



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9363rd meeting

Thursday, 29 June 2023, 10.05 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. Moretti
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Diaba
Ghana	Mr. Issahaku
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2023/419)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), 2642 (2022) and 2672 (2023) (S/2023/464)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0601 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2023/419)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), 2642 (2022) and 2672 (2023) (S/2023/464)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): 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: Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/419, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic; and document S/2023/464, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), 2642 (2022) and 2672 (2023).

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

I give the floor to Ms. Rochdi.

Ms. Rochdi: The violence and suffering experienced by the Syrian people in the past month have reminded us all of what is at stake as diplomatic efforts continue on Syria. Syrians still face acute and internationalized conflict. In recent days, we have seen multiple rounds of pro-Government airstrikes in the north-west. We have received deeply worrisome reports of a strike

on a market in north-west Syria, reportedly killing and wounding civilians. Russia states that strikes were carried out on command posts of illegal armed formations, liquidating militants and arms depots in the Idlib de-escalation zone. We have also seen multiple drone strikes into Government-controlled areas from areas controlled by the listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, reportedly also killing and wounding civilians. Meanwhile, regular mortar, rocket and artillery exchanges have continued across the front lines.

We have also seen reports of many other concerning incidents, including Turkish drone and artillery strikes on positions of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Government of Syria, as well civilian infrastructure; the shelling of Turkish positions by the Syrian Democratic Forces; Israeli air strikes; security incidents in southern and central Syria; and the ongoing attacks by listed terrorist groups. In recent days, Special Envoy Pedersen raised with key actors in the ceasefire task force the need for a restored and sustained calm. Ultimately, we need a nationwide ceasefire in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Syrians face an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis. As I stressed to the humanitarian task force this week in Geneva, Syrians' needs must be at the centre of our approach, and humanitarian action must be depoliticized — and that means that sufficient resources are needed. We are grateful for the solidarity shown and the generous pledges made at the Brussels Conference to support operations in all areas of Syria, and we need swift disbursements too. That also means ensuring access via all modalities, including cross-line and cross-border. We welcome the recent cross-line convoy into north-west Syria. As we approach the expiration of the Council's cross-border resolution, let me underline the words of the Secretary-General, who has repeatedly called for a 12-month extension, as well as the need for assistance to be provided across all pillars of the humanitarian response plan, including by enhancing early recovery. That also means that sanctioning States should continue to build on the moves they made in response to the earthquakes and step-up efforts to counter over-compliance.

Let me note that more children than in the past crossed combat lines to take exams this past month, a welcome development signalling that all sides have it within themselves to depoliticize access to aid and services when they want to.

Syrians still face an acute economic crisis. The Syrian pound stabilized for a short period in June. But ordinary Syrians continue to grapple with rising

inflation and energy and fuel shortages. Syrians from all quarters and all backgrounds are affected, fuelling rising needs across the country.

The tragedy of the detained, the disappeared and the missing continues. Their families, particularly women and girls, are deeply affected. Many are looking to the General Assembly's vote today on draft resolution A/77/L.79 with the hope that a new entity dedicated to the issue of missing persons in Syria could bring some measure of relief to families across Syria and outside of it who have been demanding their right to know the truth. Nevertheless, let us also remember that thousands remain subject to arbitrary detention and at risk every single day. We continue to call for releases, unilaterally and at scale, without delay. My colleagues who participated in the latest meeting of the Astana Working Group on the Release of Detainees/Abductees, Handover of Bodies and Identification of Missing Persons appealed to those Member States with influence to press for action on that issue, at a scale commensurate with the problem. And we will continue to raise that issue directly in our dealings with the Government of Syria and all the relevant parties.

Let us also not forget the millions of Syrians living in displacement, both inside Syria and abroad. They have still seen no concrete shift in conditions that could see them return voluntarily and in safety and dignity. Many Syrians were among those who tragically drowned recently when an overcrowded boat sank in the Mediterranean Sea — a tragic reminder for all of us of what hopelessness can bring.

All those factors show us why it is so important for renewed diplomacy to translate into real solutions to meet the immediate concerns of the Syrian people, build some trust and confidence among the parties and move forward towards a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We have carried that message to everyone this month. Special Envoy Pedersen has engaged in Geneva with the Syrian Negotiations Commission; in Paris, with senior United States, United Kingdom and European officials; in Brussels, with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and senior European officials; and with the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt and high-level officials of Italy.

The Special Envoy looks forward to continuing the close cooperation with the Contact Group of the League of Arab States. He travelled to Moscow, where he met Russia's Foreign Minister and other senior officials.

He attended the high-level meetings in Astana, where he met with the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Iran, Russia, Türkiye and the delegations of the Government of Syria and the Syrian opposition. Iran, Russia, the Government of Syria and Türkiye held a quadrilateral meeting in Astana.

