaniya, a Syrian civic initiative.

In conclusion, I ask the Council and all stakeholders — Syrian and non-Syrian alike — to exercise maximum restraint and urgently make efforts to de-escalate the tense and dangerous situation in Syria. And in tandem, we need the Council's full and unified support in getting the political process back up and running, in terms of the Constitutional Committee, step for-step confidence-building measures and a broader process on all issues of resolution 2254 (2015). The attention on Syria has ebbed somewhat given the terrible crisis in the region. But Syria is a piece of that puzzle too. And the situation in Syria is too dangerous to be left unattended. If we do not give the Syrian parties and people a horizon of hope and a political path to resolving their conflict, I fear that the situation will boil over again and again, spilling across a region that is already at a moment of historical crisis.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Rochdi for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Wosornu.

**Ms. Wosornu:** The situation in Syria remains dire. Continued fighting and the displacement of tens of thousands of people have deepened humanitarian needs and compounded the suffering of civilians as they approach yet another winter under this conflict. Last month (see S/PV.9459), I reported on the humanitarian impact of the hostilities in the north-west, the most significant we have seen since 2019. As Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi just noted, those hostilities continued over the past month, albeit at a lower intensity, causing further civilian deaths and injuries. Allow me to shed some light on the situation.

Over this past weekend alone, on 25 November, shelling in southern Idlib killed nine civilians — including one woman and six children from the same family — while they were harvesting olives on agricultural land. In all, dozens of civilians have been killed or injured in the violence, and more than 120,000 people have been displaced. While a majority of them have since managed to return to their homes, at least 10 per cent remain displaced. Some 5,000 of

those people are hosted in reception centres, while the rest live in informal settlements. The impact on civilian facilities and critical infrastructure has been significant, with 40 health facilities, 27 schools and more than 20 water systems affected by the violence.

Turning to the north-east, the uptick in hostilities that commenced in late August also continues and has further displaced 25,000 people who were already displaced. The violence in the north-east has also impacted multiple civilian facilities, including health centres and schools. Parents are afraid to send their children to school, worried about their safety. That not only affects children's education but also exposes them to risks to their safety and well-being, including, as Ms. Rochdi mentioned, gender-based violence, violence against adolescent girls, child marriage and domestic violence.

Attacks have also damaged power stations. The Allouk water station has not functioned since 5 October — I mentioned that in my previous briefing. That has deprived 1 million people of access to water in Al-Hasakah and neighbouring areas, including the Al-Hol camp. I would like to once again remind all parties that constant care must be taken to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure. That entails taking all feasible precautions to prevent and minimize civilian harm when planning and deciding on attacks. Meanwhile, crossings on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River remain closed, hampering the ability of people to access assistance, including health services.

The United Nations remains committed to the principled delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need throughout Syria, including in the north-west, where our cross-border operations remain a lifeline for more than 4 million people. Earlier this month, the Government of Syria extended its consent for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings to deliver aid from Türkiye for a period of three months, until 13 February 2024. We welcome that extension. More than 20 per cent of trucks and nearly 50 per cent of missions by United Nations personnel going into the north-west since February used those two crossings. They provide the quickest and most efficient route to reach people in need in northern Aleppo, where 20 per cent of displacement camps and informal sites are located.

We continue our engagement with the Government of Syria to ensure that the delivery of cross-border

assistance is principled, sustained and predictable. Maintaining an independent and robust oversight mechanism at the border, in line with existing modalities, is essential. The sheer scale of needs across the country underscores the urgency of scaling up the delivery of aid via all modalities. We therefore continue our efforts to further expand the delivery of cross-line assistance to key areas in the north-west and throughout Syria.

The winter is approaching, and it is already exacerbating the suffering of displaced people, some 3.2 million of whom are located in Government areas. Again, women and girls, who make up 80 per cent of those in displacement camps and informal sites, continue to bear the brunt of this crisis. A staggering 92 per cent of women-headed households in displacement camps in Syria report insufficient ability or complete inability to meet the basic needs of their families. One of those women is Reem, the breadwinner of her family, who recently told one of our colleagues “I have five children. We cannot afford to eat. How can we survive this winter?” She cannot afford fuel for heating or clothes to keep her children warm.

The lack of protection against cold temperatures poses significant health risks, particularly for vulnerable segments of the population, such as children and the elderly. Our teams on the ground estimate that 5.7 million people across Syria need critical assistance to help them through the cold winter months. Inadequate shelter, lack of proper heating and insufficient clothing and household items are among their most pressing needs.

We humanitarians are doing what we can to meet and prioritize those needs. We have so far provided very little, having provided 100,000 people — some 26,000 families — with dignified shelters, with efforts ongoing to provide similar support to an additional 7,000 five-person families. As the Council can see, we are facing a troubling, significant 70 per cent shortfall in the funds required to deliver that vital support. While we have mobilized some additional funds — thanks to the generosity of donors who fund the pooled funds of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — without additional donor funding, we will not be able to meet the needs of many people, who will spend the winter exposed to the elements.

Those funding issues extend to the humanitarian response at large. In September, I informed the Council that the humanitarian response plan for Syria was

less than 30 per cent funded (see S/PV.9426). The needle has barely moved since. The plan is funded to only 33 per cent today. We are again grateful for the generosity of donors — from whom we have received \$1.8 billion of the \$5.4 billion requested. Let me remind the Council that, at this time last year, the plan was 44 per cent funded — and this time, it is only 33 per cent funded. Such low funding levels are unprecedented for a humanitarian crisis of this magnitude. I cannot overstate the impact that this lack of resources is having on our ability to meet the needs of millions of people in desperate need throughout Syria. Some 2.5 million people no longer receive the food assistance they need. As mentioned earlier, following the World Food Programme cuts in June, the number of those receiving food assistance decreased by a further 45 per cent, from 5.2 million people to 3 million people. Some 2.3 million women of reproductive age are losing access to sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal health care. That is 10.4 per cent of the population. Close to 1 million children under the age of five are not receiving routine immunizations. Almost 6 million people are not receiving urgently needed nutritional assistance — 74 per cent of those people are women and girls. That includes 200,000 acutely malnourished children, which is 27 per cent of the population.

Hundreds of hospitals and health centres are being forced to close or scale down operations owing to the lack of funding. And survivors of gender-based violence are losing access to necessary support and health care, while prevention activities are being deprioritized to meet the most urgent, absolute needs.

The people of Syria have suffered more than enough. Yet this winter, humanitarians are being asked to prioritize one vulnerable life over another vulnerable life. We are being forced to cut critical assistance programmes when there is little chance for the restoration of regular services. That is the stark reality of the current situation.

What we need is urgent funding to save lives and stem a further catastrophic deterioration of the humanitarian situation. We need funding. We need it now. We need sustained humanitarian access through all modalities as well. And, more than anything else, we need genuine progress towards an end to the conflict, without which it is impossible to stem the tide of the vast humanitarian needs in Syria.



