



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9333rd meeting

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New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mrs. Baeriswyl	(Switzerland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mr. Issahaku
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

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

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Last month, when I briefed the Security Council in person (see S/PV.9313), I said that new diplomatic activity in the region could be an opportunity. If seized, it could act as a circuit breaker in the quest for a political solution in Syria — if there is constructive engagement on Syria's part and if key regional and international groups and players can work together. This past month has seen the pace of diplomatic activity quicken, with a meeting in Moscow of the Foreign Ministers of Iran, Russia, Syria and Türkiye; a meeting in Amman of the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria; resolutions adopted in Cairo and Jeddah by the League of Arab States; the establishment of an Arab ministerial liaison committee to follow up on the implementation of the statement adopted in Amman and continue direct dialogue with the Syrian Government; and the Arab League summit in Jeddah, in which the President of Syria participated.

There have also been meetings in Brussels on Syria between European and American officials. I note that in dialogue with the Syrian Government, the meetings in Amman, Jeddah and Moscow considered issues related to resolution 2254 (2015), including humanitarian aid and access, the safe, dignified and

voluntary return of refugees, the restoration of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, efforts to counter listed terrorist groups and post-conflict reconstruction. The importance of a political solution was underlined and there have been appeals for reconvening the Constitutional Committee and working for national reconciliation. Calling attention to those themes and points could present a real opportunity to move forward.

That is the key message I have brought during my intensive engagement during the reporting period. After consulting a wide range of stakeholders when I was in New York last month, I visited Iran, to meet the Iranian Foreign Minister and other senior officials, and Türkiye for senior-level engagements. I met with the Jordanian and Egyptian Foreign Ministers in Geneva, spoke to the Saudi Foreign Minister by phone and was in touch with a range of other players. I spoke on the phone with Syrian Foreign Minister Mekdad and saw President Jamous of the Syrian Negotiations Commission in Istanbul.

In those engagements, I made it clear that I appreciate the dangers of a continuation of the status quo for both the Syrian people and for the regional and other actors that want to curb the instability created across Syria's borders, including from narcotics, and that continue to host millions of Syrian refugees. I have long sought to bring about reciprocal, concrete and verifiable confidence-building measures to unlock progress on implementing resolution 2254 (2015). I can only welcome the intensified regional consultations and work in the same direction. My goal is to enhance the coordination, complementarity and coherence of the efforts under way, and I welcome the fact that the regional actors have also clearly stated the same goal. After all, even minimal progress on some issues pertaining to resolution 2254 (2015) will require the confidence and resources of many different players, as well as serious actions. It is vital that the recent diplomatic gestures be matched by meaningful action. Let us remember that the Syrian people have continued to suffer on a massive scale. While they have observed the recent diplomatic developments, they have not yet seen any real improvement in their lives, whether they live in or outside Syria. Nor have they seen renewed signs that the intra-Syrian political process will actually resume and start to move forward. Only if those two things change — confidence-building on the ground and a genuine political process — will we be able to say that the current opportunity has been seized.

Understandably, there has been much focus on the question of Syrian refugees and the internally displaced as well. We continue to uphold and further the principle of the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees. I want to share with everyone the voices of Syrian refugees themselves, as expressed in the annual surveys by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. The latest was published last week. It tells us that most Syrian refugees still hope to return one day, and a sizable number hope to return within five years. But, this year, as in previous years, only a small fraction indicated their intention to return in the next 12 months. Why is that? The top two factors cited by refugees were a lack of livelihoods and work opportunities, on the one hand, and a lack of safety and security, on the other. Other issues that were also major concerns were inadequate basic services and housing, on the one hand, and fears about military service, conscription, recruitment, arrests, detention, harassment and retaliation, on the other.

Why is that also important for confidence-building and the political process? It is important because it tells us that if the Syrian Government were to start to address the protection concerns of the displaced more systematically, working closely with the United Nations, and if donors were to help the United Nations do more to address the concerns that all Syrians have about their livelihoods, that would help accomplish what we all say we want to do — build confidence and begin to change the realities on the ground for all Syrians and not only the displaced. It could help bring about movement towards a safer, calmer and more neutral environment in Syria, and it could help alleviate hardship inside the country. A United Nations presence and access in all the relevant areas would of course be an essential component in all of that. We also continue to stress the importance of generosity in responding to funding requests related to Syrian refugees and of avoiding inflammatory rhetoric about them.

Let me also strongly emphasize that addressing the fate of the detained, the disappeared and the missing is a core issue for moving forward in Syria. It is hard to see how there could be genuine confidence-building without some progress on that issue, which has an impact on nearly all Syrians and is fundamental to families and communities and to repairing Syria's social fabric. We continue to call on all parties in Syria to take concrete and meaningful steps on this file, which would do so

much to change the dynamics, if done at scale and in the right way. We also continue to urge Member States to support the United Nations efforts towards the establishment by the General Assembly of an institution dedicated to the search for missing persons, as per the recommendation of the Secretary-General.

Let us remember that for the Syrian people, the economy continues to reach new lows. The Syrian lira reached its lowest level ever in the past month and inflation is on the rise. And the recent earthquake's impact has worsened the country's economic crisis. There are reports of a further increase in poverty, including an assessment by the International Labour Organization of approximately 170,000 workers losing their jobs. The cumulative effects of a decade of war and conflict, corruption, the Lebanese financial crisis, the coronavirus disease, sanctions, illicit drug trafficking and the war in Ukraine mean that the economic morass of the Syrians has never been more acute. Changing that must also be a key priority of any confidence-building process.

Let me also underline the heightened importance of resuming a credible intra-Syrian political process, starting with reconvening the Constitutional Committee. A way must be found to overcome the non-Syrian issues that have arisen and to resume the Committee's work and see it develop in a positive direction. I appreciate the ideas of many on ways out of the impasse and it is a priority to seek to resolve the challenges. In that spirit, I am in close touch with the relevant authorities in a renewed effort to overcome obstacles and reconvene the Constitutional Committee in Geneva.

Meanwhile, too many Syrians are still affected by violence. This month alone saw ongoing exchanges of rocket and mortar fire across front lines, air strikes from Israel, Turkish drone strikes, air strikes attributed to Jordan against drug smugglers, the first pro-Government suspected air strike in Idlib in more than five months and attacks by listed terrorist groups.

Yes, there is a broad military stalemate, but violence continues to cause civilian deaths on all sides and the renewed escalation of hostilities is not off the table. The engagement of all actors to sustain calm and work on a nationwide ceasefire remains of vital importance. Let us also remember that the level of humanitarian suffering has never been higher, as my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will, no doubt, shortly inform the

Council. Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi convened the Humanitarian Task Force again during the reporting period, appealing for humanitarian access via all modalities, whether cross-line or cross-border, as well as resources to meet emergency humanitarian needs, including early recovery and livelihoods.

Let me reiterate my welcoming of the Syrian Government's extension of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings for three more months to allow for the continued much-needed aid from the United Nations. Let me also remind the Council of the Secretary-General's call for a 12-month extension of the Security Council's authorization to operate the cross-border mechanism.

Meanwhile, we continue to consult with the broadest spectrum of the Syrian people, including through the Civil Society Support Room, which convened in Geneva this month in the form of thematic working groups. At the core of its message was the need for a safe environment and a comprehensive and sustainable political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which would create the conditions for Syrians to return home. The Syrian-Syrian dialogue is an essential element to rebuilding social cohesion and identifying entry points that unify all Syrians. Likewise, the Women's Advisory Board met virtually this month and with wider networks of Syrian women and continues to share with us the concerns and aspirations of all Syrians.

Last month, I said that we were entering a period of renewed probing and testing in a new context, with enhanced regional engagement and many ideas that have long been on the table, along with some new ones. There are now common and concrete points on which the many players are focused that could be meaningfully discussed and advanced. If substantive issues begin to be addressed, even if incrementally, that new dynamic could create much needed momentum. I therefore look forward to engaging the Syrian parties, the Arab, Astana and Western players, and, indeed, all members of the Council, in the spirit of promoting coordination, coherence and complementarity on Syria and eliciting positive progress, step for step and step by step, in a reciprocal and verifiable manner, consistent with my mandate in resolution 2254 (2015).

Alongside that, it is time to see the Syrians engage in dialogue and return to discussing their own future together in the Constitutional Committee. I will continue to work to facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political resolution that restores Syria's sovereignty,

independence, unity and territorial integrity and meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mudawi.

Ms. Mudawi: The humanitarian crisis in Syria must remain a global priority. The reasons are clear. After 12 years of conflict, the vast majority of the Syrian population continues to face daily challenges to meet the most basic food, health, water, sanitation and hygiene and shelter needs. A staggering 15.3 million people require humanitarian assistance throughout the country, representing nearly 70 per cent of the Syrian population.

For the first time in the history of the crisis, people across every subdistrict in Syria are experiencing some degree of humanitarian stress. Some 12 million people — more than 50 per cent of the population — are currently food insecure, and a further 2.9 million are at risk of sliding into hunger. In addition, recent data show that malnutrition is on the rise, with stunting and maternal malnutrition rates reaching levels never seen before.