From those engagements, it is clear that moving from intention to action requires genuine engagement, flexibility and commitments from more than just one group of actors. Even modest steps to improve the lives of Syrians and move forward on the political track will require action from many different sides, each of whom has easy means to spoil if excluded. That is why the Special Envoy has welcomed the enhanced attention to Syria and seeks to maximize the coherence, coordination and complementarity of the diplomatic efforts that are under way, as well as to directly engage the Syrian parties and all key players as the facilitator of the political process.

In that regard, the Special Envoy continues his efforts to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. We must overcome the issues that prevent the Committee from convening and see that it resumes its work and develops some substance, and at pace. We continue to appreciate creative ideas for overcoming the obstacles and remain engaged with all the relevant parties to reconvene the Constitutional Committee in Geneva.

On confidence-building, the question of Syrian refugees and the internally displaced is another issue of common concern. Our message remains very clear: the principle of safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns must be upheld. The way forward is for the relevant parties to take concrete steps on the protection and livelihood issues that refugees themselves say inhibit them from returning — actions that could also bring us towards a safer, calmer and more neutral environment. That is something that Special Envoy Pedersen is continuing to look at with key players and coordinate closely with other senior United Nations officials.

As the diplomatic efforts intensify, it is ever-more important to hear the voices of the Syrians themselves. It was therefore welcome to hear representatives of the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, in Brussels, deliver a clear message coordinated by a wide range of Syrians from inside and outside: that Syrians want a political solution that preserves the unity and stability of Syria and aims to rebuild social cohesion in a way that would respond to the aspirations of the Syrian people — all of the Syrian people.

Last week in Beirut, we heard a similar message from an ad hoc consultative group of Civil Society Support Room members, who discussed concrete ways to harness the recent regional dynamics in support of Syrians themselves and the political process of resolution 2254 (2015), which they need to see move urgently.

This month the Women's Advisory Board convened in Geneva and Brussels. It is essential to consult with women because the conflict affects them in specific ways, and they must play an active role in shaping a political solution. It is also extremely useful to consult with those women, who provided sharp insights and advice on political opportunities and also on potential pitfalls, such as the need to address protection concerns in any efforts emanating from regional re-engagement.

As the Special Envoy noted, we will only be able to say that the current opportunity has been seized when we see confidence-building on the ground and a genuine political process being resumed. We still cannot say that the opportunity has been seized. Diplomatic moves have yet to produce concrete results. But the opportunity is still there all the same. The Special Envoy continues to probe and test possibilities for diplomatic traction on all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), including via step-for-step confidence-building measures and a resumption of the Constitutional Committee. In the coming weeks, we hope that we can continue to zone in with greater clarity and specificity on how to build confidence, resume the intra-Syrian political process and implement resolution 2254 (2015). We look forward to continuing our engagement with the Syrian parties and the Arab, Astana and Western players on those issues in order to promote coordination and move towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political resolution that restores Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and meets the legitimate aspirations of all the Syrian people.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank you, Madam President, for inviting me. I returned from Damascus yesterday with a greater sense of the profound humanitarian challenges about which Ms. Rochdi just spoke, but also of the urgent opportunities facing Syria. The mission was my third since the February earthquakes devastated the region. I travelled to Syria to resume discussions with

President Al-Assad and Foreign Minister Mekdad. It was also a very important opportunity to hear about the challenges and opportunities first-hand from the United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) leadership, international and national, in Damascus. In Jordan, I was fortunate enough to have the chance to exchange views with Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi about regional dynamics connected to Syria. The various discussions left me with several lasting impressions.

First, the people of Syria are suffering more today than we can truly appreciate. We have said so often in the Chamber that each year their suffering continues to increase. Today families across the country want to celebrate the holy day of Eid Al-Adha, and yet they are doing so with less food on their plates, little fuel in their stoves and less water in their homes. Households have to pool income from every possible source just to cover basic expenses and often do not succeed. Twelve years of conflict, the economic collapse associated with it and other factors have pushed 90 per cent of the population below the poverty line. There is even some speculation that the number is now higher. I am therefore sorry to say that millions of people across Syria — and they will be listening to this statement — will find little respite during one of the holiest times of the year.

That hardship comes at a time when the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have very limited means to help the vulnerable people of Syria. This year's humanitarian response plan — the largest in the world, incidentally, at \$5.4 billion for humanitarian aid inside Syria — is less than 12 per cent funded, halfway through the year. It has never been quite so ill-funded in the history of the conflict. As we were briefed about last month (see S/PV.9333) and as I heard again in Damascus from the World Food Programme, a \$200 million deficit will force it to slash its emergency food aid by 40 per cent, almost half, in other words. Operations outside that particular plan are also challenged. I heard from the representative of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East that the Agency now has funds for only 18 per cent of its annual budget. It has never had such a bad year. Its operations for Palestinian refugees, the famous Yarmouk camp, for example, may grind to a halt in August if the situation does not change.

