



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9248th meeting

Wednesday, 25 January 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Ishikane (Japan)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Issahaku
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

23-02368 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Ms. Ghada Eltahir Mudawi, Deputy Director of the Office for the Coordination on Humanitarian Affairs.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: As we move into 2023, the Syrian people remain trapped in a profound humanitarian, political, military, security, economic and human rights crisis of great complexity and almost unimaginable scale. Syrians remain deeply divided over their future. Despite our best efforts, no substantive progress is being made to build a common political vision for that future via a genuine political process. Equally, many of the issues in the conflict have for several years now not been solely in Syrian hands. The country remains de facto divided into several parts, with five foreign armies, multiple Syrian armed groups and Security Council-listed terrorists all active on the ground. Serious abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights continue across Syria.

More than a decade of destruction, war and conflict, corruption and mismanagement, sanctions, the Lebanese financial crisis, the coronavirus disease pandemic and its aftermath and now the war in Ukraine have contributed to a twin humanitarian and economic crisis of epic proportions. Roughly half the pre-war population remains displaced — the largest displacement crisis in the world and one of the largest since the Second World War. The situation is not only a source of tragedy for Syrians but a driver of instability across the region, including against a backdrop of growing reports of an illicit drug trade.

The conflict needs a comprehensive political solution; nothing else can work. That solution is sadly not imminent. But we continue to focus on concrete actions that could build some trust and bring into being a real process to implement Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). To that end, I continue to engage the Syrian parties to the conflict. I will return to Damascus in February for meetings with Syrian Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad and the Government-nominated co-Chair of the Constitutional Committee, Ahmad Kuzbari. I saw the President of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, Badr Jamous, and the Commission-nominated co-Chair of the Constitutional Committee, Hadi Al-Bahra, in Geneva earlier this week.

In parallel, I am engaging widely with key international players. Last week I met with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and the Saudi Foreign Minister, Faisal bin Farhan. Yesterday I met together the Syria Special Envoys of France, Germany, the United States and United Kingdom. I have engaged with representatives of the Russian Federation and the European External Action Service, and the Deputy Special Envoy, Najat Rochdi, met representatives of European Union (EU) member States and EU officials last week. We look forward to engaging widely with the full range of regional and international actors as part of the continuing consultations. The Syrian and Turkish authorities have held security and military contacts in recent months. The Syrian and Turkish Defence Ministers met with the Russian Defence Minister in Moscow on 28 December. I continue to closely follow developments in that regard.

In all our engagements, our goal is to facilitate progress on several priorities in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), and we urge all actors to work together in support of a United Nations-facilitated political process. Last month, I flagged six priority areas to the Council in my briefing (see S/PV.9230). Let me update members on them today.

The first priority I identified was the need to step back from escalation and restore calm. A nationwide ceasefire remains essential to resolving the conflict. Last year, we saw periods of relative calm and periods of escalation. Over the past month, the picture has been equally mixed. We have seen fewer air strikes in the north-west in recent months, and the intense military escalation in the north-east that we witnessed late last year has diminished, but in other ways the picture remains as dire as ever. Shelling, rocket fire

and intermittent clashes have continued along all contact lines, involving a wide spectrum of actors, including the Government, the armed opposition, the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which launched several cross-line attacks this month. Turkish drone strikes were reported in the north-east, and Israeli strikes were reported in rural Damascus and the Damascus airport. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant remains active, with sleeper cells killing military personnel and civilians. We continue to relay to the members of the ceasefire task force the importance of preserving and deepening calm, protecting civilians and consolidating the patchwork of existing agreements and arrangements into a nationwide ceasefire. Of course, that will require a parallel effort to find a cooperative approach towards countering listed terrorist groups that is in line with international law and ensures the protection of civilians.

The second priority I stressed was to renew the framework in the Council on the humanitarian front. I thank members for the unanimous adoption of resolution 2672 (2023) earlier this month (see S/PV.9237). That allowed for the continuation of life-saving cross-border humanitarian assistance for millions of people in Syria — albeit for six months — while also expressing support for cross-line operations and early-recovery projects. The scale of needs inside Syria is at the worst level since the conflict began, with record levels of poverty and food insecurity, basic services breaking down and a burgeoning economic crisis. Needs in displacement camps remain the most urgent. Meanwhile, infrastructure remains on the brink, with frequent power outages against a backdrop of dwindling fuel supplies, resulting in knock-on effects across society. We will hear more on that from our briefer from the Office for the Coordination on Humanitarian Affairs.

The third priority remains to see the Constitutional Committee resume its meetings and make more substantive progress in Geneva. The Constitutional Committee could be a door-opener and help to advance a key component of resolution 2254 (2015), thereby contributing to the wider political process. I am keen to reconvene the meetings of the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva without delay. However, there is nothing new to report to date, including on Russia's position on the venue. The issues that had been raised previously were comprehensively addressed, and I thank the Swiss authorities for their

receptivity. Further issues have meanwhile been raised, some of which are not in Swiss hands but on which good offices are nevertheless being extended. The Government-nominated co-Chair has yet to respond to my letter of last June on improving the Committee's working methods. I will continue my efforts to resume the meetings of the Committee and to work with its co-Chairs on finding ways to improve its substance and working methods, while keeping the Middle Third apprised of any developments.

The fourth priority is that we must keep pushing the file of detainees and disappeared and missing persons. I look forward to progress in establishing a missing persons' institution, as recommended by the Secretary-General, to be created as a pathway towards achieving tangible progress on that aspect of the file. Meanwhile, we continue to remind our interlocutors at every opportunity that arbitrary detainees must be released and substantive steps taken to ensure the protection and rights of detainees. There has been no improvement on the ground this month. Arbitrary arrests have reportedly continued, with many of the individuals arrested not being informed of the reasons for their detention and their families not being informed of their whereabouts. Let us also not forget that those protection issues are among the core factors that refugees have cited to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when explaining their decision not to return to Syria within the next 12 months, in addition to the situation with respect to security, livelihoods, basic services, housing and military service. A wide range of actions on all of those fronts will be essential to creating a safe, calm and neutral environment, including for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The fifth priority is to bring about initial step-for-step confidence-building measures. It is important to identify some precise, concrete, reciprocal and verifiable steps that could have a positive impact on the lives of Syrians, build some trust and confidence among the parties and move us towards a safe, calm and neutral environment along the path of implementing resolution 2254 (2015). I appreciate that the dialogue has deepened with all parties on those issues and stress that it is important for engagement to further deepen during February.

My sixth priority is to engage with Syrians across the board. The Syrian Women's Advisory Board continues to advise me and Deputy Special Envoy

Rochdi. Members of the Women's Advisory Board have, in turn, continued their own conversations with their fellow Syrians to ensure that their perspectives, including those of women, are heard. We also continue to engage with Syrian civil society activists on a broad range of issues related to the political process and ongoing protection concerns. Participants in the thematic working groups of the Civil Society Support Room pursued their regular discussions through digital means on the issues of local governance, decentralization and protection priorities for Syrians, and how those can be addressed through a political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The Syrian women and men with whom we engage remain hopeful that the conflict will come to an end in a manner that enables individuals to live in dignity.

Ultimately, a diplomatic effort requires the inclusion of all relevant Syrian and international actors, whose stake and influence are necessary to resolving the tragic conflict. It requires a common effort to unite behind a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led process facilitated by the United Nations, as mandated in resolution 2254 (2015). Such a process is the only way to address the core drivers of the conflict; meet the needs and legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people; restore Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity; and safeguard regional stability and security concerns.

It is in that spirit in which I continue to engage all players and appeal for their continued support for the United Nations effort to facilitate the political process.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Mudawi.

Ms. Mudawi: In January, it is tradition that we wish one another a happy and prosperous new year. We wish joy and peace for everyone. And this is what the people of Syria need more than at any other time since the conflict began. No one deserves it more, and they rightfully expect the support of the international community to make their wish come true. People have endured 12 years of conflict and humanitarian crises. As 2023 begins, they face their worst year yet; 15.3 million people, or nearly 70 per cent of Syria's population, are in need of humanitarian assistance. It is hard to imagine such levels of distress.