The earthquake compounded that already bleak humanitarian situation. More than 330,000 people remain displaced, and thousands more have lost access to basic services and livelihoods. The situation is still critical for families who remain in collective shelters, camps and informal settlements. Protection concerns, including gender-based violence, and mental health needs are on the rise. With the water crisis ongoing, the risk of cholera and other water-borne diseases lurks around the corner as the hot season approaches.

The United Nations and partners continue large-scale efforts to respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs. In the coming months and years, support from donors and the Council will be crucial in addressing ongoing essential needs, including the early-recovery response. The preliminary Syria earthquake recovery needs assessment has estimated that there to be almost \$9 billion in damage and losses, and \$14.8 billion in recovery needs over the next three-year period. In this context, and despite a challenging operating environment, the United Nations and its partners continue to deliver life-saving aid and protection services to people throughout Syria, wherever they are located, by every means possible.

I welcome the decision by the Government of Syria to extend, until 13 August, the emergency measures implemented since the earthquakes to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including access for shipment and relief teams via the Al-Rai and Bab Al-Salam border crossings. These border crossings have been a vital complement to the massive cross-border assistance operation through Bab Al-Hawa, expanding reach and lowering costs. Using all three crossings, the United Nations and our humanitarian partners have rapidly scaled up the cross-border response. More than 2,330 trucks loaded with aid from seven United Nations agencies have crossed into north-west Syria since the earthquakes struck.

The people inside Syria have welcomed the opportunity to speak directly with the United Nations. Many have expressed deep fears for themselves and for their children's future. In north-west Syria, humanitarians will expand the hotline for the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment to answer requests for support, receive complaints and ensure we are listening carefully to what affected people need.

The vital importance of sustained cross-border access into north-west Syria was already clear before the earthquakes. It has only become clearer and more urgent now. As the Secretary-General has said, a 12-month extension of the Security Council's authorization of the cross-border mechanism is indispensable. It is a matter of life and death for millions of people in north-west Syria.

We continue to make progress on early-recovery and livelihood programming, with funding shared equally between Government-controlled areas and north-west Syria. This has become even more important following the February earthquakes in helping the people of Syria recover their livelihoods and their ability to provide even the basic necessities of life for themselves and their families.

The situation in Syria is too fragile, the needs are too great and too many lives are at stake not to ensure sustained humanitarian access via every possible modality, including cross-border and cross-line missions. In the north-east, the cross-line mission to Tel Abyad was completed last week. The third cross-line mission to the Ras Al-Ayn–Tel Abyad area is a welcome step. Unfortunately, efforts to restart the vital cross-line missions to north-west Syria are still being delayed. In line with international humanitarian

law, all parties must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need and ensure humanitarian workers the freedom of movement to perform their work.

I am also concerned by the recent closure of the border crossings between Iraq and Syria and its potential impact on the vulnerabilities in north-east Syria. Any disruption to the availability of essentials will only deepen needs and worsen the situation of people living in those areas.

I reiterate that there are more people in need of aid in Syria than at any other time in the conflict. Yet we are witnessing dangerously dwindling resources for the humanitarian response. The revised 2023 humanitarian response plan requires \$5.4 billion to assist 14.2 million people throughout Syria, across all areas of control. Five months into the year, it is less than 10 per cent funded. The ramifications of this shortfall are very real: the World Food Programme, for example, is warning that at the current rate, 2.5 million people are at risk of losing food or cash assistance from July onward.

We hope the upcoming seventh Brussels Conference, hosted by the European Union on 14 and 15 June, will see the generous pledges and swift disbursements of the funding required to support the Syrian people and neighbouring countries generously hosting so many refugees. I call for greater solidarity and urgently increased humanitarian funding to save lives and prevent further suffering.

Syrians need the support of the international community now more than at any time in the past 12 years. While efforts continue towards achieving a lasting political solution, we must ensure that the urgent needs of women, men and children of Syria — life-saving aid and early recovery — are made a priority and adequately resourced and funded. They are counting on the Council's support to stay the course.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Mudawi for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Aveline.

Ms. Aveline: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to share the stories and plight of Syrians affected by over 12 years of crisis.

I have just returned from Syria where I heard women, teachers and young Syrians desperately calling for a better future — one that is filled with hope — and

a dignified life. These testimonies of Syrians across Syria are often shared with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). For example, a parent recently shared with us the uncertainty felt by families and children in camps, saying,

“The future for people here is to live through the day. No one thinks about tomorrow. People live from day to day.”

Those families, like the more than 15 million Syrians in need of assistance, are constantly struggling to cope with the multiple crises facing the country.

Council members have all been well briefed about the tragic statistics that have worsened in Syria, and they are well aware that humanitarian needs are now at their greatest in Syria since the start of the crisis. They are also all aware that the economy and public services are already at the point of collapse, pushing more families into poverty. These facts are well known; however, the current response to these challenges remains severely inadequate.

It has now been over three months since the earthquakes devastated parts of Syria and added an additional layer of suffering to an existing crisis. Witnessing first-hand the worsening trauma in Aleppo after the earthquakes was unbearable.

The donor funding support for early recovery in earthquake-affected areas of Syria was welcome. However, this support needs to be extended to all the conflict-affected communities in Syria in need of rehabilitation and recovery. This support needs to be provided to communities that want to send their children to safe schools, need access to electricity to keep warm, and need a clean and sustainable water supply and dignified shelter.

International donor support for early recovery and rehabilitation of civilian infrastructure is a consistent call made by many Syrians we meet daily. I can assure you, Madam President, from a programming perspective, that it is possible to implement long-term rehabilitation in a principled and conflict-sensitive way. Actors such as the NRC, inter alia, have proven this across Syria. Instead of relying on temporary fixes, now is the time to prioritize long-term, sustainable and dignified access to essential services and to foster self-reliance and durable solutions.

It is always painful to be reminded of our collective failure in making substantial progress on durable

solutions for the millions of displaced Syrians over the span of more than a decade. Basic services, property rights and security concerns hinder durable solutions for displaced Syrians.

I recently have heard from a woman who has returned to rural Damascus about how she cannot legally own her own home in the absence of her husband, because of the persistent legal and cultural barriers that she faces. That is representative of the situation of women across the country. Many other barriers to return to Syria remain, and the conditions are not conducive for a safe and sustainable return.

Recent announcements and practices in host countries have raised concerns about forced returns and future deportations of Syrian refugees. That once again reinforces the urgent need for a systematic monitoring of return movements to better protect returnees. The protection of refugees in host countries and the principle of non-refoulement need to also be respected now more than ever. Better donor funding, as well as appropriate governmental policy approaches in host countries and in Syria, would provide displaced Syrians with the resilience, rights and protection they need and deserve.

This meeting comes at a crucial time for long-term access pathways in Syria. Progress towards improved assistance, protection, recovery and durable solutions will remain possible only with sustained and predictable access, including via the reauthorization of resolution 2672 (2023).

We welcome recent progress in humanitarian access, including the Council's historic action for assets freezes in sanctions regimes and the reopening of border crossings in Syria. Those developments provide vital access to reach people in need. However, they must be complemented by renewing humanitarian safeguards in sanctions and authorizing the United Nations cross-border response in Syria. That mechanism ensures response continuity, transparency, oversight and access to funding for Syrian non-governmental organizations. Disruptions to cross-border access risk cutting off 4.5 million people in north-west Syria from an efficient assistance modality.

The cross-border resolution must be renewed for a minimum of 12 months and the bilateral access agreements should be extended and expanded. It is also essential to scale up cross-line assistance in a principled manner and waive administrative impediments. We must depoliticize access modalities and the broader

Syrian humanitarian response, allowing all actors to work efficiently and in principled way.

For too long the response in Syria has been marred by political decisions, while the people of Syria continue to suffer. Let us collectively build on the policy gains made recently and strive for a more dignified and needs-based humanitarian response for Syrians.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Aveline for her briefing.

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

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Ghada Eltahir Mudawi for their comprehensive briefings and updates. I also thank Ms. Morgane Aveline for her insightful presentation. I welcome to this meeting the delegations of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye.

I will deliver this statement on behalf of Brazil and Switzerland, as co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire. Severe challenges are felt across various facets of life: food insecurity, limited access to water, inadequate sanitation, overcrowding in shelters and displacement, inadequate access to health services coupled with economic strain significantly elevate the risk of disease outbreaks. The recurring displacement as a result of the protracted conflict further compounds the hardships of internally displaced persons, impeding their access to basic services.