**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Wosornu for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Ms. Rochdi, and the Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Wosornu, for their briefings.

On the political track, we support the resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee in the context of advancing a Syrian-led and -owned and United Nations-facilitated political process. To that end, Syrian representatives must agree on the relevant venue. We expect that the Special Envoy, in accordance with his direct mandate, will do everything possible to facilitate that and not fritter away his efforts on other initiatives not agreed upon by the Syrian parties.

At present, the dire situation on the ground in Syria is being exacerbated by the sharp escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The country, like a number of its neighbours in the region, is literally teetering on the brink of being dragged into a large-scale confrontation. The blatant double standards of Western countries are most clearly demonstrated in relation to the Syrian Arab Republic. While baselessly asserting that Israel — the occupying Power — has a certain right to self-defence with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory, they clearly deny that right to Syrians and the indeed Lebanese when Israelis arbitrarily attack their territories, thereby provoking new waves of internally displaced persons. In the most recent period, the Israeli air force has not only repeatedly attacked the international airports in Damascus and Aleppo, which are the main gateways for United Nations assistance into Syria, but also carried out strikes in the areas of Deir ez-Zor, Abu Kamal and the Golan Heights.

The most recent Israeli air strike on Syrian territory took place on 26 November. The Israeli air force once again attacked Damascus International Airport, which had just resumed operations following the previous air strike on 12 October. As a result, the functioning of the country's airport was again suspended indefinitely. We regard the continued strikes on Syrian territory as a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of that State and basic norms of international law. We firmly condemn those events. In these circumstances, the silence of

our Western colleagues is telling. They simply must understand the risks stemming directly from such reckless action.

Regional interventions by Westerners, under the pretext of allegedly fighting terrorism, continue to play an extremely destabilizing role. It is under that banner that the United States of America and its allies have been illegally present in Syria since 2014. At the same time, Westerners have actually stopped combating Da'esh and Al-Qaida in the Arab country. They have long been using the fighters that they have nurtured exclusively for their own purposes, including for subversive acts against the Syrian Government forces. The Americans and Europeans are trying to whitewash the Security Council-listed terrorists of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, who control Idlib, by condemning Damascus and its allies for fighting them.

With regard to the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian settlement, we fully welcome the goodwill shown by Damascus in authorizing the United Nations to continue using the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossing points until 13 February 2024. That sovereign decision by the Syrian Government demonstrates Damascus's focus on a constructive and responsible approach to addressing the humanitarian challenges in the north-western regions of its country. Unfortunately, the Western countries are simply unable to demonstrate the same constructive spirit. They continue to shamelessly cover for the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists who are blocking United Nations cross-line deliveries to Idlib. None of the Western delegations on the Council have even condemned the ongoing destructive conduct of those internationally recognized terrorists.

At the same time, we know that the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point is being actively used by United Nations staff in Gaziantep for field missions to Idlib. We would like to ask Ms. Wosornu whether visits by United Nations staff to the terrorist-controlled enclave are coordinated with Damascus and whether they send the Syrian Government reports following those trips.

In that regard, we must note that, if our Western colleagues were to demonstrate the same zeal with which they approach cross-border access to Idlib to ensuring unimpeded, sustained and safe passage of convoys of emergency assistance to the blockaded Gaza Strip and to providing assistance to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians suffering from Israeli

bombing, the work of humanitarians in Gaza would be much more effective.

We also note that both the United Nations and the West remain silent with regard to the negative impacts of the illegal unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation and the socioeconomic development of Syria in general. The thematic report that the former Resident Coordinator ad interim in Damascus, Mr. El-Mostafa Benlamlih, promised to the Security Council and that the United Nations country team in Syria has been preparing for more than a year has not yet materialized. That situation is absolutely unacceptable, given that sanctions are essentially blocking the work of the United Nations staff on the ground, depriving the Syrians of the real benefits of the United Nations presence.

Given the adoption in the Second Committee of the General Assembly of draft resolution A/C.2/78/L.6/Rev.1 on unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries, we are of the view that the Resident Coordinator in Damascus now has the mandate necessary to prepare that report. That draft resolution explicitly requests the Secretary-General, along with the resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, to monitor the impact of such measures on the affected countries, including their impact on trade and development.

We warn that further silence by the Secretariat on this subject will indicate deliberate sabotage by the United Nations of the mandate of Member States and will undermine the reputation of the global Organization.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Wosornu for their briefings and for their unwavering commitment to bringing a sustainable peace to the people of Syria.

During last month's briefing (see S/PV.9459), we expressed concern about the multiple recent attacks by the Syrian regime and Russian forces in northern Syria. Those attacks killed scores of civilians, displaced over 120,000 people and destroyed vital infrastructure.

It was my great hope that this briefing would be different — that we would not have to discuss more bloodshed, more displacement and more brutality. And yet, sadly, the Syrian regime's ruthless bombing campaigns in Idlib and Aleppo governorates continue, killing hundreds more civilians. What is more, the

Al-Assad regime-led attacks, supported by Russian air strikes, concentrated in western portions of Idlib, have destroyed tents of displaced persons.

We also condemn the attacks by Iranian-aligned militia groups on United States personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria. The mission of those United States forces remains to lead the international effort to defeat Da'esh. Just like any other Member State, the United States has the right to self-defence, as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. We have therefore conducted targeted response strikes, and we stand ready to take further action, as necessary and appropriate, to address further threats of attacks.

It was in the interest of national defence that, earlier this month, we also designated Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada and its Secretary-General as specially designated global terrorists. This terrorist group has threatened the lives of United States and Global Coalition personnel alike, in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, we designated six individuals affiliated with the Iran-aligned militia Kata'ib Hizbullah.

Iran, through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, has supported those and other militant groups. It has supplied them with training, funding and sophisticated weapons, including increasingly accurate and lethal unmanned aerial systems. That escalatory behaviour is unacceptable and does nothing to address the oppressive and dire economic conditions facing Syrian civilians today. To that end, we cannot allow the Al-Assad regime to distract our attention from protests in Al-Suwayda, where for months the Syrian people have exercised their rights to peaceful assembly and the freedom of expression and called for peace, dignity, security and justice.

We support peaceful assembly, and the protesters exemplify the need for a Syrian-focused and Syrian-led solution to the conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Unfortunately, the Syrian regime has obstructed all attempts to achieve progress on the political track. As a result, the Syrian people continue to flee their homes in droves, with refugees showing no indication of a wish to return, not because of economic conditions, as the regime maintains, but because they fear regime oppression and torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, mandatory conscription and sexual and gender-based violence.

We welcome the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice earlier this month,

which order Syria to prevent acts of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment and the destruction of evidence of such acts. That is vitally important in holding the Al-Assad regime accountable for acts of torture.