People are facing a harsh winter, with rain, flooding and frigid temperatures, and an ongoing

cholera outbreak. In the north-west alone, 1.8 million people live in camps or overcrowded sites in tents and below-zero temperatures, with limited or no access to water, health services or electricity. For many families, this is their twelfth winter in displacement. Some have been uprooted multiple times, while others have lived in the same tents for more than a decade. In such a dire context, humanitarian efforts to help face and adapt to the winter in north-west Syria remain 78 per cent underfunded. Throughout Syria, the response for winterization is equally poorly funded at 29 per cent. With the available resources, only 1.4 million individuals had been reached as of the end of December, leaving 2.8 million vulnerable people without adequate emergency shelter or non-food items to protect against harsh-winter conditions. In other words, we need more donor support, more support for the winterization efforts and more support for the overall humanitarian response in Syria.

Let me recall that the 2022 humanitarian response plan has only been 47.2 per cent funded — its lowest-ever level of funding. The cholera outbreak continues to spread across the country, with suspected cases in all 14 governorates. Thanks to donors' generosity, 2 million doses of oral cholera vaccines have arrived in Syria, and 1.7 million in north-west Syria. Immunizations have wrapped up in Deir-ez-Zor, Raqqa and Aleppo and will shortly wrap up in Al-Hasakah. The vaccination campaign will start imminently in north-west Syria. I call for the strong support to the cholera response to continue, including the funding of health facilities, as several of them in north-west Syria have closed in recent weeks due to funding cuts. Adequate investment also needs to be made in water and sanitation to address the root causes of the outbreak.

There can be no prosperity for the vast majority of people in Syria in the current socioeconomic context. In December 2022, the sharp drop in the value of the Syrian pound led to skyrocketing prices for basic commodities. Life is increasingly unaffordable. Twelve million people are food insecure, and families' resilience to withstand shocks continues to erode. In Aleppo governorate, the average price of rice surged 60 per cent between November and December 2022. In rural Damascus, the prices of vegetables, fruit and other commodities have climbed by 20 to 50 per cent since the beginning of this month.

Moreover, every aspect of life in Syria has been impacted by severe fuel shortages and reduced access to

electricity, making the already-dire economic situation even worse. The acute fuel crisis is also affecting humanitarian operations, leading to fewer field missions and more project delays. Sectors that impact life-saving efforts — such as water, sanitation, health and shelter — are among the most severely impacted. Electricity blackouts and the lack of fuel for generators have severely limited the operations of water-pumping stations. Critical maintenance work has been put on hold as authorities struggle to secure transportation for technicians and equipment. The economic decline and the fuel crisis make it even harder for the most vulnerable and marginalized people to access essential services. Another example of the impact of the fuel crisis is the suspension of mobile team operations and the reduction of protection services by some of our protection partners. That will ultimately result in heightened vulnerability for women and girls.

The hostilities on the front lines and in pockets of the country leave people in fear of attacks and at risk of new displacement. In Idleb and western Aleppo, air strikes, shelling and unexploded ordnance continue to kill and injure civilians, including women and children. Last year, in north-west Syria alone, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported at least 145 civilian deaths, including 58 children, and 249 civilian injuries, including 97 children. Shelling and drone and air strikes have continued sporadically throughout northern Syria, with sadly predictable results — civilian casualties, damage to civilian infrastructure, displacement, the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities and the suspension of schools and health and other services.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance pose an additional threat to communities. Funding for mine action programmes, especially clearance, and increasing the number of operators in country able to carry out clearance work are critical. I am glad to report that progress has been made on that front. For example, 1 million square metres of agricultural land were cleared in rural Damascus last year. But much more needs to be done, as that work is critical to our ability to implement other projects, especially early-recovery ones. International humanitarian law requires that parties to conflict take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, including homes and essential infrastructure, throughout the duration of their military operations. I urge all parties to respect that fundamental obligation.

The extension of the Security Council's authorization for United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations earlier this month was indispensable. Cross-border aid is a matter of life and death for millions of people in north-west Syria. I want to welcome Brazil and Switzerland as the new co-penholders. We will continue to do everything in our power to facilitate progress in all areas covered by resolution 2672 (2023). That includes enhanced cross-line operations throughout Syria and early-recovery programming, building on the work over the past years. Humanitarian relief to civilians in need should be allowed and facilitated through all available routes, in line with international humanitarian law. However, I want to be clear that a six-month extension poses challenges to our operations and funding and disruptions to humanitarian logistics and procurement.

I say it regularly: Syria is one of the most complex humanitarian and protection emergencies in the world. More people are in need of aid than at any other time since 2011. We need renewed commitment from all parties. We need better access. We need sustained donor generosity and rapid, substantial and unearmarked pledges. Such investments will be critical to expand life-saving and early-recovery programming. I sincerely hope that 2023 will not be another bleak year for the people in Syria. I hope that the spirit of unity in the Council that resulted in the unanimous decision to extend the cross-border authorization will prevail and that it will uphold its moral duty to support the people in Syria. I hope that joy, prosperity and peace will visit all Syrians.

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

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

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

First of all, we thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Acting Director Ghada Mudawi for their comprehensive updates.

The humanitarian situation on the ground in Syria remains very concerning. With 15.3 million people in need of assistance, humanitarian needs are at their highest level since the beginning of the conflict. In the middle of the winter, against the backdrop of fuel

and energy shortages, the situation is becoming even more dramatic.

Meanwhile, the protection needs of the civilian population remain high across the country, as violations of international humanitarian law continue, particularly along conflict lines. We must always keep in mind that behind the numbers and statistics of civilian fatalities there are human beings who should have been spared the consequences of the hostilities. We welcome, in this regard, the unanimous adoption by the Security Council on 9 January of resolution 2672 (2023), which reiterates the importance of continuous humanitarian assistance to Syria through all modalities, as we face serious challenges. Let me name just a few of these challenges.

First, the cholera outbreak, which affects all 14 governorates, continues to spread. On a positive note, however, we welcome the ongoing vaccination campaign.

Secondly, food insecurity reached alarming levels in 2022 and continues to be on the rise. Today 15 million people, or 68 per cent of the total population, need food and agricultural assistance.

Thirdly, 2.4 million children in Syria do not have access to education. In the north of the country, 60 per cent of the 1,400 camps do not have primary schools at all. Not only are children suffering from psychological distress, but negative coping mechanisms, such as child labour, child recruitment and early marriage, are on the rise.

Fourthly, gender-based violence, which still often remains overlooked, is a serious concern. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 8.5 million people need assistance for gender-based violence, which is an increase of 1.2 million compared to 2022.

Another issue of concern is the chronic underfunding of the United Nations response plan. As all clusters remain underfunded, we risk putting lives at risk in the middle of winter and during a cholera outbreak. The fact that operational costs of humanitarian efforts are increasing due to the fuel crises and other operational challenges makes this situation even more serious.

When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across Syria, all channels of access should be consistently available. As co-penholders, Switzerland and Brazil support the use of all modalities to ensure rapid, unimpeded and sustainable humanitarian access to all people in need in Syria. In that regard, we look

forward to working with all Council members in the coming months to address the humanitarian needs on the ground and the operational demands of the United Nations agencies and their partners.

We believe that, at the moment, the cross-border mechanism remains indispensable, as it allows the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to millions of persons in north-west Syria. The cross-border authorization allows more direct access to this affected population through operations closely monitored by the United Nations. In relation to cross-line operations, we appreciate the efforts in place aimed at expanding the number of deliveries and welcome, in this regard, the news of an updated operational plan.

Early-recovery projects have also proven central in our collective endeavour to alleviate the suffering of the people in Syria, as these projects go beyond life-saving humanitarian aid and help strengthen the resilience of communities and support the sustainability of humanitarian activities. We welcome the continuous updates on the impact of their implementation and the ongoing work aimed at their expansion.

Finally, as co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file, we commend OCHA and all other United Nations agencies for their tireless work and reiterate the commitment to always upholding the needs and rights of the people living in Syria, who should not be left unassisted at this time of difficulty and suffering.