We welcome the fact that the United Nations can continue delivering much-needed humanitarian assistance through the border crossing of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, as recently reauthorized by the Syrian Government for another three months. The expanded access, which has allowed well over 2,000 trucks to cross north-west Syria since the earthquakes, is having a positive impact on the efforts to support Syrian people. Yet, in view of the high levels of humanitarian need, predictability remains key. All aspects of resolution 2672 (2023) must continue to be implemented. We recall that all aid modalities, including cross-line and cross-border modalities, should be used. We urge all parties to eliminate barriers to cross-line and cross-border humanitarian deliveries across Syria, ensuring unobstructed access for aid workers. Moreover,

early-recovery projects remain crucial for restoring basic services.

In the last week's annual Council open debate on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.9327), the importance of compliance with international humanitarian law was emphasized as a means to alleviate the humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts and lay groundwork for sustainable peace, stability and prosperity. Respecting international humanitarian law is not optional; it is a legal obligation. Protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure during armed conflict is vital. Deliberate attacks on and the destruction of objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population, such as health centres and schools, are prohibited and detrimentally impact health and livelihood, thereby undermining protection, especially of women, children and persons with disabilities.

Food insecurity was also addressed during the annual open debate. Armed conflicts impair social and economic networks, erode resilience and disrupt market and supply chains, intensifying long-term food insecurity. According to the World Food Programme, more than half of Syria's population of 12.1 million people, suffer from food insecurity. Roughly, 5.6 million people receive monthly World Food Programme food assistance. It is deeply regrettable that, owing to a severe lack of funding and supply chain disruptions, the World Food Programme will most likely have to stop supporting 2 million Syrians with food assistance from July onwards, which corresponds to 40 per cent of its caseload. To address Syria's huge humanitarian needs, the United Nations and its partners require adequate funding for the 2023 humanitarian response plan, and all components of the plan should be financed. That is important for the survival of the Syrian population and a sustainable recovery to enhance livelihoods and expand access to basic services.

The earthquakes have exacerbated the pre-existing considerable protection needs. It is essential that those concerns are recognized and adequately considered in the humanitarian response. They include issues of legal identity, housing, land and property rights and the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals, such as those with disabilities, those at risk of sexual and gender-based violence and children.

It is important not to overlook the specific needs and vulnerabilities faced by women and the perilous coping mechanisms they are sometimes forced to resort to. It

is crucial to address those risks, integrating women's specific needs into humanitarian response strategies, striving for their empowerment and protection and recognizing their significant role in peacebuilding.

At the same time, women in Syria have once again taken over the role of first responders. It is time that their efforts and capacities are acknowledged, thus enabling them to actively participate in humanitarian programming, negotiation and decision-making processes.

In conclusion, we highlight the importance of keeping the humanitarian imperative at the centre of our debates. Our shared responsibility is to provide the Syrian people with the chance to escape this cycle of suffering and build a better future.

I will now speak in my national capacity regarding the political aspects of the conflict.

This year marks 12 long, arduous years since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, a conflict that continues with no solution in sight. Brazil remains convinced that only a Syrian-owned and -led United Nations-facilitated political process, with due regard to the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity, will bring lasting peace. A military solution remains elusive and deleterious for Syria's future.

In that regard, resolution 2254 (2015) remains key. It provides a clear road map for this political process. We express our gratitude to the Special Envoy for his steady efforts to implement its provisions, including his continuous engagement with all stakeholders. The resumption of a meaningful dialogue aimed at reconciliation should be a priority for our stakeholders. We call for the reconvening of the small body of the Constitutional Committee, with renewed political will. A comprehensive ceasefire is also urgent.

Brazil condemns all forms of terrorism and attacks by foreign forces. The path towards reconciliation is full of challenges, but we agree with the Special Envoy — tackling outstanding issues gradually could ensure a more steady course to a peaceful resolution.

Brazil welcomes Syria's recent readmission to the League of Arab States and its participation in the Arab League Summit in Jeddah. Moreover, the posture of the Syrian Government in response to the recent tragic earthquakes can open other avenues for further cooperation, thus contributing to a more positive dynamic in the Syrian file.

Furthermore, Brazil welcomes the historic agreement signed in March by Saudi Arabia and Iran aiming to re-establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. The agreement can perhaps yield a new dynamic in the region to foster dialogue as a tool for promoting stability in the Middle East.

In conclusion, Brazil calls on all parties to put the needs of civilians first in the search for a viable solution to this terrible conflict. The preservation of human life and dignity should be at the heart of our efforts. The people of Syria deserve nothing less than a peaceful, stable and prosperous country to live in.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Mudawi for their informative briefings. I would also like to appreciate and thank Ms. Aveline for her sobering update about the needs on the ground. We are grateful for all she does alongside so many humanitarian workers to assist the Syrian people in their time of need.

Recent public attention has focused on the evolving relationship between Syria and its neighbours, but this obscures a simple fact. The situation within Syria has not fundamentally changed for the better. For more than 12 years of war and the recent earthquake, the humanitarian crisis in Syria has reached new heights. More than 6.8 million Syrians remain displaced within Syria, and another 5.3 million live as refugees in neighbouring countries. And as we speak, Syria continues to export instability to neighbouring States and remains a safe haven for extremists and terrorist groups. In short, the Syrian crisis remains a staggering human tragedy and a threat to regional and international peace and security.

The Al-Assad regime has cynically tried to seize on the outpouring of international support following the earthquakes to reclaim its place on the world stage, but merely sitting at the same table as other regional leaders does nothing to help the people of Syria. And while the United States welcomed this month's announcement that the United Nations will continue to have access to Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings through 13 August, the truth is that human suffering does not occur in three-month increments and the devastation caused by the earthquakes will take much longer than another three months to alleviate. If the Al-Assad regime wants to help the Syrian people, it should act immediately and announce that it will keep

the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings open through at least August 2024 or as long as it takes.

And even if the Al-Assad regime does the right thing, it is frankly no substitute for actions by the Council, which has a responsibility to respond to the dire humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. As we heard, the Secretary-General said that a 12-month extension is indispensable, and it is a matter of life and death for the Syrian people. Due to its scale and scope, the United Nations humanitarian response requires longer timelines for planning and implementation, particularly of early-recovery projects, and the cost savings associated with the 12-month timeline are significant and ever more essential at a time of decreasing humanitarian contributions, given vast global needs.

Immediately after the earthquake in February, we saw just how insufficient one border crossing point was, given the scale of the humanitarian challenge. And we saw what happened when that one crossing, Bab Al-Hawa, temporarily closed. Think of the lives that could have been saved had the United Nations been able to use several crossings to immediately surge the delivery of assistance into north-western Syria. Going forward, the United Nations must have multiple access options available.

For that reason, the United States will work with the penholders to seek a 12-month authorization of all border crossings — Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai — through a Security Council resolution in July. We encourage all Council members to back that resolution, which will provide confidence, predictability and desperately needed support for humanitarian workers, the United Nations and the Syrian people.

At the same time, we also encourage additional progress on cross-line assistance to all areas of Syria. We support all modalities to ensure the delivery of assistance through the most efficient and safe means. We welcome the completion of the cross-line delivery to Ras Al-Ayn and Tell Abyad on 24 May, and we remain concerned about the lack of progress on long-delayed cross-line missions to Rukban.

Before I conclude, I also want to discuss the political situation. The Jeddah Declaration from the Arab League Summit stressed the need for the regime to take effective, practical steps to resolve the conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We expect the members of the League of Arab States to hold Syria

to the commitment it made to the United Nations framework at the Summit. One practical step the regime can take is to release the more than 130,000 detainees it holds in its prisons and torture chambers and to provide an accounting of those who have disappeared or died. The United States also calls on other actors to release and provide more information on the unjustly detained, including those taken by terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al-Nusra Front. Although the Al-Assad regime claims it is ready to work with actors in the region to receive refugees, we see no indication that the regime is committed to ending its harassment, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of returnees. Moreover, the regime, along with Russia, has continued to launch air strikes that impact camps for the internally displaced in northern Syria. We must also press the Al-Assad regime to create the conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. And the countries that have generously hosted millions of refugees must refrain from prematurely pressing them to return.

Finally, the Council must speak with one voice on the need for the Syrian regime to return to the Constitutional Committee. Until there is political progress towards a durable resolution of the conflict, the United States' sanctions will remain in place. And to those who blame sanctions for Syria's current state, let us be serious. Al-Assad shattered Syria with his brutal war and heinous human rights violations. The United States will continue to hold the regime accountable for its abuses, including torture and killings. At the same time, however, we will continue to help to provide desperately needed humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, and we ask that others provide more. Syrians should not be forced to live day by day, as we heard from Ms. Aveline. We will continue to work with the Council and all Member States to build a more reliable future for the Syrian people, particularly women and children.

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 informative briefings. We also listened attentively to Ms. Morgan Aveline's briefing. We welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye in today's meeting.

For the past 12 years, Syria has been in the grip of a security and humanitarian crisis whose impact on the population was exacerbated by the earthquake that struck the country on 6 February. The A3 welcomes the Government of Syria's decision to extend the emergency measures, including the opening of two new crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai for three months, from 13 May to 13 August. Those measures have enabled United Nations agencies to continue delivering humanitarian aid in north-west Syria to populations in need. That is a particularly encouraging development when we consider the impact of the cross-border mechanism. As of 23 May, 2,285 truckloads of aid had been transported since 6 February, with the help of 7 United Nations agencies, via those two additional border crossings and the Bab-Al Hawa crossing. A total of 106 cross-border missions have been carried out in north-west Syria since the first inter-agency convoy crossed into Idlib on 14 February.