On that note, we also continue to call upon the Al-Assad regime to release, or at the very least clarify the fate of, the more than 150,000 people it has arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared. That includes extending amnesty to not only those charged with petty crimes, but also those in prison for politically motivated reasons.

Finally, we welcome the six-month extension for United Nations access through the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings. We call on the regime to extend authorization for the Bab Al-Hawa crossing before it expires in January. Failing to do so makes planning, staffing and procurement less efficient. It raises costs for United Nations agencies and aid partners on the ground and leaves the humanitarian needs of thousands of Syrian civilians hanging in the balance during the cold winter months.

There is no shortage of humanitarian crises on our agenda. Still, we must not forget about the plight of the Syrian people. I met yesterday with a group of Syrian women who appealed to me for the Council's support. We must do more, and we must give more. As the largest donor to the humanitarian response plan, the United States calls on all States Members of the United Nations to support the appeal. Most of all, we call on the Council to stand with the Syrian people as they fight for their fundamental freedoms and a more just and peaceful future.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): I will speak first on behalf of Switzerland and Brazil, co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file.

I thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi and the Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Edem Wosornu, for their briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Türkiye and Iran in today's meeting.

In the midst of conflict and crisis in the Near East, we must not forget the people in Syria. After more than a decade of conflict, the humanitarian situation remains dire. Half the Syrian population is displaced, and needs have reached unprecedented proportions. In recent

months, the country's food and water crisis has worsened. That, combined with persistent socioeconomic decline, is driving more people into deeper poverty and severely straining their coping mechanisms.

The recent upsurge in violence and hostilities, notably in north-west Syria, the worst in years, has accentuated civilian suffering. It has displaced thousands and threatened the safety of vulnerable communities and aid workers. We are concerned about the increase in attacks on aid workers and recall that they are protected under international humanitarian law. The escalation of hostilities, including the repeated strikes on Damascus and Aleppo airports, have also affected aid delivery. A long-lasting ceasefire, according to resolution 2254 (2015), across the country is the only way to avoid further death, injury, displacement and human suffering.

We call on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. That includes ensuring the rapid and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to all civilians in need throughout Syria, abiding by international humanitarian law principles regarding the conduct of hostilities, particularly the prohibition on attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and ensuring the safety and protection of civilians. We condemn the recent shelling of displacement camps in the north-west, which caused numerous civilian fatalities and injuries.

It is essential to maintain all aid modalities, including cross-border and cross-line, to ensure that humanitarian organizations can continue their indispensable work throughout Syria to reach people in need. The extension for the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings is welcome, as is the continued flow of vital humanitarian assistance through the three crossings, including Bab Al-Hawa.

In north-west Syria, 4.1 million people are in need of humanitarian support, 3.7 million are food insecure, 2.9 million are internally displaced and 2 million are living in camps. The majority of those people are women and children. Their reliance on international assistance at this critical juncture is undeniable. We stress the need for stable and long-term arrangements to effectively address the escalating humanitarian needs. That would be facilitated by an extended and predictable duration of access authorizations.

The current United Nations humanitarian response plan faces a significant funding shortfall. While we



acknowledge recent additional pledges, it is concerning that only 33 per cent of the required \$5.4 billion has been secured. Specifically, only 30 per cent of the necessary funding for early-recovery projects and livelihood activities has been secured so far. That funding gap hampers the ability of the United Nations and its partners to assist affected communities.

Regarding protection needs, we echo the concerns raised on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women by OCHA's Resident and Regional Coordinators. Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in Syria, encompassing physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, further aggravated by ongoing conflict, displacement and economic crisis. We commend the United Nations commitment to leading efforts to address gender-based violence in Syria, focusing on providing critical services to survivors, addressing root causes and protecting the rights and welfare of women and girls. We are grateful for the efforts of OCHA and all the United Nations agencies to maintain their humanitarian operations in challenging conditions throughout the year. The Syrian people, who have endured so much suffering and trauma, and especially the children of the country who have never known peace, need a chance of a better future. The Security Council must also play its part by continuing to work constructively to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. I would now like to speak in my national capacity on the political aspects of the conflicts.

We are currently witnessing a dangerous escalation of violence in Syria and the broader region. The potential regional spillover of the Israel-Hamas conflict is real and deeply concerning. Air strikes have continued to impact Damascus International Airport, which has resulted in United Nations Humanitarian Air Service flights being cancelled for nearly a month, significantly affecting the transportation of humanitarian cargo and personnel. As tensions remain high, it is the responsibility of all the relevant parties to work to prevent further instability in the region and encourage calm and de-escalation. Hostilities in both the north-west and north-east have resulted in civilian casualties, damage to civilian infrastructure and further displacement. Health facilities, schools, water systems and power stations have been damaged. The attacks include those carried out by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which the Security Council has designated a terrorist group. All attacks on civilians and civilian

infrastructure must cease immediately in accordance with international humanitarian law. That applies equally to counter-terrorism activities.

Brazil, a country with strong human ties to Syria, has consistently maintained that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. Nothing will help to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria more than a political solution, especially after more than a decade of conflict. Amid the escalating humanitarian crisis and deteriorating security, a comprehensive ceasefire is long overdue. Moreover, renewed political commitment is crucial to resuming a credible intra-Syrian political process, particularly with the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. In that regard, we encourage all the parties to actively participate and engage in the United Nations-facilitated political process envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), and we welcome the continued efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen in that regard. As Mr. Pedersen has said, the continued violence, severe economic crisis, escalating hunger, human rights violations and a stalled peace process represent an unacceptable status quo. We are facing a fragile status quo that risks total collapse, potentially further destabilizing a region already at breaking point. We must not only hope for a favourable political resolution to the Syrian crisis but actively work for one, ultimately bringing the peace, stability and reconciliation that the Syrian people deeply desire and deserve.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Rochdi and Ms. Wosornu for their important briefings.

The war on Gaza, which started more than 50 days ago, has led to rising tensions in our region, resulting among other things in military strikes on Syrian territory. In that regard, I want to reiterate the importance of refraining from exploiting the fragile situation in Syria and involving it in regional crises that will only bring more suffering for our brother people of Syria, who are still enduring the repercussions of a bloody war and a catastrophic earthquake. Amid those regional tensions, it has become more urgent than ever to intensify our efforts to achieve progress on the political track in Syria to enable it to realize peace and security domestically and support regional stability. The people of Syria deserve a better future in which they can enjoy peace and prosperity.

As the end of 2023 approaches, we hope the Constitutional Committee will hold its meetings as soon as possible under Syrian leadership and ownership, free from foreign interference. Such meetings will help strengthen dialogue among the Syrian parties with a view to ending the crisis. In the context of confidence-building among the Syrian parties, we believe that the amnesty decree issued by the Government of Syria this month is another positive step in its endeavours on the political track. It will be important to build on those steps together with the United Nations in the near future.