Of course, we appreciate the considerable donor support and pledges made earlier this month at the seventh Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future

of Syria and the Region. As High Commissioner Grandi, Administrator Steiner and my representative noted, every contribution helps significantly to alleviate suffering and bring some measure of hope. What we are looking to do is to turn those pledges into money in the bank as soon as possible, given the exceptional adversity of the funding situation for humanitarian operations in all parts of Syria.

After more than 12 years of crisis, there is also the issue of early recovery, which we have much debated and will continue to. I had lengthy talks about that in Damascus. Early-recovery needs pose a defining challenge to the humanitarian response across Syria. That is not to diminish the many other pressing humanitarian issues in Syria, and indeed, as Ms. Rochdi just reminded us, they are legion and include protection risks for women and girls and other vulnerable groups. But it is clear to all of us, I imagine, that further expanding early-recovery activities is the humanitarian community's best chance to give support to the future of the Syrian people.

Any move towards a more sustainable response will require a different approach, and crucially one with longer timelines and fewer red lines from donors, and I heard examples of that in my discussions with representatives of the United Nations and international and national NGOs in Damascus. Young people can receive vocational training but must also be mentored to turn those capacities into livelihoods. I heard about irrigation systems that can be constructed for communities of farmers without qualifying as development, which is of course taboo. A very vivid example for me was that the distinctions between "rehabilitated" and "reconstructed" schools should be relaxed to provide students with safe places to learn. At the moment, we can rehabilitate the inside of a building, but we cannot rehabilitate the building as a whole in order to restore it to its former purpose as a school for primary and secondary education. We also still need a stronger international consensus on this issue, although it has been building considerably, and your own country, Madam President, has been very much at the fore with regard to the importance of early-recovery programmes in Syria. In the coming weeks, I look forward to coming up with ideas on how to forge new partnerships and perhaps access new sources of funding on early recovery for Syria, and to discussions, particularly with the region.

As Ms. Rochdi said, in the weeks prior to my arrival in Syria, we witnessed a marked increase in violence in the north-west, particularly in Latakia and Idlib. It is with great sadness that we learned of the deaths of at least 11 people, including nine individuals who lost their lives in a bombing near a market in north-western Syria. Many more have been injured in recent days following an uptick in hostilities, reminding us that the war continues. I offer my deepest condolences, through the Council, to all the families affected by the recent violence.

As we know, the Council's cross-border resolution will expire in 11 days, on 10 July. And as we heard, the Secretary-General has been very clear about his views on the need to see it renewed to cover 12 months and to include all and any cross-border points in order to facilitate humanitarian assistance to the north-west. His conclusion, of course, is a carefully considered one. It reflects the latest assessments about the humanitarian situation on the ground. Since the earthquake, we have been very pleased to be able to deploy United Nations staff to north-west Syria, which is extraordinarily useful. Those daily assessments point to growing needs and deepening hardship. Food prices in that area exceed the national average, which is already high. The highest concentrations of displaced families are along the Syrian-Turkish border. Cholera, which we often refer to in the Council, continues to spread. In my view, a 12-month authorization reflects a pragmatic outlook on the current operations, and it is particularly relevant to the need of programming early recovery and leveraging early-recovery funds from donors.

On a monthly basis in the north-west, the United Nations and its partners reach approximately 2.7 million of the most vulnerable men, women and children with essential and life-saving assistance. Most of those supplies go through the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, authorized by the Security Council. Prior to my arrival, as Ms. Rochdi mentioned earlier, several weeks of effort culminated in a 10-truck convoy from Aleppo safely reaching Idlib, with assistance for 22,000 people. We all know that such efforts to increase that cross-line assistance must continue and are essential. The Council can certainly depend on our commitment to that end. The cross-line convoy represents an important moment, but it is also a reminder that it cannot replace the cross-border volume needed, as we regularly remind the Council. We will therefore need to continue with more time, effort and daily contacts in order to enable cross-line assistance to comprise an increasingly larger portion of humanitarian assistance in north-west Syria.

A 12-month authorization will enable us and our partners to deliver better humanitarian outcomes in the months ahead. It is as simple as that. Operational planning, staff recruitment and fundraising can be undertaken in a more deliberate fashion. An authorization for another year, until next July, will ensure aid flows in the desperate winter season, which will present a risk for a shorter period. As I have mentioned — and I think that this is the most important point that I want to emphasize — it is conducive for early-recovery programmes, which do not function on six-month cycles, and barely do so for 12 months. We need to look farther ahead. And the Syrian people, who have had greater needs every year, depend at least on that kind of assurance.

We have seen a range of donors, including your country, Madam President, fully fund — an unusual and excellent moment for humanitarian funding globally — the almost \$400 million flash appeal in response to the earthquake. Member States have also bilaterally dispatched many trucks, boats and planes full of assistance, of which I heard more details when I was in Damascus the other day. We recall that President Al-Assad granted the United Nations access to two additional border crossings, among other emergency measures, which have renewed until August. I have no reason to believe that they will not be further renewed.