Aid delivery across the front lines remains marginal, however. The A3 has continued to closely monitor the United Nations engagement with the parties aimed at reversing that trend, because the population's needs, which are urgent and growing steadily, far exceed the current response capacities. Proactive measures must be taken to ensure that 2.5 million people do not become food insecure by July. It is important to emphasize that some of the challenges facing Syria have to do with reliable access to sufficient supplies of clean water throughout the north of the country, against a backdrop of the coronavirus disease and cholera pandemics, as well as a total collapse of social and basic services and an increase in protection concerns such as gender-based violence and psychological disorders, particularly among women. The A3 notes with interest that the \$398 million funding goal for the Syria earthquake flash appeal has been met. We hope that the seventh Brussels conference in support of the future of Syria and the region, scheduled for 14 and 15 June, will attract similar international support.

On the political front, national unity must prevail if a political solution that will enable the Syrian people to regain peace and security is to be achieved. The political solution is the main path to peace in Syria. It requires a cessation of hostilities, the restoration of State authority over the entire territory of Syria and an inclusive good-faith dialogue involving all segments of Syrian society, including women, young people and minority groups. The fragmentation of Syria's political

class and the crisis of confidence among its various key actors have undermined the chances of fulfilling that dialogue currently taking place within the Constitutional Committee, whose inclusive architecture has nevertheless raised hopes. We urge all the parties to set aside their differences at a time when humanitarian urgency must prevail.

We also encourage regional players to play their roles and provide support in the pursuit of peace and stability. A strong, good-faith commitment on the part of neighbouring countries is fundamental to achieving that. In that regard, we welcome Syria's participation in the summit of the League of Arab States held recently in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. We reaffirm the importance of keeping in mind the fact that resolution 2254 (2015) remains the main road map for achieving the desired political solution to the Syrian crisis, and it should be done with respect for the Syrian Arab Republic's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The A3 is concerned about the persistence of hostilities, particularly in northern Syria. We reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire. We also reiterate our call on all the parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular by ensuring that no civilians or civilian objects are harmed during military operations. The A3 also remains concerned about the presence of foreign military forces, which could undermine regional and international security, and we reiterate that Syria should not be used as a battleground for geopolitical rivalries.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates its support for Mr. Pedersen in his quest for the only possible solution, which is a political one, to the conflict that is tearing Syria apart, and for which the country's people are paying the heaviest price. All of the parties involved and the international community as a whole should operate within a strictly humanitarian framework, without any politicization, and in the interests of the Syrian people.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Deputy Director Ghada Mudawi and Ms. Morgane Aveline for their briefings.

The increasing restoration of Damascus's ties with its regional environment is of key importance to the political settlement process in Syria. We welcome the decision taken on 7 May by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States at its extraordinary session in Cairo to restore the

participation of the Syrian Arab Republic in meetings of the Council of the Arab League and in all of the structures of the League — and we welcome in particular the participation of President Bashar Al-Assad in the League's summit, given that Syria is one of its founding States. That long-awaited step was a logical outcome of the process of Syria's reintegration into the Arab family — a scenario for which Russia has always consistently advocated. We have worked for many years with regional players, encouraging them to restore full-fledged relations with Damascus.

The decision of the Council of the League of Arab States demonstrated the desire of the countries of the Arab world to strengthen the coordination of actions to resolve current regional and international issues, reaffirming their willingness to pursue an independent policy on the world stage based on their own fundamental interests. In that context, we hope that the Arab countries will step up their support to the Syrian Arab Republic in its post-conflict reconstruction endeavours.

There has also been positive momentum in the normalization process between Syria and Türkiye. On 10 May, a quadrilateral Astana format meeting was held in Moscow between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Iran, Syria and Türkiye, during which participants reaffirmed their commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and to fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and underscored the need for increased international assistance to Damascus, including for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians to their homeland and for post-conflict recovery.

Unfortunately, instead of supporting the efforts of regional actors, who have clearly demonstrated their ability to single-handedly resolve issues within the Arab family, our Western colleagues continue to exert pressure, including by force, on the Syrian authorities and the countries of the region, dissuading them from engaging in dialogue with Damascus.

In that context, we should like once again point to the destructive policy of the United States, which is apparently no longer satisfied with merely pumping weapons into the illegal armed formations they have created in the trans-Euphrates and Al-Tanf regions. According to our information, Washington has started to establish a so-called Free Syrian Army around Raqqa, with the participation of local Arab tribes and militants from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and

other terrorist organizations. The aim is clear: to use those fighters against the legitimate authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic to destabilize the country.

We note with concern the intensification of Israeli air strikes against Syrian territory, including by violating the airspace of neighbouring countries. In April alone, there were approximately 10 random strikes, which not only destroyed civilian infrastructure — including the Aleppo airport and Latakia port — but also killed and injured civilians. We condemn such violent acts, which violate the sovereignty of Syria and its Arab neighbours. It is deeply regrettable that there has been no reaction whatsoever from the leadership of the United Nations.

At the same time, arbitrary special mechanisms continue to be churned out to investigate incidents and protect human rights in Syria, with a structure for missing persons next in line. Such entities, the non-consensual creation of which is being pushed by a group of States in the General Assembly and Human Rights Council, have no added value. Gathering compromising materials on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic at the behest of Washington and Brussels with a view to future judicial proceedings only pushes the prospects of a political settlement in Syria further away.

On the political track, we continue to support the mediation efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to advance the process of a Syrian settlement in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015) and without any external interference. In that connection, we consider it important that the Special Envoy adhere strictly to his mandate, which is based on facilitating intra-Syrian dialogue — the optimal format for which we believe is the Constitutional Committee. At the same time, we believe that decisions in principle on the parameters for future rounds of intra-Syrian consultations should be made by the Syrians themselves.

We share the alarming assessment that the humanitarian situation in Syria, exacerbated by the earthquake in February, continues to deteriorate. The existing needs of 15 million people, in addition to the fuel and water crises and the cholera outbreak, have been compounded by widespread destruction and a new wave of internally displaced persons. Meanwhile, the United Nations is woefully short of funds for even the most basic operations. Only 9 per cent of the annual humanitarian response plan for Syria for Damascus-controlled territories has been funded for the five

months of 2023. For that reason, inter alia, the World Food Programme will be forced to reduce its food aid coverage by 70 per cent.

Here we would like to address the advocates of the obsolete cross-border mechanism, who have been fervently advocating for its extension by one year. They have argued for the need for the long-term planning of United Nations humanitarian operations, but how can humanitarians make any plans for Government-controlled territories when the humanitarian plan for Damascus is so catastrophically underfunded? Their arguments are therefore flagrant blackmail, a violation of all humanitarian principles and another blatant display of double standards.

Moreover, the problems caused by the plundering of Syrian grain and oil resources by the United States, as well as the illegal unilateral sanctions by the Western bloc of States suffocating the country's economy, are not going anywhere. We therefore once again appeal to the United Nations leadership as a whole and to the new Resident Coordinator in Syria, Mr. Adam Abdelmoula, to report without delay on the impact of the unilateral restrictions on the humanitarian situation in the country. That is all the more pertinent given that Mr. Abdelmoula's predecessor reiterated that commitment during the April round of the informal interactive dialogue on Syria.

The Syrian Government's unprecedented decision to open two border crossings with Türkiye at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai and then to extend them by three months until 13 August, in addition to the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point, in accordance with resolution 2672 (2023), has unfortunately not received due credit. On the contrary, it appears as though that decision has undermined the prospects for humanitarian supplies to the insurgent north-west from Damascus. Since July 2021, only 10 convoys have been able to cross the contact lines into Idlib, the most recent being in early January — therefore, none since the devastating earthquake. A total of just 152 trucks have been dispatched. It is extremely worrisome that this is happening despite the acute needs of the population in the affected areas.

The United Nations leadership has also failed to react. At the same time, in statements in support of the cross-border mechanism, we have repeatedly heard from the Secretary-General and his Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs about a

moral imperative that we must follow in preserving the cross-border mechanism. That is a rather strange moral imperative, given that it applies only to the terrorists in Idlib. As for the rest of the country, that moral imperative is nowhere to be seen.

At the same time, more than 1,700 trucks have entered from Türkiye through three checkpoints between February and April, while the United Nations has sent more than 100 inter-agency missions to the enclave. The United Nations emergency humanitarian appeal for the north-west of Syria, which is not under Damascus' control, has raised a whopping \$400 million for 5 million people and is already fully funded.