Beyond that, we stress the importance of de-escalation and a ceasefire throughout Syria, which will help safeguard Syria's unity, independence and territorial integrity, especially considering the recent escalation of hostilities in several parts of the country. We underscore that achieving sustainable peace in Syria hinges on eliminating terrorist threats there. The Da'esh group has been persistently destabilizing security and stability in the entire region as well as within Syria itself.

The humanitarian situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate dangerously for a number of reasons, including insecurity, which has resulted in damage to infrastructure and vital facilities such as health facilities, schools and water networks. Furthermore, the targeting of Damascus airport has led to United Nations Humanitarian Air Service flights being suspended for almost a month, adversely affecting the delivery of 2.3 tons of humanitarian aid to Syria. There are also growing concerns about prices of basic commodities, which have risen to unprecedented levels, coupled with a sharp decline in the value of the Syrian pound, which in turn has increased the country's reliance on humanitarian aid, leaving Syrians unable to afford basic necessities, with 90 per cent of the population now living below the poverty line.

It will be essential to enable the continued passage of humanitarian assistance across every region in Syria and by all available means if we are to address those extremely alarming conditions. The scale of deliveries has to be expanded and tailored to the specific types of aid needed on the ground, especially in winter. In that context, we welcome the Government of Syria's decision to extend the opening of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings for an additional three months to meet humanitarian needs. At the same time, it will also be critical to focus on early-recovery projects that

can improve Syrians' living conditions tangibly and sustainably. The Syrian people's interests must be the top priority.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates stresses the need to continue working for a solution to the Syrian crisis and to end the suffering of our brother people of Syria so that they can rebuild their country and repair what war and disasters have destroyed.

**Ms. Dautlari** (Albania): We listened very attentively to the briefings of Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Wosornu, and we thank them for their updates and for the work they are doing.

The Syrian conflict, which has stretched into its second decade, is a tragedy of unprecedented proportions. We cannot and should not allow the political stalemate to drag on for another decade.

We are deeply concerned over the high number of violations, in particular abuses committed against women and children, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. In that regard, we call for respect for international humanitarian law.

The increasing movement of humanitarian trucks from the three border crossings, although positive, is merely a drop in the ocean of the existential needs of Syrians. It is our responsibility to make sure that the humanitarian response remains predictable and substantial. The extension of the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings is welcomed, while the sustainable use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, the authorization of which expires in January, should remain in our focus. We call for its extension. Equally important is for the humanitarian response plan to be further supported.

However, I would like to reiterate Albania's understanding that while humanitarian aid is the hand that reaches out to those in need, the Council should also be a voice that speaks for those who cannot and whose calls for socioeconomic reforms and political changes are ignored. We should not tolerate the blocking by the Syrian regime of the holding of the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee, and we should call for meaningful engagement to achieve real progress on the Syrian-led constitutional dialogue based on resolution 2254 (2015). That has become even more urgent at the present time, considering the situation in the region and the risk of escalation.

In that context, we join the call of the Special Envoy for de-escalation, restraint and respect for the nationwide ceasefire. It is important to continue supporting the efforts and proposals of the Special Envoy aimed at increasing confidence through step-for-step measures as the only way to end the cycle of violence.

The people of Syria deserve a Government that respects their rights and represents their aspirations, a Government that can guarantee the safe and dignified return of refugees and that justice is served for the detained and missing persons. Efforts to release the detainees should be coordinated with the United Nations so as to be meaningful and transparent, providing a full list of those detained and clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons. We also welcome the order on provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice requiring Syria to prevent acts of torture and other cruel treatment and to preserve any evidence related to the allegations in the case. Accountability is the main ingredient of change and healing — no one should be able to escape it.

In conclusion, we repeat our call for respect for resolution 2254 (2015) and for the Council to be united on this issue for the benefit of the Syrian people.

**Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan): I would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ms. Wosornu, for their valuable updates.

The world's attention is now focused on the deepening crisis in Gaza. Not only do we need to prevent the spillover effects of the Gaza crisis on the Syrian security situation, but also we must not forget the plight of the Syrian people. After more than a decade of war, millions remain refugees or internally displaced. Tens of thousands were killed by the devastating earthquakes in February, and 9 out of 10 are living in poverty. Those who knew Syria before the Arab Spring could never have imagined such a catastrophe.

Syria is in desperate need of a political solution, yet none appears imminent. It is unlikely that the Constitutional Committee will be able to convene before the end of the year. The formation of the Arab contact group following Syria's return to the League of Arab States in May offered much promise for a regional role in resolving the Syrian crisis, but progress has been slow.

The Council continues to support the step-by-step approach of Special Envoy Pedersen, although his efforts have been complicated by the intertwined interests and involvement of many actors, both internal and external. Yet we do not have the luxury of losing hope. The Council must remain engaged and reaffirm the importance of a political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Humanitarian needs across the country are at their worst-ever levels, with no sign of improvement. Support for early recovery and resilience-building is critical. Japan, as a major donor, continues to address that crisis in collaboration with the United Nations and non-governmental organizations on the basis of a people-centred and whole-of-Syria approach. We encourage donors to make collective and further efforts for the humanitarian response plan, which is currently severely underfunded.

With winter approaching, the Syrian Government's decision to extend the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months is a welcome step that will contribute to facilitating needed aid to the 2.9 million displaced persons, most of whom are women and children, in north-west Syria. To address the Syrian refugee crisis, much more effort is needed from the Syrian Government to create an enabling environment for their safe, voluntary and dignified return.

It is also essential that the Government address in good faith the issue of disappeared persons, of whom there are estimated to be more than 138,000. The General Assembly's decision in June to establish the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (see General Assembly resolution 77/301) was an important move, and Japan will support the Institution so that it can begin substantive work in the near future. Also, it is urgently necessary to advance the reconciliation process. In that vein, Japan urges Syria to follow the recent order of the International Court of Justice and take all measures to prevent acts of torture and other inhumane abuses.

Finally, as OCHA has pointed out, the cost of inaction on the Syrian crisis is extremely high. Without the prospect of a political solution, the country will remain unstable, and humanitarian needs will not diminish. We would like to emphasize again that sincere and positive action by the Syrian Government on the

political track is the only way to build confidence in the international community.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this joint statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3).

We thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi and Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Edem Wosornu for their briefings and welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye in this meeting.

Cognizant of the volatile situation in Syria, the A3 reiterates its concern over the increasing rate of violence in the country, which reached a crescendo on 5 October, when a military graduation ceremony in Homs was attacked, resulting in the deaths of more than a hundred people, including civilians.

Regrettably, Syria has also become a theatre for foreign military actions, with a number of foreign forces repeatedly attacking installations, including civilian infrastructure. One such recent attack on the Damascus International Airport, attributed to Israel, disrupted United Nations aviation services and affected the transportation of light humanitarian cargo and personnel. We urge such attacks to stop and renew our call for respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and for the complete withdrawal of all foreign forces from that country.