I think that the Council sees our views on where we want the draft resolution to go, and they exactly reflect the Secretary-General's statements to that effect. As Ms. Rochdi has reminded us, the humanitarian response in Syria is at a critical juncture, as is the future of Syria itself. On our side, considerable challenges are apparent, but, frankly, so are the many important opportunities. We can leverage more early-recovery funding on a reliable and dependable basis, continue to be present in north-west and north-east Syria, ensure that our aid there is not dependent on fluctuations within a shorter period of time and turn our attention to sectors in Syrian that, as I was reminded of in Damascus, have such a central role in determining basic needs, for example electricity and water — we can, must and should address those issues — only if we make our presence one of partnership and support for the people who have suffered these many years.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings on, and assessments of, the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

We are convinced that there is no alternative to advancing the Syrian-led and Syrian-implemented political settlement process in Syria with the assistance of the United Nations, in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015) in respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. That stance and our consistent position in support of the Special Envoy's mediation efforts were reaffirmed in consultations with Mr. Pedersen in Moscow on 9 June. At the same time, we believe that it is important that he adhere strictly to the mandate set out in the relevant Security Council resolution, which is centred upon promoting inter-Syrian negotiations, including within the framework of the Constitutional Committee, which is the optimal format for direct inter-Syrian dialogue. We continue to believe that the core decisions on the parameters and venues for future rounds of inter-Syrian consultations should be made by the Syrians themselves, without external interference.

We note with satisfaction the outcome of the twentieth international meeting on Syria, held in Astana on 20 and 21 June with our partners — Iran and Türkiye — within the framework of the Astana process. At the meeting, the leading role of the Astana format in promoting a sustainable and long-term solution to the Syrian crisis was once again underscored. In addition, productive quadrilateral consultations were held in Astana among the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Russia, Iran, Syria and Türkiye on the preparation of a road map for restoring relations between Syria and Türkiye.

The normalization of Damascus' relations with Arab countries, including Syria's long-awaited readmission to the League of Arab States (LAS), has become the focus of international attention. We believe that Syria's renewed participation in the work of the LAS, of which it is a founding member, will help improve the environment in the Middle East and to overcome the consequences of the Syrian crisis and the catastrophic earthquake of 6 February, as soon as possible. In that regard, we hope that Arab countries will increase their support for the Syrian Arab Republic in rebuilding its infrastructure, with a focus on the

humanitarian, commercial and economic areas. Such work is complicated by the illegitimate unilateral sanctions imposed by Western countries on Damascus. As they have been unable to stave off Syria's return to the Arab family, our American and European colleagues are trying to negotiate unilateral political concessions with Damascus, while they continue to subscribe to anti-Damascus sentiments. We have heard about the plans to adopt an anti-normalization act, which indicates the United States unwillingness to abandon its neocolonial approaches and policy of punishing the Syrian people and leadership in their pursuit of implementing their own independent policy. To that end, they have wheeled out practical tools like the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, the illegal military presence in the trans-Euphrates and Al-Tanf regions and the plundering of Syrian natural resources, including oil and grain. Lofty statements by Washington and Brussels about easing sanctions and the generosity of Western donors, including in the aftermath of the earthquake, have never been translated into actions.

Against that background, the situation on the ground remains tense. The destabilizing factors remain the same — the illegal foreign presence in the north, the north-east and the south of the country, the persistent hotbeds of terrorism, primarily in Idlib, and regular and arbitrary Israeli air strikes on Syrian territory. Such actions, which violate the sovereignty of Syria and neighbouring Arab countries, as well as the lack of an appropriate response by the United Nations leadership, are deeply regrettable and warrant condemnation. For our part, we continue to work side by side with the Syrian Arab Army to combat the terrorists entrenched in Idlib. On 25 June, the Syrian Arab Armed Forces, together with the Russian Aerospace Defence Forces, destroyed the command post of the Al-Fatah Al-Mubin terrorist alliance operating in that governorate under the umbrella of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, weapons and ammunition depots and sites used for equipping unmanned aerial vehicles with explosives and launching them. More than 30 militants were neutralized, including several jihadist leaders.

In the context of the humanitarian problems in Syria, we note the lack of progress in the implementation of resolution 2672 (2023) on the cross-border aid mechanism. Even the devastating earthquake in February has not changed the state of affairs. We are particularly concerned about the dispiriting situation with regard to the financing of United Nations operations in the country. The donors' attention is focused solely on the

areas in the north-west that are not under Damascus's control. The emergency humanitarian appeal through which the United Nations requested \$397 million to assist the areas affected by the earthquake was fully funded in its first few months, which cannot be said for the 2023 humanitarian response plan for Syria, with only 12 per cent of the \$5.4 billion required raised by the middle of the year. With the severe shortfall in its funding, the World Food Programme will be forced to cut its coverage of those in need by 40 per cent as early as next month.