I will now address the political situation on behalf of Brazil.

Brazil thanks Special Envoy Pedersen once more for his ongoing engagement with a wide array of stakeholders in a unstinting effort to foster confidence among the parties. We reiterate our support for Mr. Pedersen's important initiative on step-for-step building measures and efforts to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. We agree with his assessment that we need more than formal meetings of the Committee: we need renewed political will to move the process forward.

The continuous hostilities on the ground in Syria, particularly given the constant tensions in the north, remain deeply worrisome. Brazil echoes the Secretary-General's repeated calls on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, maintain the ceasefires agreed upon and respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. All attacks against civilians and

civilian infrastructure must also immediately cease in accordance with international humanitarian law, and that applies to counter-terrorism activities as well.

Brazil remains very concerned about the plight of those detained and missing in Syria. In this regard, we welcome all efforts in place aimed at trying to bring answers to the suffering of tens of thousands of families left without any knowledge of their loved ones.

Finally, Brazil reaffirms its commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process as a means of ensuring a political resolution of this long-lasting conflict. The implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) remains central to the main objective of the Security Council, namely, to contribute to bringing the conflict to an end by peaceful means.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Mudawi for their briefings.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2672 (2023) confirming the continued authorization of the cross-border humanitarian assistance delivery mechanism was, as we have just heard from Ms. Mudawi, a necessary step to aid the Syrian people and reduce suffering. We now join Ms. Mudawi in calling on States to contribute generously to the United Nations-Syrian humanitarian response plan so that humanitarian actors can continue to provide life-saving food, water, medicine, shelter and early-recovery programmes, among other aid, across all of Syria. We similarly urge donors to increase support for Syrian refugees and their host communities. We particularly thank Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt for continuing to welcome these Syrians in need.

We encourage the United Nations to continue strengthening its oversight of and due diligence with respect to procurement in Syria, even as it expands cross-line aid deliveries. Given the alarming record of human rights violations and abuses in Syria and the well-documented cases of corruption, vigilance is important.

We remain deeply concerned by the dire need for assistance in Rukban, and we call on the Al-Assad regime, which has at times refused outright to approve cross-line deliveries, to allow United Nations agencies and the Red Crescent to help the people who are suffering there. The fact that no aid has reached Rukban from Damascus since 2019 is unconscionable, and it puts the lie to regime rhetoric that cross-line aid

can be relied upon. The United States supports cross-line aid to all areas of Syria, including the north-west, the north-east and Rukban. Several Council members that profess support for cross-line aid refuse to acknowledge that the primary impediment to increased cross-line deliveries is the insecurity created by the Al-Assad regime's relentless conflict. In that context, we call on the Al-Assad regime to cease its assault on the Syrian people. It is imperative that all sides agree to a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire.

We are eager to see results from the resumed meetings of the ceasefire task force in Geneva. We are also eager to see the resumption of Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva, provided that Russia abandons its arbitrary demands on unrelated issues. It is incumbent upon the Al-Assad regime to stop stalling and cooperate with Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to convene good-faith discussions towards a political solution to the conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). That resolution remains the only viable solution to the conflict, and we encourage all parties to engage fully under that framework and coordinate all efforts through the United Nations Special Envoy.

After 12 years of brutal war on the Syrian people, we have yet to see the Al-Assad regime take any meaningful steps towards a political solution. In fact, we continue to hear the regime casting blame on others for the war that it started and has maintained. We will hear more of that today, I am sure, in the Chamber. Given that obstinance, the United States opposes any measure of normalization with the Al-Assad regime. States contemplating rapprochement should carefully consider what the Al-Assad regime has done to earn such an opportunity. Indeed, the regime continues to behave as it long has — behaviour that rightly caused the international community to recoil in horror and reject any dealings with Al-Assad.

We share the concerns raised by many about the situation in the displacement camps and detention facilities in north-eastern Syria. We call on States to repatriate their nationals from north-eastern Syria, reintegrate them and, where appropriate, prosecute them for any atrocities they may have committed. The continued presence of thousands of third-country nationals further complicates the humanitarian, human rights and security situation in Syria and must be addressed.

The Al-Assad regime can begin to demonstrate its commitment to good-faith discussions by confirming the fate and whereabouts of the 132,000 missing or arbitrarily detained persons. While we acknowledge that last year's so-called amnesty decree appears to have resulted in the release of approximately 500 people, we call on the regime to release everyone that it has arbitrarily detained. Furthermore, we call on the Al-Assad regime to conduct all detainee releases in an organized and humane manner, including by releasing the list of individuals and the locations where they will be released and providing proper services to support detainees during their transition from detention. For all those who remain in detention, the regime should inform family members of their condition and location and the reason for their detention, and should conduct fair and transparent trials for those accused of crimes. The regime should allow immediate, unhindered access to third-party prison monitors and medical services for all detainees.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Ghada Mudawi for their briefings on the political and humanitarian aspects of the situation in Syria.

The situation in the country remains tense. The main challenges on the ground continue to be the illegal foreign military presence in the north-east and the south of the Republic, the continuing threat of another military operation in the north, and the increasing number of random attacks carried out by the Israeli Air Force on Damascus and its neighbourhoods. Those tensions have led to a resurgence of terrorist activity by the Security Council-listed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

We are also concerned about terrorist activities in the south of the country. Terrorists use the cover of the so-called security zone near Al-Tanf, which was arbitrarily established by Washington. We believe that the goals of ensuring the national security of Syria's neighbours must not be met at the expense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In that regard, in practical terms we are in favour of the full and effective implementation of the Astana format in Idlib and the Trans-Euphrates. Together with our Astana format partners, Iran and Türkiye, we will continue to help to achieve sustainable and long-term normalization in and around Syria.

We still see no alternative to advancing a Syrian political settlement process that is Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and facilitated by the United Nations, in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015). At the same time, we believe that the modalities of international mediation should be based on respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Syrians themselves, without external pressure and the imposition of ready-made formulas, should reach an agreement on all outstanding issues on the future organization of their country. In that context, we welcome Mr. Pedersen's recent contact with the Syrian parties, in accordance with the mandate entrusted to him in resolution 2254 (2015). It is important to ensure that we do not divert our efforts to other initiatives that do not have clear modalities or specific value added.

We are surprised and disappointed about the fact that the Special Envoy mentioned that five foreign armies and terrorist groups are equally contributing to the violence in the country, without making any distinction among their statuses. He also links that to the crisis in Ukraine as a humanitarian factor. The humanitarian situation in Syria is indeed swiftly deteriorating, which has nothing to do with the action or inaction of the Syrian authorities or the crisis in Ukraine. The Syrian authorities attempt to do all they can for their nationals, but the main obstacles are the unilateral sanctions imposed by Western States on Syria. Their nefarious effect was highlighted in the December 2022 United Nations humanitarian needs overview for Syria, which clearly states that economic sanctions led to an increase in the number of those in need and that their consequences affected the accessibility and cost of basic goods, including fuel. The record hike in the price of food, especially for agricultural products, was also noted. Overall, approximately 68 per cent of the Syrian population needs food assistance, which means that everyone, including donors, must take immediate steps to rectify the situation and help the agricultural sector in Syria, including by facilitating fertilizer supplies.

Our country stands ready to send a shipment of fertilizer to Damascus free of charge. Fertilizer is being blocked by European Union countries because of anti-Russian sanctions. However, as is becoming clear, because of the United States Caesar Act it is impossible to bring fertilizer into Syria, given its so-called dual purpose. That is an issue to which we and our Syrian colleagues have already tried to draw the attention of

the Secretary-General, including at one of the rounds of the informal interactive dialogue. We expect to receive clear information from the United Nations on what is being done to resolve that situation. If our colleagues in the Security Council continue to try to ignore the obvious ramifications of Western sanctions, then all talk in the Chamber about how important it is to help ordinary Syrians will appear even more deceitful and cynical. Such cynicism can also be clearly seen against the backdrop of Washington's continued plundering of grain and oil resources in the Trans-Euphrates. On 14 January, for example, the United States moved 53 cisterns of stolen oil from Al-Hasakah into Iraq. According to Syrian information, approximately 80 per cent of all Syrian oil was removed from the country by the occupying Powers in the first half of 2022. Comment is unnecessary here.