The United Nations mandate for the use of the cross-border mechanism for humanitarian assistance, as I have already mentioned, expires on 10 July. We see no reason at all to extend it. The United Nations has already proven that, with contact and coordination with the national Government, it can work without a Council resolution, which should finally cease to exist. In addition, it is high time for the issue of the return of Syrian refugees to now be dealt with in a practical manner.

On the subject of refugees, another so-called donor conference for Syria is scheduled to take place in Brussels in June. Once again, representatives of the Syrian authorities have not been invited. In fact, the West continues to criminally freeze the Syrian refugee crisis in neighbouring countries, condemning people to live in tents, even in winter. Helping to resolve the country's internal issues, building reserves for independent development and restoring at least the basic infrastructure are what is really expected from the donors. Efforts to respond to Syria's humanitarian needs must be based, without preconditions, on the interests of the Syrian people.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Ms. Mudawi and Ms. Aveline for their remarks.

We are now well into the thirteenth year of the tragic Syrian conflict. More than 500,000 Syrians have been killed, half of the country's pre-war population is displaced, and credible reports indicate that 90 per cent of Syrians are now destitute and much of the infrastructure destroyed. As we heard, the economy is in shambles. Millions of Syrians need urgent assistance, with hundreds of thousands of them living in makeshift tents. Over 100,000 people are still unaccounted for, forcefully disappeared, detained or missing. Violence,

including from terrorist groups, has not stopped. Despite their precarious conditions, millions of refugees must now cope with another anxiety: the spectre of a forced and undignified return to Syria, a country disfigured by conflict. It comes as no surprise that fewer than 1 in 10 Syrians want to return to Syria voluntarily nowadays.

As we heard, Syria's humanitarian demands are the biggest in the world, and the situation is worsening, including in the aftermath of the earthquake. We commend all the donors that are providing indispensable aid. We are in awe of the tireless efforts of local and international relief workers — and Ms. Aveline gave us a taste of what it takes to help Syrians nowadays — who pursue their noble mission of assisting everyone wherever possible in Syria and providing them with a lifeline, especially women and children. The extension of the border crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai until August is clear recognition of the vital need for unfettered access for humanitarian aid to all Syrians. We urge the Syrian regime to keep the crossings open for as long as they are needed. We believe that the cross-border authorization for Bab Al-Hawa remains indispensable to securing humanitarian access and providing life-saving aid to more than 4 million people in north-west Syria.

More than 130,000 Syrians arbitrarily deprived of their liberty have been forcibly disappeared. Albania has continued to highlight that critical issue in the monthly discussions in the Security Council, asking for concrete action on it. We welcome the draft resolution being submitted to the General Assembly on the establishment of a new institution to determine the whereabouts of the missing. We call on all States Members of the United Nations to acknowledge the purely humanitarian character of that initiative and to refrain from any form of politicization. Its sole aim is to provide closure for all Syrians who have remained without news about their loved ones, and whatever their cases may be, to provide those loved ones with a dignified burial. Those are matters that we should all agree on, and we should never succumb to the temptation of scoring political points off the backs of the aggrieved.

We all know that the Syrian tragedy will continue to unfold before our eyes if there is no proper, genuine and inclusive political process. The root cause of all the suffering in Syria is political and can be alleviated only by a just and lasting political solution. We deplore the impasse in the Constitutional Committee and the

regime's apparent lack of good faith regarding enabling the political transition that Syria desperately needs, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which after nearly a decade remains unimplemented, despite the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy.

A few weeks ago, Syria was readmitted to the League of Arab States. We would like to believe that the regime will see it not as a concession, or as acceptance that its scorched-earth strategy in the war has worked, but rather as a hand extended by its Arab neighbours to all of the Syrian people. We sincerely hope that the new development will help create a new impetus and the conditions for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), so that we can see the start of a Syrian-led transition towards a free, democratic and prosperous Syria for all Syrians. In our view, it will require that the regime commit seriously to political reforms, take responsibility for war crimes, ensure the safe return of some 6 million refugees and the dismantling of a drug-producing and smuggling network that has turned Syria into a narco-State, with serious regional implications. That will help the country and its reconstruction. We continue to believe that justice and rights are indispensable to ensuring lasting peace in Syria and everywhere. Ending impunity for serious crimes by ensuring that their perpetrators are held accountable for their violations will therefore lay the foundations for reconciliation and a future that is different from and better than the terrible past in Syria.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): Our thanks go to Special Envoy Pedersen, Ms. Mudawi and Ms. Aveline for their briefings.

The politics in the region have shifted notably with the decision of the League of Arab States to readmit Syria amid a reduction in tensions in the Middle East. Japan appreciates the efforts by Arab countries to improve the situation in Syria, in particular the Jeddah Arab League summit and the meeting held earlier this month in Amman between the Foreign Ministers of Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iraq. In the changing regional dynamics, what remains important is that the Syrian Government take specific actions to improve the humanitarian situation and implement its obligations under resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, Japan will continue to call directly on the Syrian Government to take constructive and tangible action.

Syrians remain desperately in need of aid. On top of the devastation of war, many are still suffering from

the damage caused by the earthquakes earlier this year. Japan recently announced an additional \$14.3 million in assistance to build earthquake resilience by conducting damage assessments of buildings and restoring critical infrastructure in Aleppo and Latakia. As a country that has suffered through many earthquakes in the past, Japan truly understands the feelings of the Syrians affected and is willing to consider additional assistance that responds to the needs on the ground. It will be vital to ensure smooth humanitarian access to the devastated areas. In that context, we welcome the Syrian Government's three-month extension of its approval for the two additional crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai for emergency humanitarian assistance, including earthquake relief. Resolution 2672 (2023) on the cross-border aid mechanism should again be extended in July so that all aid modalities, including early-recovery and cross-line assistance, can continue. As members of the Security Council, we should continue to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

The Syrian Government should not be granted immunity for what it has done to its own people, even given the new regional dynamics. That is particularly true with regard to the issue of missing persons, as the fate of more than 100,000 people remains unknown. With that in mind, Japan has heard the calls, including from the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, to establish an independent institution to determine the fate of the missing. We support the objectives of such an institution and are ready to engage constructively to ensure that it will be accountable and effective.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Deputy Director Mudawi and Ms. Aveline for their remarks today. Their testimonies are a sobering reminder of the attention that we must continue to pay to Syria.

As we just heard from our briefers, the depth and scale of humanitarian needs all over Syria are barely within comprehension. Millions of Syrian men, women and children continue to suffer in the brutal conflict. Meanwhile, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners continue to try to meet the staggering needs within Syria, despite the modest resources they are allocated and the major challenges they face in a complex emergency humanitarian setting.

As we have said many times before, Syria is first and foremost a protection crisis. Half of Syria's population is still dealing with hunger, with malnutrition rates

on the rise. More than 600,000 children under the age of five are already stunted, leaving them contending with irreversible physical and psychological damage. Around 55,000 people are stuck in the spiralling disaster of the Al-Hol camp in north-east Syria, with an estimated two-thirds of the camp's children under five years of age. Only half of the pregnant women and new mothers in all the displacement camps have access to maternal health services and emergency care, while 8.5 million people are in need of assistance as a result of gender-based violence and the so-called widow camps in the north-west are largely neglected and under the radar. With no clear plan or strategy in sight for rehabilitation, repatriations or returns, we are witnessing a lost generation of women and children expand before our eyes.

Against that backdrop, Malta commends the work of the United Nations in reaching an agreement with the Syrian regime in Damascus to extend the opening of the humanitarian border crossing points at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai for another two months. We are also looking forward to the holding on 15 June of the seventh Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, and we hope it will make a substantial contribution to addressing Syria's humanitarian needs. As July approaches, we hope that we will see agreement in the Council on the extension of the cross-border mechanism at Bab Al-Hawa. The people of Syria and the humanitarians who support them need steady and predictable humanitarian access into and throughout the country.

A United Nations-facilitated political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is the only way forward, and we support the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. Progress requires a multilateral, coordinated and inclusive effort that also engages Syrian civil society and women peacebuilders. No one party alone can secure a political solution or achieve just and lasting peace. Meanwhile, the Council must not forget that millions of Syrian lives have been torn apart and changed forever by the actions of the Al-Assad regime over the past 12 years. We must not forget their continued suffering. We must not forget the forcibly disappeared or those who remain arbitrarily detained. In that respect, Malta supports the work of all mechanisms designed to pursue justice and accountability in Syria for the atrocities committed over the past decade. We take note of the Secretary-General's recommendation that the General Assembly establish a new institution

to address the issues of ongoing arbitrary detentions, missing persons and forced disappearances.

As Syria enters a time of great change, the Council must be steadfast in support of the work of the Special Envoy and ensure that Syria's future does not resemble its recent, fearful and violent past.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Deputy Director Mudawi for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the statement by the representative of civil society.