Amid the unending violence, fertile ground has been created for terrorism to take root, constituting a great threat to international peace and security. Security Council-listed terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continue to target innocent civilians. No country is safe from that scourge. We use this opportunity to reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and underscore that no motivation is adequate enough to justify such acts.

Mindful of the ongoing crisis in Gaza, we urge all countries in the region and friends beyond to work in concert to guard against any potential spillover of the conflict into Syria. The consequences would be catastrophic, not only for international peace, but in particular for the many Syrian civilians already severely affected by a war that has lasted for far too long.

We take note of the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2023/805), which covers the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 September 2022, in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005). The contents of the report are deeply distressing. The rights of children in Syria are being severely violated as a result of the violence. The violations, including their recruitment and use in the conflict, killing, maiming, mutilating and subjection to various forms of sexual violence, among other despicable abuses, are serious crimes under international law. The rights of children must be respected by all, particularly the parties to the conflict. In that regard, we welcome the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice requiring the Syrian Arab Republic to do everything in its power to prevent torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and to ensure that its officials adhere to such standards.

We believe that, after several years of conflict, it is important to fully and closely support Syria so that it can emerge from the current political and security impasse, which is causing the country to retrogress and blighting the future of its population, especially the youth. The link between conflicts and delayed development is no longer in doubt. In that context, we echo the words of the Secretary-General, who recently said that “[t]he closer a country is to conflict, the further it moves away from sustainable and inclusive development”. The advancement of peace and the progression of sustainable and inclusive development go hand in hand.

We call for an immediate nationwide ceasefire to create an enabling environment for the political process. The most effective solution to the conflict remains an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, undertaken with the support of the international community under the aegis of the United Nations, as detailed in resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we fully support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Geir Pedersen, and his step-for-step approach.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, the A3 would like to reaffirm the value of human life in all circumstances, including during war. Syrian lives matter. As in all conflicts, civilians in Syria, particularly women and children, are the first victims of hostilities. The parties should constantly take measures to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure during the



conduct of hostilities, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The escalation of hostilities results not only in the loss of human lives, but also in serious protection concerns among displaced populations, with women and girls being particularly affected. At the same time, we remain concerned about the plight of millions of people in Syria who remain food-insecure and continue to be deprived of basic necessities, such as water and electricity, and whose situation will be exacerbated by the coming winter, as we heard earlier from the briefers.

Facilitating access to humanitarian aid for as many people in need as possible therefore remains a priority for the A3. For that reason, we welcome the Syrian Government's decision to extend the authorization for the use of Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings by the United Nations to deliver aid to people in need in north-west Syria for an additional three months until 13 February 2024. While welcoming the broader scope of the cross-border mechanism, the A3 also encourages the delivery of aid across the front lines, which is equally essential and complementary to the cross-border deliveries. Furthermore, given current funding challenges, we re-echo the call for greater financial mobilization to support the humanitarian response plan in Syria, which, as we heard this morning, is currently 33 per cent funded. We note with interest the announcement by the European Union of humanitarian aid in the amount of €15 million for the most vulnerable people in Syria and Lebanon, including €11.5 million intended for Syria. That will provide food assistance and water, sanitation and hygiene support to those who need it the most.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates its call for a nationwide ceasefire and the immediate resumption of negotiations between the parties, with a view to a political settlement that will bring about comprehensive peace, stability and sustainable development to Syria, in accordance with the terms of resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. De Rivi re** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Rochdi and Ms. Wosornu for their briefings.

I would like to underscore three points.

First, the consequences of the crisis in Gaza continue to pose the risk of a regional spillover. France is committed to preventing the spread of the conflict. Stakeholders in the region must show responsibility and restraint. The opening of a new front against Israel in Syria would further destabilize the country, and the

Syrian people would once again pay the highest price. We must therefore collectively redouble our efforts to avoid that.

Secondly, the regime and its allies continue their violence against Syrians. We have condemned the bombings that they have carried out in Idlib governorate since October, which have resulted in a large number of civilian casualties and affected on essential infrastructure in disregard for international humanitarian law. Russia raises the issue of respect for the latter in Gaza on a daily basis, while it rides roughshod over it every day in Idlib. Hostilities must therefore cease throughout the country, in accordance with Security Council resolutions.

There will be no prospects for a political solution until a credible and inclusive process is launched on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). France supports the work of Geir Pedersen to that end. The continued large-scale violations of Syrians' rights show to what extent the fight against impunity for those who violate them remains relevant. They must be held accountable for their actions.

Thirdly, the renewal of the agreement for the delivery of humanitarian aid through the two crossing points of Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai in mid-November is good news. However, it is unacceptable that their renewal be conditional and temporary. Humanitarian access must be continuous and unhindered. We demand that the renewal of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing authorization in January meet those criteria.

As winter approaches, we call on all donors to contribute to the United Nations humanitarian response plan. With more than €30 billion since 2011, the European Union and its member States are the leading contributor to the humanitarian response in Syria. The Council must remain seized of this issue. It is important that the Secretariat report to the Council in writing on the situation. The conditions for the return of refugees to their country must finally be met. Damascus must make concrete and verifiable commitments to that end. France continues to support countries hosting millions of Syrian refugees.

**Ms. Gatt** (Malta): I begin by thanking Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Wosornu for their briefings.

As we heard, Syrians continue to suffer the political, economic and humanitarian consequences of

the devastating conflict. Recent developments in the region paint a troubling picture. Mortar fire emanating from Syria into the occupied Golan has been reported. Israeli air strikes have continued to target areas of Damascus, including Damascus International Airport. Attacks on United States military forces in the north-east have spiked. Against that backdrop, increased military action by Syrian forces in the north-west has continued unabated, with more than 70 people killed, a third of them women and children, as a result.

We are deeply concerned about reports of an increase in children being killed and maimed in Syria, as well as in attacks on schools and hospitals. We reiterate our call on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international law and to swiftly implement their action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. In Syria's north-west, some 4.1 million remain in need of acute humanitarian assistance. We again express our utmost concern about the needs of the displaced in the north-west as we head into the cold and harsh winter months. Those circumstances leave the most vulnerable groups, including women and children, persons with disabilities and the elderly, at increased risk. Furthermore, without safe spaces for displaced women and girls, many are forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive, including early and forced marriage. They continue to face pervasive threats of gender-based violence and barriers to accessing critical services owing to the destruction of the public health-care service. That means that drastically limited maternal and paediatric health care is available to many of Syria's most vulnerable.

Malta welcomes the renewal of the agreement between the United Nations and Damascus on the use of the Bab Al-Rai and Bab Al-Salam crossings for the provision of vital humanitarian assistance. We express our continued support for the provision of aid via all modalities in Syria. All pathways must remain in place as long as the needs persist.

We regret, however, that the Syria humanitarian response plan remains critically underfunded. While greater resources are urgently needed, what Syria needs now more than ever is genuine political progress in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). All parties must work to ensure de-escalation across Syria. That is essential to moving towards a much-needed nationwide ceasefire.