We would also like to draw the Council's attention to Washington's recent decision to impose additional restrictions on the sale of medication, equipment and its components, as well as on services and support to a number of State-owned or private medical facilities in Syria. As members can see, that decision is far from being humanitarian in nature. We also note that resolution 2664 (2022), on humanitarian exemptions, which was actively promoted by the United States delegation, has nothing to do with the overall Syrian context. It concerns only the work of humanitarian workers in Idlib, where international terrorists, sponsored by the United States of America, are in control. It is them that Washington cares about. It does not care about the suffering of the Syrian people. Syrians no longer have any illusions about that.

In that context, the decision by the United Nations country team in the Syrian Arab Republic to prepare a report on the impact of the anti-Syrian sanctions on the humanitarian situation in the country deserves support and is timely. We expect it to be available by the end of January, as the Secretariat promised us. We trust that those and other issues that we mentioned will be fully reflected in it and not obscured, as some would wish.

Next year marks the tenth anniversary of the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism, which currently provides humanitarian assistance to north-western Syria in violation of generally accepted humanitarian norms. We will not repeat our well-known position on that matter. I should just point out that, in its present form, the mechanism has little chance of surviving not only to its anniversary, but even to the next extension in

July this year. If our Western colleagues really want to maintain the possibility of providing aid to the people of Idlib not through Damascus, they must immediately start preparing with us for its thorough change.

Idlib, where the United Nations continues not to have a presence on the ground, remains a grey area. First, we need to agree that humanitarian deliveries to that region should be undertaken with the consent of, and not a notification to, Damascus and in close coordination with the legitimate Government. We call on the United Nations not to stop its efforts to increase cross-border deliveries to the area and on Western delegations not to turn a blind eye to terrorist denials of humanitarian aid to that area with regard to sending humanitarian convoys from government territory.

We are also dissatisfied by the juggling of figures on early-recovery projects, including by the United Nations. For example, for 374 projects allegedly being implemented in all provinces of Syria, according to the figures made available to us, a record \$517 million was received. We note that the Secretariat is providing increasing amounts of funds every month without being able to give us a basic breakdown of all the projects, disaggregated by specific regions and thematic areas. How is the total amount of funds raised for those activities calculated? And for whose benefit is it increasing so rapidly on paper? We will not get very far with such an approach; that intolerable situation must be clarified as a matter of urgency.

Finally, as we all recall, prior to the Security Council's adoption in January of resolution 2672 (2023), on the future of the cross-border aid mechanism, the Permanent Representative of that country sent a letter to the then President setting out Damascus's priorities for shaping the humanitarian situation in its territory. We fully endorse that short, but important, list of issues, which is long overdue for all of us to seriously consider.

On a separate note, there is the extremely urgent issue of the return of Syrian refugees, which is crucial not only to the humanitarian reconstruction of Syria, but also to reducing the burden on the host countries, including neighbouring Lebanon. In December 2022, the first review of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification in Lebanon was published. According to the survey, at the end of last year, almost 2 million people in the country, including 37 per cent of Syrian refugees, were in the food crisis phase. Those numbers are estimated to increase to 2.26 million and 42 per

cent, respectively, in the next six months. It is clear that Beirut is unable to shoulder that burden, and the issue of Syrian refugees is becoming an existential threat for Lebanon. Against that backdrop, the short-sightedness of donors that are pushing Syrians into tents of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees inside Lebanon, instead of helping people to return to their own countries, is surprising. A sustainable solution to that problem must be found for the benefit of the two countries.

We look forward to a United Nations response to all the points that we raised — if not today, then at the next round of the informal interactive dialogue, in February.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Deputy Director Mudawi for their briefings.

A Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process is the only viable way to resolve the Syrian issue. China welcomes the extensive engagement of Special Envoy Pedersen and his team with all parties on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We hope that the Constitutional Committee will be reconvened as soon as possible. China welcomes Special Envoy Pedersen's ongoing efforts to follow the step-for-step approach and promote continued consultations and the building of consensus among the various factions in Syria.

Russia, Türkiye and Syria recently held three-party talks and demonstrated their willingness to promote the restoration of peace and stability in Syria. China welcomes that positive step. We hope that the joint efforts of those three countries will fundamentally improve the situation in northern Syria.

The counter-terrorism situation in Syria remains complex. The international community should adopt unified standards, in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions, combat all terrorist forces in Syria with zero tolerance and cease condoning, shielding and politically exploiting terrorist forces. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected. The illegal presence of foreign troops and their illegal military operations in Syria must end. The illegal plundering of natural resources in Syria by foreign troops must stop immediately.

Earlier this month, the Security Council adopted resolution 2672 (2023), on the extension of the authorization of cross-border humanitarian assistance

in Syria. China calls on the international community to fully take stock of the lessons learned from the implementation of the resolution over the past six months and to make greater efforts in the next six months in order to ensure its full implementation and achieve a greater impact on the ground.

Cross-border aid is a temporary arrangement, made under special circumstances. Ultimately, there should be a gradual and orderly transition to cross-line assistance so as to allow cross-line deliveries to become the main channel for humanitarian assistance to Syria. We welcome the United Nations updated cross-line humanitarian operation plan in north-western Syria, and we look forward to seeing a more significant increase in the frequency of aid operations and in the size of the convoys. The cross-line relief for the Al-Rukban refugee camp in south-eastern Syria should be resumed as soon as possible.

Early-recovery projects can help to foster endogenous drivers for Syria's development. China urges all donors to further improve the funding of early-recovery projects in order to prioritize the well-being of all Syrians and promote their balanced and efficient implementation throughout Syria.

We note with regret the fact that explosive remnants of war have had a severe impact on the livelihoods and daily lives of the Syrian people. China hopes that relevant areas will be included in the scope of early recovery as soon as possible. Unilateral sanctions and the consequent overcompliance issues run counter to the efforts of the Security Council and the broader international community to improve humanitarian access and increase humanitarian resources in Syria. China once again calls on the relevant countries to immediately and fully lift unilateral sanctions against Syria.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Ms. Ghada Mudawi, Deputy Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings.

I begin by acknowledging the Security Council's efforts to achieve sustainable political solutions to the conflict in Syria, with a focus on respect for unity, independence and territorial integrity, in accordance with the principles set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

Ecuador commends the determination with which Special Envoy Pedersen has sought to reconcile the will of the political actors in pursuit of creative solutions to build trust among the parties and promote conditions for a lasting ceasefire.

I also join his call to reactivate the meetings of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. I encourage the parties involved to renew their commitment to that mechanism created to support the inclusive process of drafting a new social pact that reflects the Syrian reality. We believe that this is one of the steps that will lead to a new stage of governance that incorporates all social, political and religious sectors in the framework of respect for international human rights law.

Ecuador highlights the results achieved in the early-recovery and livelihoods projects in 2022 and encourages the international community to continue to support funding to consolidate that progress, in accordance with resolution 2642 (2022), so that the most basic needs of the Syrian population, such as access to electricity, water, health and education services, are alleviated in the short term.

The Secretary-General's report on humanitarian needs in Syria (S/2022/933) states that the situation in that country is one of the most complex on the planet. Internal and cross-border displacement and the lack of guarantees to promote the safe and voluntary return of refugees is one of the challenges, as are the growing famine, malnutrition, food insecurity, poverty, sexual violence, mental illness and the alarming number of people who depend on humanitarian assistance to survive.

For all of the above reasons, Ecuador values the unity of the Security Council, which on 9 January allowed it to unanimously adopt resolution 2672 (2023) extending the authorization for cross-border humanitarian aid through Bab Al-Hawa, in north-western Syria, for an additional six months, as provided for in resolution 2642 (2022). In both cases, I highlight the role of the co-penholders, as well as the role of the 10 elected members of the Security Council.

I must point out, however, that while that extension until next July was vital to counter the precarious conditions that the Syrian population is experiencing, the Council should promote greater predictability in the time frames for humanitarian crossings.