Attempts are being made to convince us that the cross-border mechanism should be extended for 12 months to enable it to plan its operations better, but permit me to ask with what means will the United Nations be planning those operations? Because the appeals we have been hearing today are sheer hypocrisy. There should be no question of any talk in this situation about early-recovery projects. Against that backdrop, the generosity of Western donors regarding the crisis in Ukraine that they themselves provoked is simply duplicitous. As soon as the issue is about Syria, Yemen or countries in Africa, our Western colleagues either have no money or allocate it extremely reluctantly and in small portions.

However, the United States and its allies have already spent as much on arms for Ukraine as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has requested for humanitarian assistance in 2023 to all in need worldwide, approximately \$55 billion, of which, incidentally, OCHA has so far received only 20 per cent. Imagine how many people in the world could be helped if the Western donors truly wanted to. But no, for them it is more important to spend money on weapons, as a result of which they enrich their own arms companies. According to data from Ukraine's national bank, the total amount of financial, military and humanitarian aid it received exceeded \$120 billion in 2022 alone. That tells us what Western priorities are.

In that difficult and not very encouraging context, we will soon have to decide once again on the future of the cross-border mechanism for humanitarian assistance in Syria. In anticipation of that, the hypocritical Western propaganda machine, with the rust scrubbed off it every six months by our former partners, has been fired up once again. We are once again being told that without the cross-border mechanism, millions of Syrians will starve and freeze and that we have no choice but to once again extend a scheme that violates Syria's sovereignty

and territorial integrity. They tell us that knowing full well that there is in fact an alternative, which is sending supplies across the contact line, as provided for in resolution 2762 (2023), among other such decisions. The reality is that that is simply no use to the internationally acknowledged terrorists in Idlib, who would then be deprived of an opportunity to plunder humanitarian aid and enrich themselves to the degree to which they can with the cross-border mechanism. That is why we have had only one very modest such convoy this year, clearly timed to coincide with our meeting today. After that, are we seriously expected to consider the cross-line convoy situation satisfactory?

In the past six months the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union have not even been eased, let alone lifted, and they continue to stifle the people we are called on to help by extending the cross-border mechanism. The subject of early-recovery projects in the territory under the control of the lawful Syrian authorities is not even worth discussing. Not only are they mere crumbs, but in practice the huge numbers of restrictions on their implementation often make the reconstruction of facilities impossible. It is all smoke and mirrors, an imitation of activity.

The notions circulated in the Council that abolishing the cross-border resolution would lead donors to withdraw their support for early-recovery efforts in Syria and claiming that it would deprive the United Nations of its mandate for early recovery are unconvincing. That support has barely been enough over the years to cover the basic urgent needs of Syrians, an overwhelming majority of whom live in territories under the control of Government forces. The cross-border mechanism in the current formula is inherently a zero-sum game that brings the Syrian people no benefit whatsoever. Instead, we are increasingly hearing from the United Nations about efforts to strengthen its position in the rebellious north-west independently of its interaction with the official authorities in Damascus.

Against that backdrop, our principled assessments of and approaches to the cross-border mechanism remain unchanged. The mechanism is only nominally humanitarian. In fact, it is increasingly being used to undermine Syria's sovereignty and deepen territorial divisions in the country, discriminate against Government-controlled territories and fuel illegal armed groups. And with that approach, the question naturally arises: for whose sake are we really going to

adopt a new resolution on the cross-border mechanism? Not for the Syrians, apparently, but rather for the terrorists who have taken refuge in Idlib. We believe it is time our Western colleagues changed their own hypocritical approach if we are truly looking to help the people of Syria and Syrian refugees. In that context, we call on the penholders on the Syrian humanitarian dossier working on the draft resolution to put the true interests of the long-suffering Syrian people living in the territories under the control of the internationally recognized Government of Syria first. They should refrain from getting sucked into the politicization of humanitarian issues and playing to give everything away with the United Nations and the terrorists in Idlib, who since February of this year have established a close and, as far as we can tell, mutually beneficial cooperation with the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Mr. David Carden, who incidentally is a British citizen.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

As the Under-Secretary-General underscored, the authorization for United Nations cross-border deliveries of humanitarian assistance through Bab Al-Hawa expires in just 11 days. Last month in this Chamber (see S/PV.9333), Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield called on the Council to extend and expand that mandate for 12 months and to include the border crossings at Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai. That is the only way to ensure that the Syrian people receive the assistance they need. Since then, several important voices have endorsed the three crossings, notably the Foreign Ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Their statement on 8 June

“expressed support for including all currently open border crossing points — Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai — in a Security Council resolution to be passed this July”.