Syria was recently readmitted to the League of Arab States, marking its first reunion with the Arab family in 12 years. That not only gives a fresh impetus for the Arab countries to gain strength through solidarity but also provides a new opportunity for a political settlement of the Syrian issue. As a sincere friend of the Arab world, China welcomes and commends that development. We hope that all the parties can take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen dialogue and actively support the work of Special Envoy Pedersen to advance the political process in Syria so that it can make progress as soon as possible. China has consistently supported the solidarity and revitalization of Arab countries, while actively endorsing Syria's return to the League of Arab States and engaging the parties concerned through its own channels. Countries outside the region should fully respect the will of the States of the region and their peoples, refrain from obstructing the process of dialogue and reconciliation among countries in the Middle East and strive to create conditions that are conducive to a political settlement of the Syrian issue.

China welcomes the Syrian Government's extension of the use of border crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai one more time. At the same time, we call on the party in control of north-western Syria to stop obstructing the cross-line aid operations. The Secretariat should make comprehensive and detailed reports to the Security Council on the specific difficulties for cross-line aid operations and should propose solutions. Israel must immediately cease attacks on all civilian facilities in Syria, including its airports. Energy supplies are bottlenecks that constrain humanitarian relief and economic recovery in Syria and should be advanced as a priority for early recovery. Explosive remnants of war continue to cause civilian casualties in Syria and should be incorporated into the early-recovery process as soon as possible. Illegal

unilateral sanctions are a severe obstacle to Syria's economic recovery and livelihood improvements and should be lifted immediately, unconditionally and fully.

Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Ms. Mudawi and Ms. Aveline for their briefings.

I would like to focus on two points. An unconditional exoneration of Bashar Al-Assad will not bring about the lasting peace to which Syrians aspire. His regime and its allies are responsible for a war with unprecedented consequences — more than 500,000 dead, more than 130,000 missing, the displacement of 12 million Syrians and the regime's use of chemical weapons against the population on at least nine occasions. In addition to the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria, the United Nations has documented the systematic use of torture and sexual violence in detention centres at the hands of the regime. As well as being at the head of a system of widespread corruption, the regime and Iranian militias are now the world's leading producers and exporters of the drug Captagon, making Syria the heart of a global drug trade worth billions in profits and constituting a source of instability for the entire region.

Against that backdrop, as our Minister for Foreign Affairs reminded us on 23 May, the fight against impunity remains a priority for France. Those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be held accountable for their actions. European sanctions are designed specifically in order to restrict the room to manoeuvre for perpetrators of such crimes, as well as the sources of funding for the repressive Syrian apparatus.

For France, there can be no lasting return to stability in Syria and the region without a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians and enables them to live in peace in their country. The parameters of the political process are well known. The Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015), which lays the foundation for the lasting peace to which the Syrians aspire. That road map is being ignored by the regime, which refuses to make any commitment on the political front. In that context of deliberate obstruction, we reiterate our full support for the mediation led by Geir Pedersen and will continue our demands with regard to the political process. The regime must make tangible gestures so that a genuine political process can begin.

The absence of a political solution increases the suffering of Syrians. The humanitarian situation in Syria is catastrophic primarily because the regime has committed large-scale crimes against civilians for more than 12 years. The regime took the opportunity provided by the earthquakes of 6 February to try to divert international attention from its abuses, and the earthquakes further exacerbated an already deteriorating situation. We must guarantee the delivery of aid using all the means at our disposal. We call for extending the use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point in July for 12 months. The earthquakes have also shown that it is essential to have several cross-border access points in order to deliver aid as effectively as possible. Humanitarian operations in Syria remain complex due to the fragmentation of the country and the nature of the regime.

The humanitarian needs remain immense. Since the beginning of the conflict, the European Union and its member States have been the main donors of international aid to people affected by the conflict in Syria. A seventh Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region will be held on 21 June to mobilize the international community once again and to honour our commitment, particularly with regard to hosting refugees. Their future lies in Syria. Regrettably, the regime's active policy of demographic engineering and the many political, economic and security obstacles that continue to be put in refugees' way make any dignified, safe and voluntary return to Syria impossible at present.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen, and the Deputy Director of the Office for the Coordination on Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Ghada Mudawi, for their briefings. I especially thank Ms. Morgane Aveline, the representative of civil society, for the information she provided. I also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Syria, Türkiye and Iran in this Chamber.

Ecuador acknowledges the Syrian Government's political will to maintain the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, a decision that will allow the continued distribution of humanitarian aid to north-west Syria. We also express our intention to support the renewal of the mandate set forth in resolution 2672 (2023) to keep the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing operational and thereby ensure that United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations may continue to

reach those who depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival.

My delegation is concerned about the persistence of violent attacks that endanger the lives and safety of civilians and the destruction of strategic infrastructure essential to livelihoods, in violation of international humanitarian law. The number of air and ground incursions, bombardments and rocket attacks continues to escalate.

Ecuador deplores any indiscriminate use of violence and insists on urging the parties to silence their weapons. We reiterate the need not to give up on efforts to find an inclusive and sustainable political solution to the crisis in Syria. The role of neighbouring countries and the international community is crucial in achieving this goal. We encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to continue negotiations to engage regional countries and strategic partners to strive to achieve national and regional reconciliation, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

We acknowledge the work of the United Nations teams and partner organizations on the ground. In particular, we commend the results of early-recovery projects, livelihood support and cash grants, which together have contributed to improving the living conditions of a million people.

However, humanitarian indicators continue to deteriorate. Statistics from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warn of 4.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in north-west Syria, 3.3 million at severe risk of food insecurity, and more than 1 million children at risk of not being reintegrated into the education system. As in any conflict, women, people with disabilities, boys and girls bear a disproportionate impact of the humanitarian crisis and its consequences for their physical and mental health.

We note with alarm the number of people displaced as a result of the war and whose situation has been exacerbated after the earthquakes. Some 350,000 Syrians do not have permanent housing, and the shelters do not provide conditions of security and stability.

We are also concerned about the problems and needs faced by Syrian families in trying to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing and arbitrarily detained relatives. My delegation will support any initiative promoted in the United Nations to provide

adequate support for the victims, survivors and families of missing persons.

Ecuador emphasizes the urgent need to find a negotiated political solution to the Syrian crisis — a solution that allows for transitional justice, national reconciliation, development cooperation and, above all, an end to the suffering and despair of the Syrian people. We call once again for the political will of the Syrian Government and the commitment of countries of the region and the international community.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Ghada Mudawi for their valuable briefings. I also thank Ms. Aveline for her briefing.

Over the past several weeks we have witnessed important steps taken by Arab States to end the suffering of the Syrian people caused by the protracted crisis. That includes the return of the Syrian Arab Republic to its seat in the League of Arab States, as agreed upon at the Jeddah and Amman meetings. As a result, Syria participated in the Arab summit recently held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was marked by an atmosphere of optimism and a focus on strengthening cooperation and joint Arab efforts aimed at addressing the region's crises, including the Syrian crisis.

Those efforts are also consistent with shared Arab interests and fraternal relations that bring together the Syrian people and all other Arab peoples. In that regard, we underscore that a political solution is the only way to end the Syrian crisis and that Syria's return to the Arab League is only the starting point, representing an important step on the Arab-led track towards achieving peace, in close coordination with the Special Envoy and the United Nations.

For the first time in the history of the devastating war that has profoundly affected Syria, developments on the political track that offer hope for progress are emerging on the horizon. Those developments have resulted from initiatives of Arab States, and it is essential that all actors work to support and strengthen those efforts through a realistic approach — one that is primarily aimed at ending the war, establishing peace and addressing the war's humanitarian, security and political consequences for Syria, the region and the world. We also hope that the various regional and international efforts will contribute to security and stability in Syria, thereby preserving Syria's independence, unity and territorial integrity.

In the context of our aspirations for a better future for Syria, we stress the need to continue making progress in the fight against Da'esh, especially considering the decrease in attacks over recent months. The group will not stop attempting to seize territory and spread violence and extremist ideologies, not only in Syria but across the entire region.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we must acknowledge that this acute crisis requires finding sustainable solutions aimed at resolving it. Despite international efforts, the level of need on the ground far exceeds the volume of assistance. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 90 per cent of Syrians live below the poverty line today. We therefore underscore the need to focus on early-recovery projects, the reconstruction of infrastructure and the rehabilitation of public facilities, while considering ways to revive the economy. We welcome the measures taken by the Syrian Government to alleviate the acute humanitarian situation, which include extending the delivery of aid through the Al-Rai and Bab Al-Salam crossings for an additional three months in response to the increased needs resulting from the recent earthquake.

As for cross-line assistance, we reiterate our deep concern that, since the onset of this disaster, assistance convoys to north-west Syria have been unable to pass due to obstruction by terrorist groups. We continue to stress the need to ensure that aid reaches all regions in Syria without hindrance, in accordance with international humanitarian law and resolution 2672 (2023). Similarly, we look forward to the extension of the cross-border mechanism into Syria through next July, which remains an essential lifeline for millions of Syrians.

In conclusion, we underscore the aspirations of Syrian refugees to live in dignity and safety, especially considering the difficult conditions they have endured. That requires looking into the means available to facilitate their voluntary return to their homeland.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Pedersen, Ms. Eltahir Mudawi and Ms. Aveline for their informative briefings.