Therefore, while the United Nations system and the international community must support efforts to improve conditions on the ground, including through timely, sustained and secure cross-line assistance operations, the Council should authorize in July an extension of the border crossing for at least 12 months or until the situation described in the Secretary-General's report requires it.

To return to the initial thesis of my statement, the only possible solution to the conflict is political. The empty chairs at the tables of Syrian families bear witness to the very high human and social cost of this protracted war. That is why we are calling for a renewed interest in engaging in political dialogue in order to implement lasting solutions on the road to justice, national reconciliation and the reconstruction of the social fabric.

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

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Deputy Director Ghada Mudawi for their briefings on the most recent political and humanitarian developments in Syria. We welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye in this meeting.

The A3 is very concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria, which remains alarming. The needs on the ground continue to grow. In 2023, more than 15 million people will need humanitarian assistance, up from more than 14 million in 2022, the highest level since the conflict began in 2011.

At the same time, the country is in the grip of a severe economic crisis that is now at its worst level since 2021. That is compounded by difficulties in accessing basic services, the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the resurgence of the cholera epidemic.

As a result, Syrians struggle on a daily basis to meet their basic needs. Indeed, more than half of the Syrian population struggles to feed itself, and 6 million people need assistance during a particularly difficult winter. The people of north-western Syria are among the most vulnerable and depend on humanitarian assistance provided through the United Nations cross-border mechanism. It is estimated that slightly more

than 4 million people, 80 per cent of whom are women and children, out of a population of 4.6 million, are in need of humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs.

We are particularly sensitive to the plight of women and girls, who continue to be disproportionately affected by the crisis. They face gender-based violence, forced and early marriages and limited access to livelihoods. Of the 8.5 million people in need of assistance for gender-based violence, more than 55 per cent are women and 37 per cent are girls.

To meet the ever-increasing needs, while the overall level of funding for the humanitarian response plan for Syria remains low, the A3 calls for greater solidarity and increased humanitarian funding, including for early-recovery and livelihoods projects. We note with satisfaction that in 2022, donors contributed \$517.6 million to partially or fully fund early-recovery projects in the 14 governorates.

We call for the lifting of sanctions that could impede access to essential medical supplies, medical support related to the COVID-19 pandemic or food aid in Syria in order to prevent sanctions from having unintended negative humanitarian consequences, in accordance with Council resolution 2664 (2022).

The A3 notes with deep concern that hostilities, air strikes and bombings continue along the front lines and in pockets across the country. Those hostilities are causing high numbers of civilian casualties, including women and children, in violation of international humanitarian law. In north-western Syria alone, 138 civilians were killed and 249 injured between January and November 2022.

We therefore urge all parties to respect international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and to always ensure that civilians and civilian objects are spared in all military operations.

We fear the risk of escalation and a further deterioration of the situation. It is extremely urgent to restore relative calm on the ground. To that end, renewing the political process is of vital importance. We take this opportunity to commend Special Envoy Pedersen for his continued efforts, in a difficult context, to advance a step-by-step confidence-building process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and to convene a ninth session of the Syrian-led, United

Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee. We also urge the parties to exercise restraint and to shoulder their responsibilities by committing themselves to renewing the dialogue and cooperating to consolidate the bundle of bilateral agreements reached by the main actors in the region into a nationwide ceasefire for the sake of the people of Syria.

We note with interest the progress made in cross-border operations throughout Syria following the United Nations update of its plan to progressively increase access and scale up assistance to those in need in order to complement the cross-border mechanism's response. A total of 10 convoys have been dispatched between August 2021 and January 2023, with a gradual increase both in the truckloads and the number of people reached. We therefore call on the parties to continue to ensure the safe passage of cross-border convoys and their personnel.

The A3 welcomed the unanimous extension by the Security Council on 9 January (see S/PV.9237) of the authorization of humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months, until 10 July. Accordingly, resolution 2672 (2023) authorizes the work of that crucial mechanism, which provides vital assistance to 2.7 million people in need every month — approximately 65 per cent of those in need in north-west Syria. The extension of the cross-border mechanism is all the more vital for the Syrian people as there has been no substitute for it to date, both in terms of size and impact. We reaffirm our commitment to respecting the Syrian Arab Republic's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates its solidarity with the Syrian people in their quest for lasting peace and stability. The firm and good-faith commitment of Syria's neighbours is essential for achieving that.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me start by again thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Deputy Director Mudawi for their powerful briefings today. I would like to highlight the following three points.

First, the United Kingdom welcomes the recent adoption of resolution 2672 (2023) to continue the delivery of life-saving aid to millions of Syrians in need. But let us be clear. As we heard again today, six months is not a sufficient timeline within which humanitarians can effectively operate. The humanitarian community has consistently warned us that shorter mandate renewals force United Nations

agencies and non-governmental organizations to direct much of their efforts to contingency planning. That uncertainty limits their capacity to help those in need. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with 15.3 million Syrians now in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

Secondly, with humanitarian needs growing each year, the Al-Assad regime continues to profit from the production and trafficking of narcotics, most prominently of captagon, which provides billions of dollars annually to the regime. Turning the country into a narco-State harms the people of Syria and adds to regional instability. We urge partners in the international community to condemn that clearly and to continue supporting those affected by the captagon trade.

Thirdly, we applaud Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to continue engagement with Damascus, as well as countries in the region and beyond. The United Kingdom stands ready to support a political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We must guard against any process that does not deliver on the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and that will not contribute to lasting and sustainable peace. We had heard from Russia that it had been taking steps to renew the Constitutional Committee, but we have seen no progress. We urge Russia to stop stalling what should be a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. It is time to move away from discussions of process for the Constitutional Committee and begin to tackle substance.

It has been seven years since the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). The principles set out in that resolution remain the only means for achieving a sustainable solution to the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me join others in thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Mudawi for their briefings.

Another year has passed, and we are approaching the twelfth year of the horrific war that has devastated Syria and its people. For anyone who is 12 years old in Syria, all they have seen since the very first day of their lives has been nothing else but war and its disastrous consequences. They have grown up in constant fear of death, facing acute hunger and freezing cold, with no education or health care, and in perpetual displacement and destitution. All they have seen around them, without understanding, is widespread human rights

violations on a massive and systematic scale. And as they begin to grasp the meaning of life, they may end up thinking that what they see is the world — no, it is Syria, the place where citizens have endured extensive and deadly destruction that is almost unparalleled in modern history.

The unfortunate soul-wrenching irony of all that is that children who happen to be 12 years old in Syria today are considered lucky to have survived an atrocious never-ending conflict, since children and other civilians continue to get killed every day in Syria. And it is needless to add that the situation of children and women immured in displacement camps is far worse — they survive in squalid and inhumane conditions, in a prison within a prison.

There is no doubt that the regime is primarily responsible for the tragedy in Syria. It has shown constantly and defiantly that the only language it knows is that of the severe repression of its own citizens. What has unfolded during the past long 12 years has been the tragic living proof of the profound disrespect for human rights and the wanton destruction of life that the regime generates and worships, built atop mass graves and unfathomable depravity. About 130,000 Syrians are detained and continue to languish in prisons in unimaginable conditions. Others are simply missing or have vanished, and as the Special Envoy confirmed again today, the Syrian regime keeps nearly every Syrian family — and the world — in total darkness about their whereabouts.

The regime continues to ignore the persistent urgent calls of families across Syria who are seeking to clarify the fate and whereabouts of their missing loved ones. Serious action is therefore needed to end the despicable practice of arbitrary detention and forcible disappearance, including extrajudicial killings, and to hold the perpetrators accountable. In that respect, we reiterate our support for the creation of new mechanism for missing persons in Syria. We reiterate our full support for the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and we join the call on all States, civil society and the United Nations system to provide relevant information and documentation in support of accountability in Syria.