Their words carry weight. The Secretary-General's standalone report of 9 June (S/2023/419) makes it clear that the humanitarian needs in north-west Syria have never been greater and that any authorization short of 12 months would be inadequate. We heard the Under-Secretary-General reiterate that point just now. As the Secretary-General has stated, it remains a moral and humanitarian imperative. The report also underscores that early-recovery projects require more than six months to plan and implement. Recent reporting by the

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also highlights the fact that over the past 18 months, more than \$750 million has gone to early recovery across 14 governorates in Syria. That includes over \$112 million for early recovery in the past two months alone. Non-governmental organizations have also indicated that 90 per cent of the 4.5 million people in north-west Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance to survive.

We have supported all aspects of resolution 2672 (2023) and we welcomed last week's successful cross-line delivery to the north-west, as well as last month's successful cross-line mission to Tell Abyad, the first since 2019. We applaud the United Nations for its unrelenting advocacy with the parties on the ground. Even as we encourage further cross-line aid to all parts of Syria, it is obvious that cross-border aid remains essential. To be clear, the Al-Assad regime has chosen to make the Organization's access unpredictable, and the Syrian people are suffering the consequences. The regime also has not shown any indication that it intends to commit to an indefinite extension of United Nations access. That is why a Security Council resolution that includes a 12-month extension, including for all three crossings — Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai — is essential. The humanitarian community needs the predictability such a resolution would provide.

Donors, including the United States and other countries here today, have stepped up to meet needs. On 15 June, they pledged nearly \$10 billion at the seventh Brussels Conference. The United States announced an additional contribution of \$920 million, our largest ever. Last year, the international community pledged nearly \$7 billion. The year before, it was nearly \$6 billion. Given the needs, we encourage other countries to match their rhetorical support with financial contributions. Those funds have helped sustain the Syrian people, who have experienced more than a decade of insufficient food, inadequate shelter attacks on health and education facilities and diminished services as a direct result of Al-Assad's war on the Syrian people.

But donations alone are not enough. Beyond donor support, it is incumbent upon the Security Council to ensure that aid reaches those in need. The best and most cost-effective option to provide certainty and flexibility for humanitarian operations is a 12-month extension, including all three crossings — Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai.

The Al-Assad regime remains a major obstacle to the humanitarian response, undermining the cross-border mechanism and preventing cross-line deliveries to Rukban. The regime and its Russian backers have also continued to strike hospitals and other civilian sites, including attacks just last week that injured displaced civilians in Idlib. Russia's role in the recent upswing in violent attacks in Idlib is a grim reminder of its long history of brutality against the Syrian people throughout this 12-year conflict.

We are concerned by the recent violence in north-west and north-east Syria. We condemn any attacks targeting civilians and urge all parties to condemn attacks targeting civilians, in violation of international law. The Syrian people do not need more violence; they need more constructive dialogue. We note with frustration that the Constitutional Committee last met 13 months ago. We urge the regime to resume the Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva and participate in good faith.

Given the situation, conditions are still not in place for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugee and will not be until the Al-Assad regime ceases its killings, arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment of the Syrian people, including refugee returnees. We urge Russia and the League of Arab States to press the regime to contribute to the necessary conditions for returns by clarifying the status of 135,000 missing persons, waiving conscription requirements and addressing uncertainty around housing, land and property issues.

The only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people remains a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We encourage Syria's neighbours to push Al-Assad to meaningfully engage in the United Nations-facilitated process and to join us in supporting civil society in its pursuit of justice and accountability for human rights violations and abuses.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland): I wish Eid Mubarak to all those who have been celebrating.

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

Let me first thank Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings, and I thank the Secretary-General for his reports (S/2023/419 and S/2023/464).

As we just heard from Mr. Griffiths, the humanitarian situation in Syria is worse than ever before in its 12-year history of conflict. The earthquakes in February compounded the already dire circumstances, and 70 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian aid and protection in every district in Syria — for the first time.

Amid the disheartening statistics presented by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), we are confronted with the stark situation of children in Syria, who are disproportionately affected by the drivers of the crisis. According to UNICEF, the education system has been devastated by the conflict, with over 7,000 damaged or destroyed schools. The earthquakes further impaired educational facilities, limiting children's access to education. More than 2 million children are out of school, and another 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out.

The recruitment and use of children in this conflict is also an increasingly worrisome trend. We must do everything we can to stop this situation. It is crucial that the funding pledges made by donor countries at the Brussels Conference lead to an increased funding of the humanitarian response plan. For aid to reach those in need in the most direct and effective manner, all modalities, including cross-line and cross-border, need to be available for the humanitarian actors.

According to the Secretary-General's special report, the authorization by Syria for the United Nations to use Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai has allowed for more direct and efficient access to affected populations in northern Aleppo. It is important that this access remain available for as long as needed. We urge all parties to eliminate impediments to humanitarian deliveries across Syria and to allow and facilitate rapid, safe, sustainable and unhindered access to all civilians in need. We commend the Organization's constant efforts to enable cross-line deliveries, as well as the assistance that reached those in need through last week's convoy — the first since the earthquake. But much more is needed. As the Secretary-General indicates in his special report, cross-line operations remain essential, although they currently cannot replace the size or scope of the Organization's cross-border mechanism.