Malta again calls for the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee at the earliest opportunity and for the Committee to undertake its work in a credible manner. To that end, we continue to support the tireless work of Special Envoy Pedersen with representatives in the region and encourage engagement through his step-for-step approach. We also welcome the recent order of the International Court of Justice in Syria in the case concerning the application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

At this time of grave instability and danger across the whole of Syria and the wider region, we must all redouble our efforts to ensure the restoration of calm and the cessation of all hostilities. From there, we all must refocus in order to ensure the realization of a just and lasting peace for the people of Syria.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I thank Ms. Rochdi and Ms. Wosornu for their briefings.

Now more than ever, the international community needs to ensure that our attention remains on Syria and that we act together to improve the situation for the Syrian people. Today I will highlight three areas requiring immediate attention.

First, we urgently need regional de-escalation. After more than 13 years of conflict, violence in Syria is at its highest level in more than three years. We condemn the Syrian regime's sustained attacks in north-west Syria. We are also gravely concerned by the attacks in the north-east by Iran-affiliated militias against the Global Coalition against Da'esh. Reports that Iran has started to use Latakia airbase for weapons shipments are alarming. It is essential that the Global Coalition continues its operations against Da'esh to ensure that we do not see a resurgence. We urge Iran to roll back its militias, and we call on the regime and its Russian backers to prioritize stability and prosperity in Syria.

Secondly, we remain committed to ensuring sustainable, predictable and efficient aid flows across the whole of Syria. Increasing hostilities mean increasing need for the reliable provision of humanitarian aid. That highlights the importance of the cross-border operation, which is a lifeline for 4.1 million people. It is positive that the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai agreements were extended on 14 November, but the situation on the ground means that short-term, last-minute agreements are not sufficient. As the United Nations has made clear, we need those agreements for

as long as humanitarian needs demand, including for the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, which is set to expire on 13 January 2024 — the height of winter.

Thirdly, the worsening situation in Syria should remind us all of the need for a viable political process. Until the regime and its backers engage seriously and meaningfully in a political process, the United Kingdom will not engage with the regime. We reiterate our wholehearted support for a United Nations-facilitated settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), as the way to end this conflict.

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland fully endorses the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Brazil, our co-penholder, on behalf of our two countries on the humanitarian issue. I would like to thank Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for her briefing. Allow me to add a few comments in my national capacity on the political situation in Syria.

Switzerland supports Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to ensure that Syria is neither threatened nor overshadowed by the regional repercussions of the Middle East conflict. I thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi for her briefing on the most recent developments in Syria. We regret that efforts to relaunch the political process and the work of the Constitutional Committee on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) have stalled. We urge all parties concerned to fully engage and collaborate with the Special Envoy with a view to relaunching such a process.

The security situation, in particular in the north of the country, continues to deteriorate sharply. Switzerland reiterates that respect for international humanitarian law and human rights, in particular the protection of civilians, is — and must remain — a priority for the Council. The civilian population and civilian infrastructure, including schools, must be protected at all costs. In the Idlib region, dozens of people — nearly one third of them children — have been killed, and approximately 100,000 others have been displaced by the fighting. In the north-east, armed violence continues, raising fears of a security vacuum that would benefit the Islamic State group, which has been stepping up its attacks of late. As has been the case in previous years, this new wave of hostilities in the north of the country disproportionately affects women and girls, thereby increasing the risk of gender-

based violence. Finally, the recurrent strikes on the airports of Damascus and Aleppo and on various sites throughout the country, are proof, among others, that the repercussions of the Middle East conflict are also being felt on Syrian soil. We therefore call for a nationwide ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

At this time of heightened regional tensions, we would like to recall that a lasting peace is impossible without justice — in Syria as elsewhere. Switzerland reiterates its full support for civil society organizations, which play a crucial role in documenting international crimes. Their work, like that of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, is key in the fight against impunity. Switzerland stresses the need to provide them with the resources they need to carry out their work.

Finally, Switzerland reiterates that the implementation of pragmatic confidence-building measures, as defined in resolution 2254 (2015), by all parties, such as the recent declaration of amnesty and the extension of the opening of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings, are essential to paving the way for dialogue both within Syria and at the international level. Real progress towards a political solution can only be made if all the parties concerned resume a realistic, constructive and tangible dialogue. To that end, it is important that the Security Council continue to give Syria its full attention.

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Edem Wosornu of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. I welcome the presence of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye.

My delegation recognizes and appreciates the actions taken by Special Envoy Pedersen to overcome the political impasse, in particular, the meetings held with countries in the region and with representatives of various sectors of the Syrian political and social spectrum. Ecuador has highlighted the need to exhaust all diplomatic and political mechanisms to reactivate the Syrian Negotiations Commission, the step-by-step strategy and any other initiative that promotes the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore reiterate our call for all actors involved to renew their commitment and political will to redirect constructive negotiations without delay.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, we are concerned about the increase in the number of people who depend on humanitarian assistance to survive. We are also concerned about the threats that loom over the civilian population due to the increase in violence and the arrival of winter. Given those circumstances, Ecuador wishes to acknowledge the work of the United Nations teams and its associated agencies on the ground, which are increasingly exposed to working in conditions of instability and high risk.

The violation of international humanitarian law is to be condemned. The attacks perpetrated against critical Syrian civilian infrastructure — hospitals, airports and schools — which have claimed the lives of civilians and left hundreds injured — including women, children and humanitarian personnel — are, as I just said, to be condemned. Like others, my delegation is concerned about the impact of the conflict between Israel and Palestine on the worsening violence experienced in past weeks in Syria, as well as about the projections concerning the deterioration of humanitarian and security conditions that we heard this morning. We hope that the cross-line and Bab Al-Hawa cross-border crossings, which expire next February, will be renewed without conditions in order to ensure predictable humanitarian assistance.

Finally, I reiterate my country's conviction that the building of a peaceful and prosperous future in Syria and the region will be possible only through a political solution that prioritizes peace, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and that directs all efforts towards the economic and social development of Syria and its people.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of China.

I will mention three points.

First, we must work together to avoid a spillover from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Over the past two months, the situation in the occupied Golan has remained tense. Airports in Damascus and Aleppo are among the various locations within Syria that have been subjected to frequent air strikes. This is a matter of deep concern to China. All parties in Syria and Israel should exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation. Major countries outside the region should play a constructive role that contributes to the de-escalation of the situation. The occurrence of these incidents is closely related to the current round of escalation in

the Palestinian-Israeli situation. The international community should start with the full implementation of resolution 2712 (2023) so as to realize a sustainable ceasefire and effectively protect civilians through joint efforts to keep the situation under control and eliminate the risk of escalation of the situation on the Syrian-Israeli border.