We deplore the continued obstruction of the work of the Constitutional Committee on laying the ground for the drafting of a new constitution and the start of political transition towards another Syria, a democratic Syria. When all the key indicators are red and flashing, when everyone knows that the country needs everything — but more than anything a path to its future — then blocking the Constitutional Committee is equal to committing a crime, a crime against people and their hope. We support the continual engagement of Special Envoy Pedersen with the relevant parties in Syria and the region in favour of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process under United Nations auspices in order to advance an inclusive political solution that will protect the territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty of Syria, as well as the rights and dignity of its citizens. Only a genuine and inclusive political process, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), will help to put a definitive end to the conflict and offer Syrians a new perspective — one they need and deserve.

Only a few weeks ago, the Council showed unity — based on reason, facts and reality — by extending the humanitarian cross-border mandate. It showed that, when the interests of those in need are put first, diplomacy works and produces results, and the Council discharges its responsibilities and saves lives. We must take into account the very clear observation made many times, including today by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, that the future renewal of the cross-border mandate should last for at least one year in order to provide those on the ground, the United Nations and everyone involved with the proper means to perform their tasks. We need to apply the same approach of unity to support the political process if we want to help Syrians to overcome the total impasse of this never-ending crisis of epic proportions, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General characterized it, and give Syrians, especially the children I mentioned and the country's young people, a chance for a better life, a life without war and with rights and dignity.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Mudawi for their briefings.

I would like to stress three points.

First, as we do every month, we regret the absence of any openness on the part of the regime to negotiate

under the aegis of the United Nations the basis for a lasting peace as defined by resolution 2254 (2015), which was adopted unanimously by the Security Council. Despite the Special Envoy's efforts, the Constitutional Committee, which has not managed to produce a single result since its inception, no longer meets at all. In order to overcome the status quo, the so-called step-for-step approach has been suggested, which France, together with its European partners, supports. The regime must commit itself to that approach. Any change in the French and European positions on the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction will be possible only if the regime commits to a credible and inclusive political process.

Secondly, the regime alone bears full responsibility for the humanitarian disaster that the Syrian people face. The brutality of the conflict and the repression have caused one of this century's largest movements of people in terms of both displaced persons and refugees. France and Europe will continue their engagement alongside the Syrian people to save lives, fight against sexual and gender-based violence, counter the risk of famine and meet medical needs. At a time when the Syrian population continues to face a devastating humanitarian crisis, with 15.3 million people in need, we recall the importance of ensuring full humanitarian access. The renewal of the cross-border mechanism by the Council, albeit for only six months, was essential. Guaranteeing unhindered access is essential to ensure effective humanitarian assistance. We all have a duty to respect international humanitarian law. The Syrian refugees aspire to return to Syria when their safety is guaranteed and their rights are respected. It is therefore up to the Syrian regime to create the necessary conditions for their return.

Thirdly, we must continue to fight against impunity. There are 100,000 people missing, and countless atrocities have been committed. Peace cannot be created without justice. France will continue to fight tirelessly to ensure that those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity are held accountable.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I make this statement on the political situation in Syria in my national capacity.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, I align myself with the statement made by my Brazilian colleague on behalf of both our countries.

I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Deputy Director Mudawi for their sombre but very important briefings.

The Syrian civilian population continues to be subjected to severe hardship. Switzerland is concerned about the continuing violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law throughout the country. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international law. The way out of the conflict in Syria is clear and we heard that today; it can be achieved only through a political solution. That is why Switzerland supports the efforts of the United Nations and its Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen, based on the mandate given to him by resolution 2254 (2015), which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council. We commend him for his recent consultations with key regional and international actors at the highest level. Those efforts are crucial to building confidence among the parties and maintaining the momentum for a political solution at a time when the already fragile humanitarian, security and economic situation in Syria is worsening dangerously.

In order to fulfil its commitment to the implementation of the Council's resolutions, Switzerland offers the best possible guarantees for the continuation of the peace process in Geneva, the main headquarters of the United Nations in Europe. We have great hopes that the work of the Constitutional Committee will soon resume under the aegis of the Office of the Special Envoy. The Security Council, through resolution 2254 (2015), calls for the voice and expectations of the Syrian people to be taken into account. Switzerland supports Syrian civil society organizations, in particular through the Civil Society Support Room in Geneva. Civil society organizations are involved in identifying an appropriate and sustainable political solution. Across all regions, they are building social cohesion and preserving the country's territorial integrity.

Finally, Switzerland would like the Security Council to remain seized of the issue of detained or missing persons. Resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2474 (2019) underline the importance of this issue in any peace process. Switzerland joins the appeals of the Special Envoy and the families and commends the efforts of the Secretary-General to shed light on the fate of those persons. We call on all parties to put an end to the practices of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances in Syria. Allowing the access of specialized humanitarian organizations to all places of

detention would be an essential step in that direction. Experience shows that trust cannot be restored in a society until the families of the missing get answers about the fate of their loved ones. Women and tens of thousands of orphans across the country are waiting to hear from a husband, a parent or a brother in order to regain control of their lives. They have the right to know.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Ghada Mudawi for their briefings.

Over the past 12 years of the crisis, Syria's territories have been used as a theatre for political and military operations, which has had an impact on the Syrian people. Those operations have also led to tragic outcomes, including at the humanitarian, economic, social and security levels. Although the Council renewed the cross-border mechanism earlier this month in order to mitigate the worsening humanitarian conditions in Syria, a bandage will not heal a deep wound. While those efforts are important, they do not address all the causes of the Syrian crisis, particularly in the long term. We reiterate the need to stop piecemeal and temporary approaches. We need to move from managing the Syrian crisis to resolving it, which includes turning the page on disputes by political communication, dialogue and diplomatic efforts. We also stress the importance of finding Arab solutions to Arab crises to build a better future for the peoples of the region.

Turning to the political situation, the United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of supporting the efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria, as well as Arab and regional diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the crisis. We also look forward to the upcoming trilateral meeting and hope that such efforts and international talks regarding Syria will yield results in the interest of the Syrian people and in support of the security and stability in the region.

At the same time, we reaffirm the importance of overcoming the paralysis that affected the Constitutional Committee during the previous period, as it is the only platform in which Syrians can constructively engage in a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned national dialogue without foreign intervention or dictates in order to move the constitutional process forward.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, we believe that the unanimous adoption of the resolution to extend the cross-border mechanism (resolution 2672 (2023))

reflects the unity of the Council about prioritizing the needs of the Syrian people over any political considerations. However, we must work to find solutions that respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, including by doubling cross-line humanitarian aid, both in terms of its frequency and scale, and early-recovery projects. In that context, we commend United Nations efforts to increase cross-line aid and stress the importance of intensifying such efforts.

My country expresses its deep concern over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the camps, especially during the cold and harsh winter, given the lack of basic infrastructure. That, in turn, threatens the lives of millions of people, including women and children. We emphasize the need to consider long-term solutions to address those conditions and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, we hope that the year 2023 will witness additional positive steps towards creating the conditions appropriate to putting Syria on the path of security and stability.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Deputy Director Mudawi for their remarks. As always, their updates are a pertinent reminder of the continued suffering endured by the Syrian people and the need for a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

As the Syrian conflict nears its thirteenth year, millions of Syrians are desperately poor, hungry and sick. In 2023, around 15.3 million people will require some form of humanitarian assistance. Year by year, living conditions for the Syrian population are only worsening. The impact of years of violence inflicted upon the Syrian people by the Syrian regime, instability, corruption, economic struggles and the lack of progress on the political front have rendered it impossible for the population to be able to meet its most basic needs. Cholera is spreading rapidly across the country. More than 2 million children are out of school and are often forced into work or pushed into early marriage to support their families. Those are the agonizing consequences of conflict for millions of children in Syria. As noted by our briefers today, the situation in Syria remains first and foremost a protection crisis.

Malta was pleased by the unanimous adoption of resolution 2672 (2023) on 9 January (see S/PV.9237), which saw the humanitarian cross-border mechanism

renewed for a further six months. We encourage the continuation and expansion of efforts to successfully deliver assistance via cross-line aid convoys in the north-west of Syria. However, it is clear that those cross-line operations cannot substitute the size and scope of the cross-border mechanism at Bab Al-Hawa. Malta supports the use of all modalities to meet the needs of millions throughout the country.