The members of the Security Council will soon be called on to decide on the continuation of the cross-border mechanism, which continues to be a crucial lifeline for millions of children, women and men in Syria — even more so after the earthquakes earlier this year. As co-penholders, Brazil and Switzerland are

guided solely by the objective of ensuring that assistance continues to reach all those in need. The Secretary-General, his Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA, the Special Envoy for Syria and all humanitarian actors operating on the ground keep underlining that the 12-month timeline is needed for ensuring rapid, safe, sustainable and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for all civilians in need. This timeline is also necessary in order to facilitate the further expansion of early-recovery activities. It is our shared responsibility to stand in solidarity with the people of Syria. We call on all Council members to work constructively over the coming days in order to live up to our collective responsibility to the Syrian people.

(spoke in French)

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

I thank Ms. Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria for her briefing on the recent exchanges of the Special Envoy with regional and international players, including the members of the Astana platform last week. Switzerland shares the conviction that only a political solution, within the parameters defined by resolution 2254 (2015), can put an end to the conflict in Syria.

We therefore welcome the support expressed for the implementation of this resolution, both in the Joint Statement of the Astana meeting on 21 June, as well as in recent statements by regional actors, including in the framework of the League of Arab States. We also join in the calls made by the same actors, and repeatedly by Council members, for the work of the Constitutional Committee to be relaunched. Switzerland remains ready to make Geneva, the main headquarters of the United Nations in Europe, available to host the Committee's meetings.

Among those initiatives, Switzerland supports the Civil Society Support Room within the Special Envoy's office in Geneva. The Support Room brings together Syrian civil society and helps guide United Nations efforts to promote intra-Syrian dialogue and trust between the parties. Those efforts for peace and dialogue cannot bear fruit without a commitment from all parties to the establishment and observance of a nationwide ceasefire. Hostilities, such as the latest escalation in Idlib, continue to affect the civilian population, including children. I would like to express our sincere condolences to the families of the victims of this recent violence. We welcome the holding, two days

ago, in Geneva, of a meeting of the task force mandated by resolution 2254 (2015) to verify the implementation of the urgent ceasefire, of which we have just heard.

In that context, we call on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, in particular measures to protect the civilian population. Respect for human rights is also essential — to protect the dignity, life and freedom of every individual. Switzerland would like to reiterate its full support for the Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, whose work is fundamental to the fight against impunity. In Syria, as elsewhere, there can be no lasting peace without justice.

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

The A3 would like to thank Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings. We also welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye in today's meeting.

The persistence of violence and attacks resulting in security and humanitarian crises in Syria, aggravated by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the cholera epidemic, the impact of climate change and the February earthquakes has reached its highest level since the beginning of the conflict in 2011. We encourage the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to pursue his mandate, despite a particularly difficult context, in favour of stability and a lasting, secure peace in Syria. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect the principles of distinction and proportionality, and to take all measures to spare civilian populations and infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We call on all Syrian parties to engage in an inclusive and broad political process, involving all actors in society, respecting the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and without foreign interference. We also encourage the Syrian authorities to put particular emphasis on the issue of the abducted and missing persons, in order to find a humanitarian way out so that the survivors and their families can obtain answers.

In the same vein, we support progress in mine clearance. It is nevertheless worth remembering that those activities must be carried out in a timely manner, so as to reduce the risks to civilians from such devices and to clean up the working environment for United Nations personnel.

(*spoke in English*)

The dire humanitarian situation in Syria has been aptly characterized by the Secretary-General as “one of the world's most complex humanitarian and protection emergencies”. The already deplorable humanitarian situation occasioned by the 12-year-long war was aggravated by the earthquakes of 6 February 2023. This natural disaster has claimed the lives of more than 5,900 people, affected about 8.8 million people and caused extensive damage to housing and other infrastructure.

Due to its complex nature, the international community and humanitarian agencies urgently need to expand existing humanitarian measures to be able to effectively deal with this multipronged crisis. In that regard, we urge the United Nations and partners to increase funding for early-recovery programmes, particularly those that focus on income-generation projects and livelihood activities. Those projects and activities may avert an increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, strengthen self-reliance, improve individual and community well-being, and reduce future dependence on external assistance.

We welcome the holding of the recent donors' conference in Geneva, at which \$10 billion was pledged to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria. We call on the concerned countries to honour their pledges as soon as is practicable.

The A3 encourages the United Nations to continue to do everything in its power and scope to increase crossline assistance to supplement cross-border aid, which, admittedly, remains a critical life-saving support for about 2.7 million people in north-west Syria each month.