Secondly, we must work together to promote a political solution to the Syrian question. The international community should, based on full respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, and in accordance with the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015), adhere to the principle of Syrian-led and Syrian-owned solutions, encourage dialogue, bridge differences and find a solution acceptable to all parties. We welcome the continued engagement of Special Envoy Pedersen with all parties in that respect. We also support the Arab countries in strengthening their solidarity and cooperation to make greater efforts to reach a political settlement of the Syrian issue. Terrorism is a long-standing threat to the political process in Syria. China welcomes the positive progress made by the Syrian Government in combating terrorism and firmly supports their efforts in this vein. We call upon the international community to act in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions, adopt a uniform standard and a zero-tolerance approach in its cooperation to combat terrorist forces in Syria.

Thirdly, we must work together to promote a fundamental improvement in the Syrian humanitarian situation. Over the past six months, the United Nations and the Syrian Government have maintained effective and fluid communication. The operations of cross-border relief points have been extended successively several times. We urge the parties concerned to show sincerity in order to see positive progress made in the cross-line delivery operations. To date, the humanitarian aid for Syria is grossly underfunded. Donors should effectively deliver on the commitments to support humanitarian action and early recovery projects throughout Syria. Unilateral sanctions have long weakened the Syrian Government's ability to revitalize the economy and carry out reconstruction. Such sanctions should be lifted. We once again urge foreign forces to end their illegal military presence in Syria and to stop plundering Syrian natural resources.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.



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

**Mr. Dandy** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and on your able steering of its work.

It is regrettable that we had to wait 50 days to reach the partial temporary pause of the terrorist Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and to halt the barbaric Israeli killing machine, which has been killing children, women, journalists, humanitarian workers while targeting residential buildings, hospitals, schools, United Nations facilities and other acts of aggression that are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

What Israel has committed during the previous period was nothing but a crime of aggression and full-fledged crimes against humanity. We cannot in any circumstances justify this aggression under the pretext of self-defence or countering terrorism. What the Israeli forces have done is tantamount to crimes and deliberate destruction that was witnessed and denounced by all of humankind. If this does not amount to terrorism and deliberate killing, what is it then?

Furthermore, Israel persists in its crimes and aggression against Syria, the last of which was the aggression two days ago in broad daylight against the Damascus International Airport and locations in rural Damascus that were targeted by rockets, decommissioning the airport again only a few hours after resuming operations and navigation. This aggression also threatened passengers, jeopardized the safety of civil aviation and disrupted United Nations humanitarian operations.

It seems that the representatives of some Western countries in this Chamber have not yet heard about that aggression or do not want to hear about it. Syria condemns those flagrant acts of aggression, which represent a grave violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law. We call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and to condemn that aggression, while putting an end to them, guaranteeing their non-recurrence and holding their perpetrators accountable. Those same perpetrators are dragging the region into a serious escalation of which we cannot predict the consequences or avoid its devastating effects.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continues with its positive steps in an attempt to overcome the repercussions of the terrorist war against it. This month the Syrian Government renewed the authorization granted to the United Nations and its specialized agencies to use the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings for three additional months, until 13 February 2024. That comes out of our continued keenness to improve the humanitarian and living conditions of all Syrians and to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, including in the north-west.

Pertaining to the return of Syrian refugees, Syria welcomes their safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homeland, and it has engaged in a constructive dialogue with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to effectively address the main concerns of those refugees. In that regard, I would like to share with the Council certain aspects that open the doors for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees.

First, there is a need to enhance communication and consultation with actors concerned with the return of refugees.

Second, we must achieve greater and broader humanitarian access and a flexible and predictable presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, particularly in key areas of return and border points.

Third, we must enable refugees and internally displaced persons to make free and informed decisions about their return and to decide the time and destination of their choice.

Fourth, we must use communication and consultation channels to examine the cases reported pertaining to voluntary, safe and dignified return.

Fifth, no returnee should be discriminated against for fleeing their places of residence, seeking asylum abroad or staying or residing in an area formerly or currently under the control of armed terrorist groups.

Sixth, issues relating to conscription and military service must be addressed in a non-discriminatory manner, and returnees should benefit from the relevant amnesty decrees.

Seventh, refugees and returnees, like other Syrians, enjoy all the rights and obligations guaranteed to all

Syrian citizens by the Syrian Constitution, laws and regulations, without any discrimination. Their life, freedom and human dignity are protected from any discriminatory action or violations against their basic rights guaranteed by the Syrian Constitution and laws.

Eighth, we must ensure access to the necessary documents, certify the civil and academic documents granted to refugees abroad and facilitate the regulations and procedures pertaining to housing, land and property.

The success of this endeavour requires the States that have been supporting, funding and arming terrorism not to hinder Syrian efforts to increase early-recovery projects, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to fund the clearance of mines and explosive remnants and to tangibly improve the humanitarian and living conditions in Syria.

As a culmination of all those efforts and in a clear desire of the Syrian State to consolidate national reconciliation approach and achieve permanent stability, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic issued Legislative Decree No. 36, of 2023, several days ago. That is the second amnesty decree in less than a year. It grants general amnesty for all crimes committed before 16 November. The decree also encompasses many who have been convicted and prosecuted, including juveniles, the elderly and those with terminal illnesses.

It is surprising to see that the positive Syrian steps are being met with the persistence of some Western States to politicize the humanitarian dossier by imposing conditions and donor countries failing to honour their pledges to the humanitarian response plan. Only 30 per cent of the pledges have been funded, despite being one month away from the end of the year. That hinders the implementation of United Nations humanitarian programmes in Syria. Furthermore, the United States persists in its hostile policies against the Syrian people. Its forces occupy Syrian territory, kill Syrians without mercy, support separatist militias, use terrorist groups in the Al-Tanf region to destabilize Syria, plunder national resources and, together with the European Union, impose unilateral coercive measures on all vital sectors — from food to medicines, energy, transportation and agricultural production, causing immense and unprecedented economic and humanitarian suffering for Syrians. That collective punishment, blockade and starvation will have catastrophic and devastating consequences.

It is time for those Western countries to reconsider their hostile and inhumane policies against my country, to adopt a humanitarian political approach by committing to fully respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, ending the illegal presence of United States and Turkish forces, stopping the repeated Israeli aggression and immediately lifting the illegitimate unilateral coercive measures.

In conclusion, it seems that the Ambassador of the United States is once again trying to accuse my country in an attempt to shift attention from the support given by her country to Israeli terrorism in a blatant policy of political hypocrisy and double standards. We are all aware of the full record of multiple and repeated war crimes committed by the United States in Viet Nam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria — and the list goes on. The United States Ambassador invokes Article 51 of the Charter to justify her country's ongoing crimes committed on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. Her claims are refuted by facts. The Charter and international law do not provide legal justification for the presence of United States forces on Syrian territory without the approval of the Syrian Government. The United States has violated the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. It has led an alleged international coalition to fight Da'esh terrorist organization, but facts have shown that the real goal of that coalition was only to support terrorism and to destabilize the security and stability of Syria in order to serve the interests of the United States and the Israeli occupation entity.