The Syria of today is one where mothers are skipping meals to feed their children. Since much of the country's infrastructure has been destroyed, electricity and fuel are scarcer than ever. Major cities face lengthy power outages. We stress the importance of supporting primary health-care services and strengthening maternal health care and nutrition programmes for mothers and their children. We also express our thanks and gratitude for the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all humanitarians who strive to reach millions of Syrians every day at great personal risk. Malta remains committed to assisting the Syrian people and to providing humanitarian support, as well as ensuring that it reaches those most in need.

There simply can be no further delay in meaningful and substantive political progress in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Malta urges the swift reconvening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva and calls upon the Syrian Government to engage in good faith in that regard. We also highlight the importance of ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all stages of the political process. In that regard, we welcome the Special Envoy's engagement with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board in November and stress that women's participation must be more than a formality. The agreed 30 per cent threshold should be seen as the minimum.

Time is of the essence. As Special Envoy Pedersen outlined, the dangers of a military escalation in parts of the country remain real. Therefore, the first step is for all parties to step back from escalation and work towards a nationwide ceasefire. We must remain guided by the needs of the Syrian people and steadfast in the pursuit of justice and accountability for the crimes perpetrated against them. In that vein, Malta reiterates its support for the work being carried out by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 to ensure accountability for the most serious

crimes committed under international law. Malta also continues to support the implementation of targeted sanctions against relevant individuals and entities involved in the repression of the Syrian people.

We also stress that all returns of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons must be legal, safe, dignified and voluntary, in accordance with the criteria set by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Furthermore, we call on the Government of Syria to ensure the immediate, transparent and verifiable release of all those detained arbitrarily and for the provision of information on the whereabouts and fate of the thousands who are missing.

In conclusion, I reiterate Malta's support for Special Envoy Pedersen and for his tireless work in advancing a political process for Syria. Malta stands by his step-for-step approach and calls on the Government of Syria to engage faithfully and substantively with his good offices. The people of Syria must come first, as that is the only viable way forward.

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

I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the Deputy Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Ghada Mudawi, for their briefings.

As 2023 begins, Japan hopes that a new year will bring new momentum. Japan welcomes the unanimity the Security Council showed in renewing the cross-border aid mechanism earlier this month (see S/PV.9237) and hopes that such solidarity can be sustained, including when the time comes to renew the mechanism again in July — regardless of the divergence of views on the political front.

As we approach 12 years since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the country is shattered and the suffering of its people is beyond measure. There are no winners in the conflict. More than half of all Syrians are refugees or internally displaced, cholera and coronavirus disease have spread widely, and the economy has collapsed. We are fully aware of the enormous humanitarian needs in Syria, including for early-recovery activities, such as the restoration of schools, hospitals and water and electric facilities; the removal of landmines and debris; and the provision of emergency medical assistance.

Nevertheless, history has demonstrated that conflicts eventually end and it is possible to rebuild.

To that end, Japan urges all parties, especially the Syrian authorities, to engage meaningfully in an inclusive United Nations-facilitated political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Japan calls on the Council to unite in support of the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen. The Council must also work to ensure that the Constitutional Committee makes real progress. Japan strongly encourages the Syrian Government to address in good faith the issue of detainees and missing persons and create a conducive environment for the return of refugees. In that vein, Japan notes with appreciation the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a new mechanism to determine the fate of missing persons in Syria and to provide support for victims, survivors and their families. Japan also takes note of the series of announcements concerning an amnesty by the Syrian Government and strongly hopes for its implementation in an expeditious and verifiable manner.

Syria has a rich history and civilization dating back millennia. Damascus is one of the oldest cities in the world. Aleppo was once a vibrant centre of commerce. Let us remember that not just Syria's present but also its future are at stake. Today millions of children cannot attend school. We the Council members must make the utmost efforts to seek a political solution in a humble and constructive manner so that the day comes swiftly when those children can resume their education and all Syrians can live in peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to reiterate my delegation's position on the practice of holding monthly Security Council meetings on Syria in the absence of any relevant developments. That leads Member States to the usual routine of repeating the same statements and phrases. However, it seems that those who are attached to this kind of discussion have no regard for the Council's time and resources and for their use to maintain international peace and security. They would rather exploit the Council to repeatedly launch campaigns of lies and misinformation while fabricating baseless accusations.

In 2022, Syrians were faced with difficult and multifaceted humanitarian crises, while the beginning

of 2023 has created opportunities for agreeing on solutions to resolve and alleviate them. It is therefore important that we take a moment to look at the root causes that led the Syrians to the current difficult humanitarian situation, including its deterioration and persistence.

The wrong policies pursued by the United States of America throughout the world — in our region in general and in Syria in particular — led to instability and insecurity and destroyed the development achievements achieved over decades. The policy of creative chaos adopted by successive United States Administrations in our region and in Syria, which is a vital part of the region, has produced and exacerbated problems and ignited tensions, thereby resulting in conflicts. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been provided to suspicious media outlets to mislead public opinion and distort the image of the Syrian State. That malicious policy has destroyed all political, economic and social achievements and has led to the emergence of terrorist organizations, in particular Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front. That policy has also created harmful and obscure structures alien to Syrian society, the sole purpose of which is to serve the selfish geopolitical interests of the United States of America and its allies.

The United States and its NATO allies have invented a number of pretexts for directly intervening in Syria. They have manipulated the provisions of international law and the Charter of the United Nations to justify their illegal military presence on Syrian territory, which has gravely threatened the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and led to the theft of more than \$100 billion in Syrian national resources and wealth, primarily in the form of oil, wheat and gas.

The United States and its Western allies have provided protection and impunity for Israel, which has enabled Israel to continue its occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967. That has prevented the Council from assuming its responsibility to address Israel's repeated acts of aggression against Syria's sovereignty and vital infrastructure, the most recent of which was the attack on Damascus International Airport at the beginning of this year, which led to a number of martyrdoms, casualties, material losses and the temporary suspension of the civilian airport's services. Those who claim here that they are protecting Syria and Syrians failed to condemn those attacks, which demonstrates the level of their hypocrisy and adherence to double standards.

At the same time, the United States and its European allies have imposed unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian people that are illegitimate, inhumane and immoral. They have only exacerbated the suffering of Syrians inside and outside Syria, especially as they impact third countries. The targeting of the Syrian health sector, which provides health care to millions of Syrians, including specialized children's hospitals, by the Bureau of Industry and Security of the United States Department of Commerce, through the restrictions it has imposed on the sale of equipment and the provision of services, support and spare parts to many Syrian public and private hospitals, is an example of how those measures threaten the lives of millions of Syrians. Moreover, the United States delegation, together with other delegations, claims that sanctions do not affect the health sector. They shed crocodile tears in this Chamber, while claiming that they are providing humanitarian assistance to Syrians.

It is regrettable to hear certain United States and European Union officials publicly and privately stating that they will not implement the recently adopted resolution 2672 (2023), in particular its provisions on early recovery and electricity. That means essentially that the resolution will remain unimplemented, as is the custom with those countries, and we will hold them accountable for that before the Council in advance. The United States of America and its Western allies have not lost a single opportunity to exploit and politicize humanitarian activities. They blackmail and pressure those in charge by controlling funding. They also use various international bodies as a tool for exerting political pressure on Syria by openly manipulating international conventions or opting for their selective misinterpretation in order to create politicized mechanisms.

Such destructive behaviour by the United States in Syria has brought insecurity and instability to millions of Syrians. It has turned a large number of them into refugees and displaced persons, undermined their food security and caused difficult humanitarian conditions. The coronavirus disease pandemic, the harsh winter and the outbreak of cholera and other infectious diseases have only exacerbated the Syrian people's suffering and misery.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns all those crimes, violations and immoral practices perpetrated by the United States of America and its allies and calls upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities

and fulfil its mandate to ensure respect of Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and ensure compensation for all damages borne by the Syrian people as a result of those faulty policies and practices.

During those difficult years, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has dealt responsibly with all the challenges it has faced. With high patriotic spirit, the Syrian people have worked to combat terrorism, and the Government succeeded in eliminating a large part of it. Today it is more determined than ever to continue their efforts aimed at combating the remnants of terrorists and restoring security and stability throughout Syria.