It is clear, from the Special Envoy's remarks, that the last month has seen significant developments in Syria, so now is the time to redouble our efforts for an inclusive and accountable end to the conflict, so that

Syrians enjoy peace, Syria no longer exports instability to the region and refugees can return in safety and with dignity. Resolution 2254 (2015) provides the framework to deliver sustainable and lasting peace for the people of Syria.

Last week, the United Nations and international community came together to focus on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.9327). That includes 15.1 million people in need because of the impact of 12 years of war, including 4.1 million people in the north-west of Syria who faced a crisis on top of a crisis when the devastating earthquake hit in February.

We welcome the extension of access across Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai earlier this month, and we applaud the United Nations efforts there, but last-minute agreements for short-term periods are not workable. As the Secretary-General has said and the Special Envoy reminded us today, humanitarians need to plan effectively with predictable access in order to deliver the indispensable, as Ms. Mudawi said, assistance to people who are, as she said, in life-and-death need.

So the extension of the Council's mandate for Bab Al-Hawa for at least 12 months, as all three of our briefers said today, is critical. But the people of Syria deserve more than that. They deserve answers on the whereabouts of loved ones who have been detained and/or are missing. As the Special Envoy said, that is a core issue that affects all Syrians on all sides of the conflict. And progress on that issue is essential for rebuilding trust with the Syrian people and putting in place the conditions needed for refugees to safely choose to go home. We also need effective action to stem the illegal captagon trade, to demonstrate that regional stability comes above the billion-dollar income the regime currently derives from it.

For a stable region, we need a sustainable end to this conflict. Resolution 2254 (2015) is the framework to deliver that lasting peace for the people of Syria. We call on the Syrian regime to engage meaningfully in that process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement on the political situation in Syria in my capacity as the representative of Switzerland.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, I endorse what our Brazilian colleague said on behalf of our two countries. I would like to thank Ms. Aveline and

Ms. Mudawi for their briefings. I also thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing.

Switzerland is following with interest the current regional dynamics in relation to Syria. We welcome the willingness expressed at the meeting of the League of Arab States on 7 May in Cairo to work together to implement Security Council resolutions. We welcome the fact that the States parties to the League's ministerial committee, which was established on that occasion, wish to support the step-by-step approach, with a view to a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). That demonstrates once again the relevance of that resolution to achieving a political solution to the conflict that ensures peace and security for Syria and the region.

In that regard, coherence among the various international efforts under the aegis of the United Nations is essential. Switzerland calls on the countries of the region to intensify the coordination of their efforts with those of the Special Envoy. We remain at their disposal to support those efforts and to facilitate all types of talks and initiatives aimed at promoting a lasting peace under the aegis of the United Nations, notably through the Geneva platform. In that respect, we welcome the determination expressed in the Amman communiqué of 1 May to work "on the resumption of the activities of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible".

The same communiqué also refers to the need to resolve the issue of detainees and missing persons. Resolution 2254 (2015) and the Special Envoy explicitly stress the importance of that as a confidence-building measure in the peace process. Switzerland calls on the parties to put an end to the practices of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance and to allow specialized humanitarian organizations access to all places of detention in Syria. Enabling the many families concerned to get answers about the fate of detainees and missing persons is necessary to restore confidence within society and open the door to a lasting political solution.

Last week's open debate (see S/PV.9327) clearly attested to the need to protect civilian populations suffering the consequences of armed conflict, including children. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, civilians have been the first victims of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. In the

face of those violations, Switzerland reiterates its full support for the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, whose work is indispensable in combating impunity and preventing further violations.

The concerted pursuit of a credible political process, anchored in resolution 2254 (2015), is capable of restoring hope to Syrian society as a whole, in particular women and the younger generation. After more than 12 years of armed conflict, they deserve to live in peace and security.

Beyond its commitment to protecting Syrian women and men from armed violence and arbitrary restrictions on their fundamental rights, Switzerland will continue to support their aspirations to participate fully, equally and inclusively in the decisions that shape their future.

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*): The League of Arab States summit, which was recently held in the city of Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was a great achievement, as it restored the glory of the collective Arab position and the momentum of joint Arab action. Most importantly, the Arab States affirmed their support for Syria in maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity and in overcoming the difficult circumstances it is experiencing as a result of the terrorist war it faces, the unjust economic sanctions imposed on it and the repercussions of the devastating earthquake that struck the country.

In another context and within the framework of the Syrian Government's endeavour to restore its sovereignty over its entire territory and to put an end to the illegal military presence of foreign forces on Syrian territory, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates participated in the quartet meeting held in Moscow on 10 May, which brought together the Foreign Ministers of Syria, Russia, Iran and Türkiye. The statement issued by the Quartet at its meeting affirmed its commitment to Syria's sovereignty and territorial

integrity and the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It also called for an increase in international assistance to Syria for the reconstruction of the country and to facilitate the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians to their homeland.

In contrast to those positive trends, the United States of America and its Western allies continued their hostile statements and provocative measures against Syria, aimed at interfering in its internal affairs. They continued their concerted efforts to obstruct any attempt at achieving security and stability in Syria. They have also used terrorist elements to achieve that goal. The statements made by those States in today's meeting and in previous meetings are a clear demonstration of the above. We did not hear today the opinion of the representative of the United States of America on her country's continued violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as American forces are still illegally present on Syrian territory. Moreover, they continue to support separatist militias in north-eastern Syria and plunder Syrian oil and wealth. The latest of such acts was the smuggling of 42 tanks loaded with hundreds of tons of Syrian oil from fields in the Jazira Region through illegal crossings, heading towards United States military bases on Iraqi territory.

The American crocodile tears on Syrian suffering will not erase the fact that the wrongful American policies in Syria are the reason for that suffering, which is the result of its harsh, immoral and illegal sanctions against the Syrian people. The United States talks about the huge number of Syrian refugees and displaced, as if it were not the cause for such displacement and for the masses of refugees. The United States has actually exported terrorist elements into Syria in order to undermine its security and stability. American forces have also committed war crimes in Raqqa, which led to the loss of thousands of Syrian lives and the destruction of infrastructure.

The United States of America resorts here to lecture about respect for the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law in an attempt to deceive and conceal its own violations of the Charter and the resolutions of the Security Council and all rules and provisions of international humanitarian law.

At the same time, Israel and its extremist authorities continues to export its internal crises through inflaming the situation in our region and to commit more acts of aggression and perpetrate crimes and

gross violations of international law and the provisions of the United Nations Charter. Once again, on 1 May, the Israeli occupation forces carried out an air strike against Aleppo International Airport. Bombs of great destructive capacity were used, causing a number of martyrs and injured persons, and rendering the airport unusable. As a result, the United Nations was unable to use the airport to provide humanitarian services.

Just two days ago, Israel launched yet another air strike from the occupied Syrian Golan, targeting certain points in the surroundings of Damascus, which led to material losses. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms all those crimes and illegal practices. We call on the Security Council to break its deafening silence and fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter to put an end to all these aggressive policies, hold the perpetrators accountable and compel them to compensate the Syrian people.

Turning to the humanitarian issue, the Syrian Government continues its efforts to improve the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people and to face the effects of the unprecedented earthquake disaster that struck Syria on 6 February and the tragedy it left behind at the national level. Accordingly, the President of the Republic issued decree no. 7 on the first of this month, establishing a national fund to support those affected by the earthquake. The fund seeks to provide them with financial support and help them overcome the ensuing physical, material or moral harm. This decree represents a major pillar for the basic trends and the national action plan that were approved by the Syrian Government late last month to address the impact of the earthquake from various aspects. That would lead to moving our efforts from the emergency response phase of relief work to the recovery phase.

In the context of the Syrian Government's efforts to facilitate the arrival of humanitarian aid to those in need throughout Syria, especially in north-western Syria, and aware of the continuing need to meet the emergency needs resulting from the devastating earthquake and to continue working to recover from its impact on various sectors, the Syrian Government decided to extend its voluntary initiative to grant the United Nations permission to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months, ending on 13 August, in order to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Syrian civilians in need in those areas.

The Syrian Government also confirmed that it will continue to issue visas, facilitate field visits and provide the necessary facilities to the United Nations and partners in humanitarian and development work. In that context, Syria stresses the following points.

First, the United Nations, its representatives and staff must not communicate with terrorist organizations and affiliated illegal entities in north-western Syria. We call for allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to supervise the distribution of humanitarian aid in those areas.

Second, we stress our aspiration for international donors to assume their responsibilities and fulfil their pledges by providing the required funding for United Nations activities and programmes. That will enable the implementation of projects included in the humanitarian response plan and the strategic framework for cooperation between Syria and the United Nations, in turn revitalizing the economy, supporting the dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons to their homeland and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, Syria condemns all Western calls for refugees not to return to their homeland and homes under false pretexts.