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

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to congratulate China on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. I thank the briefers for their updates and informative briefings.

As underscored in today's briefings, the humanitarian crisis in Syria remains dire. The Syrian people suffer from profound economic challenges. Despite the efforts of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver essential aid to those in need, the continuing impact of illegal unilateral sanctions, especially those unlawfully imposed by the United States, places a disproportionate burden on the Syrian people, including women and children.

A notable concern is the current insufficient allocation of funds for the Syrian humanitarian response, which falls far short of the actual requirements. That acute shortage severely impedes the capacity of the United Nations to provide the necessary assistance to those in dire need. The humanitarian assistance and reconstruction initiatives in Syria should not be used as tools to exert political pressure on the Syrian Government. It is important to ensure the impartial and non-politicized delivery of humanitarian aid to all regions of Syria as a crucial measure for preserving lives.

Iran welcomes the decision of the Syrian Government, on 10 November, to renew the permission granted to the United Nations and its specialized agencies to use the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings for an additional three months. Iran emphasizes the importance of supporting aid transfers through the cross-line mechanism, which enjoys the full endorsement of the Syrian Government and represents a sustainable and constructive approach that can significantly improve the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The lack of a decisive response from the Security Council has emboldened the Israeli regime to continue its aggression on Syrian territory. In addition to the atrocities it is perpetrating against the people of Gaza, the Israeli regime continues to commit acts of terrorism and aggression within Syrian territory, deliberately targeting civilians and vital infrastructure.

Iran strongly condemns the Israeli regime's heinous acts of terrorism, particularly the most recent air strikes on the civilian airport of Damascus on 26 November, inflicting severe damage to essential airport facilities and causing significant disruption to its operation. We call on the Security Council to condemn Israel's egregious violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The illegal presence of United States military forces in Syria and their continued occupation is the primary source of insecurity in the country and has provided fertile ground for the nourishment of terrorist organizations, both within Syria and the broader region. The United States claims to be fighting terrorism in Syria. In reality, it is engaging in unlawful action in Syria and providing immunity and a protective shield for terrorist organizations to advance the political agenda of the United States and the Israeli regime in the

region. Furthermore, because of the situation in Gaza, the United States, despite expressing concerns about a spillover of the tensions into Syria, tries to misuse the situation, increase tensions and destabilize the country.

We maintain our steadfast belief that an essential solution to the Syrian crisis should be pursued through diplomatic and political means. In that context, we highlight the significance of resuming the meetings of the Constitutional Committee as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process. The continued functioning of the Committee is vital. The role of the United Nations should remain supportive, with the entirety of the processes being under Syrian leadership and ownership.

Iran welcomes the President of the Syrian Arab Republic's recently issued legislative decree, which is the second amnesty decree in less than a year. Iran supports the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. Addressing the numerous challenges confronting Syrian refugees requires the creation of critical infrastructure. The United Nations, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), plays a pivotal role in that endeavour. We welcome the support of engagement and constructive dialogue between the Syrian Government with UNHCR in addressing that issue.

The United States groundless allegations in this Chamber against my country, which were repeated irresponsibly by the representative of the United Kingdom, are categorically rejected. Those baseless allegations appear to be part of the deliberate effort by the United States to divert attention away from its ongoing, serious violations of international law and the Charter of the United Nations in the Syrian Arab Republic. I would like to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran has never been involved in any act or attack against United States military forces in Syria or elsewhere. Iran has consistently upheld its commitment to promoting peace and security in the region. The United States must stop its unlawful actions and illegal occupation and comply with international legal obligations, including the pertinent resolutions of the Council, which require all Member States to uphold and respect Syria's national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Such actions are pivotal for promoting regional and international peace and security.

In conclusion, I want to underscore Iran's unwavering commitment to continuing assistance

aimed at alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. We believe that addressing the consequences of the Syrian crisis demands a holistic approach and genuine political commitment. That commitment should entail putting an end to the recurrent and systematic Israeli aggression, ending the occupation of Syrian territory, withdrawing the unlawful presence of foreign forces from Syrian territory, promptly and unconditionally lifting unilateral coercive measures and actively supporting the political process being under Syrian leadership and ownership.

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

**Mrs. Özgür** (Türkiye): It has been more than 12 years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria. However, the prospect of a lasting political solution is not on the horizon yet. Meanwhile, the implications of the aggression in Gaza are felt in the region. Preventing a spillover should continue to be among our priorities. These developments have once again reminded us that the status quo is not tenable in crisis contexts, including in Syria. The international community must therefore remain engaged to help resolve the Syrian conflict as soon as possible. There is no room for complacency in that regard. Resolution 2254 (2015) sets out the path towards that goal. It is our collective responsibility to uphold the provisions of the resolution and work towards achieving a durable political settlement of the Syrian conflict accordingly.

To that end, Türkiye remains engaged with key stakeholders, including the Syrian opposition and members of the Astana format. Convening the next round of the Constitutional Committee would be a positive step forward. Similarly, if we were to disregard the sizeable number of Syrians abroad, it would not be possible to achieve genuine national reconciliation. Therefore, in parallel with our efforts to revitalize the political process, it is critically important to create conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians to their country. Countering terrorism to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and unity must be a pillar of that three-track approach, the elements of which should proceed simultaneously. Otherwise, our endeavours aimed at resolving the conflict would be incomplete.

To that end, we must call out the human rights violations and abuses committed by terrorist organizations in Syria, primarily the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, which have caused inexplicable suffering to the Syrian people. Those terrorist organizations have no place in Syria's future. The presence in Syria of the PKK/YPG, across our borders, and its terrorist attacks, also constitute a vital threat to our national security. Türkiye is entitled to take appropriate measures against that direct and imminent threat and will continue its fight against that terrorist organization, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Council.

The preservation of calm on the ground, including in the Idlib area, is important for political, humanitarian and security reasons. Yet we have witnessed increased attacks by the regime in that area since the beginning of October. The resulting high number of civilian casualties is of serious concern. We continue our efforts to de-escalate the situation and ensure that the ceasefire is observed.

The humanitarian situation remains dire in Syria. We are concerned that the conditions will further deteriorate in the coming winter months. In addition, we will soon be facing further uncertainty as to whether the use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for the United Nations cross-border aid deliveries will continue beyond mid-January. That unpredictability negatively affects the operations of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and, ultimately, it is the Syrians in need who suffer the repercussions. It is critically important for United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance to continue as long as is needed and in line with its long-standing modus operandi, including monitoring and reporting. In addition to ensuring cross-border aid, international partners should also contribute to the stabilization efforts in the north-west in order to prevent a new wave of migration from Syria.

In conclusion, Türkiye will continue to contribute to international efforts towards improving the humanitarian situation and achieving a lasting political solution in Syria.

*The meeting rose at noon.*