The Syrian Government has also supported political settlement tracks and national reconciliation efforts, which have strengthened national unity, preserved Syrian social cohesion and facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those who deserve it, to meet the needs of Syrians and support their resilience. Syria has also implemented its legal obligations under the international conventions that it has joined. It has supported all initiatives put forward by brotherly and friendly countries, especially the Astana format meetings, to mitigate the repercussions of the crisis or find solutions for it.

The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that the ultimate solution to the crisis in Syria requires stopping the repeated and systematic Israeli acts of aggression; ending the illegal foreign presence on Syrian territories in the north-east and north-west of the country, as well as the presence of affiliated terrorist groups and separatist militias; the immediate and unconditional lifting of measures of economic terrorism and collective punishment imposed on the Syrian people; improving the humanitarian situation by addressing the humanitarian needs of Syrians fairly and without discrimination; donors fulfilling the commitments they have made regarding the humanitarian response plan; and increasing and expanding early-recovery projects in quantity and quality.

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

Mr. Jalil Irvani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Mudawi for their insightful briefings.

On the political track, we emphasize once again our steadfast position that the Syrian crisis must be resolved

in accordance with principles of international law. A political solution based on a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process facilitated by the United Nations is the only way to end the crisis. Throughout this process, the national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic must be fully respected.

Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to Syria and the region. However, the presence of foreign forces in the north of Syria under the pretext of combating terrorism should not be used to violate and undermine Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Such an illegal presence continues to violate the United Nations Charter and international law and creates ideal conditions for terrorist activities, which must be ended. In order to create grounds conducive for ending the crisis in Syria, all uninvited foreign forces must leave the country without any precondition or delay, and terrorist groups must be confronted.

Equally important, the Security Council must compel the Israeli regime to immediately end all acts of aggression against Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Israeli regime continues to commit these illicit acts that contravene international law, notwithstanding the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated requests for the Council to explicitly condemn them. We strongly condemn the Israeli regime's recent 2 January terrorist attack on Damascus International Airport, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and endangers regional and international peace and security.

Along with the other members of the Astana format, we support the Constitutional Committee's work, which must continue in accordance with its rules of procedures and without foreign interference or artificially imposed timelines. We hope that the procedural obstacles to the functioning of the Constitutional Committee will be removed as a result of the constructive engagement and good faith of the parties and that the Committee's next meeting will be held soon. In this context, we support the constructive engagement of the parties with the Special Envoy to effectively resolve differences over the Constitutional Committee meeting. We also support the Special Envoy's interaction with Syrian authorities, which is required for the political process.

Given the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Syria, Iran welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2672 (2023), which extends the cross-border mechanism for an additional six months, and it regards

this action as an important step forward in addressing Syria's pressing needs, particularly in the light of the harsh winter conditions. However, we continue to stress that the cross-border mechanism is only temporary in nature. We believe that, in discussions on a new extension, in July, the legitimate concerns of the Syrian Arab Republic, together with identified gaps and challenges, must be addressed.

We commend the efforts made so far by the United Nations and other humanitarian actors to meet the needs of the Syrian people. We are confident that, in implementing resolution 2672 (2023), the focus will be on improving early-recovery projects for the rebuilding of critical infrastructure, enhancing cross-line aid operations and supplying electricity, which has been identified as a pressing challenge and a basic requirement for all Syrians. Accordingly, political conditions should not prevent humanitarian aid from reaching those in need, and all parties must strictly adhere to the basic principles governing humanitarian assistance while maintaining neutrality and transparency.

We reiterate our call for the lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria, particularly those targeting ordinary people and patients in the health sector. Such illegal actions are preventing resolution 2672 (2023) from being implemented, making humanitarian aid more difficult to deliver, and even delaying the return of refugees and internally displaced people. We urge the international community to increase funding for the humanitarian effort in Syria, particularly in view of the harsh winter conditions.

Finally, we commend and support the Syrian Government's ongoing efforts for local and national reconciliation, which are a critical step towards restoring Syria's stability and facilitating the dignified, safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced people.

Syria has always played an important role in the region, and it is a key pillar of regional peace and security. We support Syria's regional standing and improved diplomatic relations because we believe that a safe, secure and prosperous Syria benefits the Syrian people, the region and the global community.

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

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Türkiye): Let me thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Deputy Director Mudawi for their briefings.

Earlier this month when the Security Council agreed to extend United Nations cross-border assistance for an additional six months, millions of Syrians who depend on that vital assistance and the humanitarian community breathed a sigh of relief. We thank Ireland and Norway for their dedicated and responsible work as co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file for the past two years. We congratulate Switzerland and Brazil on taking on that important responsibility. We expect that, in the face of unprecedented needs in Syria, the humanitarian imperative will be at the centre of the Council's work in the period ahead.

The Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2672 (2023) is important and welcomed, given the vital role the United Nations cross-border mechanism plays in the delivery of life-saving aid to 4.1 million people in north-west Syria. The scale of the humanitarian crisis and preserving regional stability necessitate a longer-term maintenance of the United Nations cross-border mechanism. We reiterate our call on Council members to continue to do what is right and support the indispensable cross-border mechanism for as long as it is needed. It should be a needs-based decision, not a time-bound one. We will continue to support the full implementation of Security Council resolutions in all their aspects, including by facilitating cross-line aid deliveries.

Syria is experiencing the highest number of humanitarian needs amid harsh winter conditions. The season is already hitting communities with rain, unpredictable flooding and cold temperatures. For many families among the 6.8 million internally displaced in Syria, it is their twelfth winter in displacement. Especially at camps for internally displaced persons, the sole concern these days is how to get warm, which often results in negative coping mechanisms, such as using unsafe substances for heating.

Reports about people, including children, who lost their lives and tens of thousands who were injured due to winter conditions or fires are not only alarming but also underscore the need for lasting shelter solutions. We support the efforts of the United Nations and its partners to replace the short-lived and easily damaged tents with safer, more durable and dignified shelters. Similar to Türkiye's brick shelters project, durable

shelters can provide a decent way of life for millions of displaced Syrians. We continue to encourage other international stakeholders and donors to prioritize funding such projects.

Türkiye's long-lasting priorities in Syria are clear and intact — ensuring the security of our borders, protecting Syria's unity and territorial integrity, eliminating all terrorist organizations from Syria, ensuring the success of the political process and creating the appropriate conditions for the return of Syrian refugees to their homes in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner. As the guarantor of the Syrian opposition and the country hosting the largest Syrian refugee population globally, Türkiye's support to the Syrian people will continue. We believe that a lasting solution to the conflict can be achieved only through a political process. We expect the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee to be held as soon as possible. It is crucial to start obtaining concrete results from the process. We continue to communicate that message to all interested parties.

We are as committed as ever to resolution 2254 (2015) and to United Nations principles on the return of refugees. The United Nations and its agencies have a major role to play in the process of creating the necessary conditions for refugee returns, as well as in implementing and monitoring returns on the basis of United Nations principles. As we have done so far, we

will continue to work closely with the United Nations on that issue.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) terrorist organization in northern Syria is a critical threat to our security. The terrorist organization continues to target our citizens inside our borders, as well as Syrian civilians. The organization is also advancing its separatist agenda in north-east Syria. It is a matter of public record now, including in the Secretary-General's reports to the Council, that the members of the PKK/YPG and its offshoot, the Syrian Democratic Forces, which is a minority in north-east Syria, oppress the Arab majority in the region, including by recruiting minors, imposing their own controversial school curriculum on the Arabic-speaking majority, closing schools in which students are taught in Arabic and arresting Arabic teachers. As we have done so far, Türkiye is determined to do whatever is necessary to eliminate the terrorist and separatist threat posed by the PKK/YPG.

We cannot allow or afford for the Syrian crisis to be a frozen conflict. The international community needs to step up efforts in support of a Syrian-led political solution. The parameters are clearly defined in the Council's own resolution 2254 (2015). We will not give up on our Syrian brothers and sisters. We will continue to support them in their pursuit of a peaceful, prosperous and just future.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.