Thirdly, there is a need for an immediate, full and unconditional lifting of the illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people. Those measures are immoral, contrary to international humanitarian law and a major impediment to humanitarian and development work. Syria also stresses that the alleged exemptions announced by the United States of America and the European Union from those measures are nothing but cheap propaganda. They did not achieve any tangible results. Instead, some in the Council are proud of imposing additional sanctions and declare publicly that they will not back down from them.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic affirms that it will not normalize its relations with those who occupy its lands, and that the political solution that we seek requires the elimination of terrorism and an end to interference in its internal affairs and to the destructive initiatives of some well-known States, including their attempts to institute additional international politicized, biased mechanisms aimed at obstructing that solution and to restore colonial legacies that are irretrievably gone. We stress that reviving our country's economy, which will be crucial to improving the Syrian people's humanitarian and living situations, requires lifting the

unjust sanctions and the suffocating siege imposed on Syria by the United States and the European Union. There is also a need to support the Syrian State and its institutions in its relief and development efforts in order to achieve early recovery and ensure the rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and civilian facilities.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that the interpretation from Arabic into English was not accurate regarding the extension of the use of the two crossing points for a period of three months, which ends on 13 August, not in February, as the interpreter said.

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

Ms. Ershadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank the briefers for their updates and informative briefings.

As those briefings highlighted, despite the diligent efforts of the United Nations, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to present challenges. The current level of funding allocated for the Syrian humanitarian response has fallen far below what is needed. The severe shortfall severely hinders the ability of the United Nations to provide adequate assistance to those in need. Furthermore, the persistent imposition of unilateral sanctions remains a significant impediment to improving Syria's humanitarian and economic situation. Those unlawful measures have further exacerbated the challenges faced by the Syrian people, severely hampered the Government's capacity to deliver critical services to those in need and even delayed the return of refugees and internally displaced people.

A comprehensive approach is crucial to effectively addressing the humanitarian and economic crisis in Syria. It should encompass several key elements, including security, sufficient funding, ensuring the impartial distribution of aid and removing counterproductive sanctions. That will not only save lives but can also lay a foundation for the restoration of infrastructure, the rebuilding of communities and the revitalization of the economy. In addition, prioritizing early-recovery projects that address the immediate needs of all Syrians affected by the ongoing crisis is essential. The projects should aim to provide comprehensive support and assistance to those affected, facilitating their path towards recovery and resilience. At the same time, substantial efforts should

be directed at enhancing the delivery of humanitarian aid across all regions of Syria. That includes a specific focus on improving cross-line aid delivery, as outlined in resolution 2772 (2016).

We want to express our appreciation to the Government of Syria for its unwavering commitment to supporting the United Nations and other international organizations in facilitating the delivery of relief and support to the crisis-affected areas. We particularly commend the Government of Syria for its decision to extend its permission to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months until 13 August, which is enabling the crucial delivery of humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians in need, particularly in northwestern Syria.

Terrorism remains a significant threat to Syria and the wider region, and it must be addressed decisively. We are concerned about terrorist activities in the areas under occupation. The illegal presence of military forces in Syria is the primary source of insecurity in the country and must end if we are to create an environment conducive to resolving the crisis. The fight against terrorism must be carried out in full respect for Syria's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and must not be used as a pretext to violate those fundamental principles of international law.

Turning to the political track, we continue to extend our support to the Special Envoy's sincere efforts and commend his active engagement with all the parties involved in resolving the Syrian crisis. We welcomed his visit to Tehran on 15 May, during which he held discussions on the ongoing humanitarian and political situation in Syria with Iran's Foreign Minister and other relevant Iranian authorities. Iran stands firmly behind a speedy resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings, and we are committed to supporting that process. Moreover, Iran, in collaboration with Russia and Türkiye, its partners in the Astana format, remains firmly committed to working for long-term and sustainable normalization in Syria. In that context, we fully endorse and support a continuation of the Syrian-Turkish dialogue, recognizing it as a crucial component of such broader efforts. It is noteworthy that on 10 May, the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Iran, Syria and Türkiye convened in Moscow to engage in discussions regarding the re-establishment of inter-State relations between Syria and Türkiye. The talks comprehensively addressed various aspects, with a firm emphasis on

upholding Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the need to fight terrorism. We would also like to highlight the two-day official visit by Iran's President to Syria, the first visit there by an Iranian President in more than 13 years. During the visit, the two Presidents signed a comprehensive agreement in Damascus on long-term and strategic cooperation between our two countries.

We are pleased to note the recent positive developments in Syria's diplomatic relations, both within the region and internationally. The return of Syria to the League of Arab States and the resumption of relations with our brother Arab countries are significant strides in the efforts to help Syria's security, stability and prosperity. Those constructive approaches reaffirm the effectiveness and legitimacy of Iran's policy and those of its allies in the region in defending the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as backing the legal Government of Syria during the country's 12 years of crisis. We hope that Western countries will soon reassess and rectify their policies towards Syria, which will contribute to the restoration of stability, peace and prosperity in the region.

The international community's failure to address the Israeli regime's ongoing acts of aggression and terrorist attacks on Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity is deeply concerning. Those reprehensible acts, like the terrorist attacks on 28 May targeting Damascus and its surrounding areas, which were deliberately aimed at civilian infrastructure, are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and a grave threat to regional peace and stability. We strongly condemn those heinous crimes and emphasize the urgent need for swift and decisive action to hold that lawless regime accountable.

Lastly, in her statement the representative of France made an unjustified reference to my country and a groundless claim against it that we categorically reject. We expect France, as a permanent member of the Security Council, to behave more responsibly and refrain from labelling other Member States without evidence.

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

Mrs. Özgür (Türkiye): As we heard from Deputy Director Mudawi, three months after the devastating earthquakes the humanitarian situation in

Syria continues to be a source of deep concern. The international community has been responding to the worsening needs, mostly through the United Nations cross-border assistance. We welcome the extension of the two additional border crossings, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, for another three months. That is a step in the right direction in broadening the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid.

In six weeks' time, the Council will take a decision on the renewal of resolution 2672 (2023). As an immediate neighbour to Syria and the main partner of the United Nations on cross-border mechanism, we believe that, under the current circumstances, the Security Council's reauthorization is essential so that this lifeline — the only viable method — can continue to deliver humanitarian assistance at the scale and on the scope needed.

We also have a responsibility to provide predictability to humanitarian actors to ensure that humanitarian funds and other resources can be used in the most rational and efficient way. That requires a longer-term perspective, planning and humanitarian programming, rather than the three- to six-month periods that humanitarians have had to operate on recently. Hence, we call on the Security Council to renew the United Nations cross-border mandate for at least 12 months, with multiple border crossings.

We welcome the fact that the United Nations flash appeal for Syria following the earthquake has been fully funded, as it was instrumental in supporting post-disaster humanitarian efforts. However, recent reports by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on critical funding gaps, including in the Syria humanitarian response plan, outline the alarming situation we may be faced with in upcoming months. Therefore, it is time to carefully consider how to improve the financing of vital humanitarian needs on a sustainable footing.

While we continue to provide uninterrupted humanitarian assistance without losing pace, we also need to focus on how to gradually reduce dependency on humanitarian aid. That is why the early-recovery activities carried out in line with resolution 2672 (2023) are significant. A longer-term Council renewal of the resolution in July will also ensure the continuation of early-recovery projects, which require more time to implement and achieve results. In order to complement those humanitarian efforts, we also continue to

encourage all parties to facilitate regular cross-line missions.

Türkiye is among the countries most affected by the 12 years of conflict in Syria. We have felt its various repercussions in security, economic and social aspects. With a view to ensuring stability and security in Syria, we have spearheaded numerous initiatives since the beginning of the conflict and continue our efforts today with the same understanding. As per resolution 2254 (2015), achieving political stability, eliminating the threat of terrorism emanating from Syria and maintaining the territorial integrity and political unity of that neighbouring country, as well as preparing the ground for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians, in coordination with the United Nations, remain top priorities for Türkiye.

Through the quadrilateral engagement process that we launched in that understanding, meetings were held between our Foreign and Defence Ministers, and it was agreed to prepare a road map under the coordination of our Deputy Foreign Ministers. Those contacts will continue in the period ahead. We are carrying out the process without preconditions and in good faith. It is

not possible to resolve all issues in an instant, as it will need to be a long and phased process. Nevertheless, the sides having found common ground in the fight against terrorism has laid foundations that can be built upon.

We advocate for the settlement of the Syrian conflict through a political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the legitimate rights and demands of the Syrian people. We believe that, if political stability is achieved, it can pave the way for the resolution of other interrelated issues. With that thought in mind, we continue our efforts towards breaking the political impasse and convening the Constitutional Committee. We support the ongoing efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen towards that objective.

Before I conclude, let me underscore that the recent engagement process does not in any way whatsoever mean a change in Türkiye's determination to eliminate terrorism from its borders. The terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units and its offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, pose a major threat to both Türkiye and Syria and have no place in the future of the region.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.