We remain concerned that women, girls and children continue to be the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected by the crisis. They are including being exposed to greater risks of gender-based violence, forced and early marriages, and restricted access to livelihood opportunities. As evidence of that, in the first quarter of 2023, more than 320 serious violations were committed against children. Children are increasingly showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

We welcome the Government of Syria's decision to extend the authorization for the opening of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai for another three months until August in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the country. We are hopeful that the cross-border resolution (resolution 2672 (2023)) will be renewed in a way that gives the United Nations and its humanitarian partners ample time to plan and successfully execute the operation. We have been engaging with the penholders to ensure an outcome that best serves the interests of the Syrian people.

We want to acknowledge and commend the normalization of relations between Arab nations and Syria and Syria's return to the League of Arab States family. Within the framework of regional cooperation, the current rapprochement could be critical in addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria and the issue of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

The A3 would like to express its continued support to the Special Envoy in finding a political solution to the conflict in Syria. The political process underpinned by resolution 2254 (2015) remains the most viable solution to the conflict and to bringing the suffering of the Syrian people to an end. It is crucial to ensure that all the parties involved, including the international community, approach the situation from a humanitarian standpoint free of politicization. Ultimately, our individual and joint actions should be focused on ensuring the well-being of the Syrian people.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

The Syrian Government has so far opened the border crossings of Bab-Al Salam and Al-Rai, taken positive measures to facilitate humanitarian access, ended the case-by case approval procedure for cross-line assistance and facilitated the issuance of visas for humanitarian workers. Those initiatives have been welcomed by the parties concerned, and China commends them. In the planning for its next phase of work, the Security Council should take into account the developments in the situation in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2672 (2023) in a science-based manner in order to further increase humanitarian assistance to Syria and to alleviate its humanitarian crisis. I would like to emphasize four points.

First, Syria's sovereignty and the Government of Syria's ownership must be respected. The cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism is only an exceptional

arrangement in response to a specific situation and should eventually be phased out in an orderly manner. Promoting the transition from cross-border to cross-line deliveries is the right way forward for the subsequent discussions in the Security Council. China hopes that the Council members will adopt a pragmatic approach and engage in dialogue and consultations on appropriate arrangements to that end.

Secondly, cross-line operations should be the main channel for humanitarian assistance in Syria. However, in the past six months, due to obstruction by the parties in de facto control of north-west Syria, the cross-line operations were interrupted for four months. The Council must come up with practical solutions to remove the barriers to delivering cross-line assistance, as well as to improve the efficiency and increase the scale of that assistance, in order to ensure that the relief work is more stable and predictable.

Thirdly, explosive remnants of war in Syria continue to cause civilian casualties, threaten the safety and security of humanitarian workers and impede humanitarian relief efforts. We call for incorporating the clearing of explosive remnants of war into early-recovery projects without delay. The current huge gap in the humanitarian funding for Syria has already affected the implementation of relief operations and early-recovery projects. We hope that the parties concerned will honour their commitments and further increase their funding support.

Fourthly, some countries have been expressing concerns about the humanitarian situation in Syria and asking that the Council adopt resolutions on humanitarian issues there. At the same time, they have been wilfully imposing unilateral sanctions, exacerbating Syria's economic and humanitarian plight. That self-contradictory, hypocritical approach is tantamount to pretending to give a patient cardiopulmonary resuscitation while keeping them in a chokehold. I want to reiterate that all unlawful unilateral sanctions against Syria should be lifted fully and unconditionally.

China's position on the political process in Syria has been consistent and unequivocal. We welcomed the twentieth meeting of the Astana format on Syria and its positive outcome. Syria has returned to the family of the League of Arab States, and we believe that the unity and cooperation among the countries of the region will inject new impetus into the political settlement of the Syrian issue. The international community

should also play a constructive role in creating an external environment that is conducive to dialogue and reconciliation among the various factions in Syria. We once again urge foreign forces to end their unlawful military presence in Syria and to stop plundering its natural resources.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Rochdi and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings, and I would like to focus on three points.

The conflict in Syria began 12 years ago, and those 12 years of war can be summed up as follows. More than 500,000 people are dead, more than 130,000 are missing and 12 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced. The regime has used chemical weapons against its own people, there has been systematic use of torture and sexual violence in the regime's detention facilities and now there is ongoing drug trafficking. The war is not over, as shown by the recent air strikes in the province of Idlib. France condemns those acts in the strongest possible terms. That is why Bashar Al-Assad, who is at the root of all of it, and of this unprecedented tragedy, cannot receive unconditional redemption. To do so would be incompatible with achieving a lasting peace in Syria. Those responsible for crimes must be held to account. The specific and sole purpose of the European sanctions is to restrict the freedom of action of the perpetrators of those crimes and their sources of funding.

In the face of that tragedy, France and Europe have taken action to respond. Since 2011, France, the European Union and its member States have provided funding to United Nations agencies and civil-society actors amounting to €30 billion in Syria and its neighbours. The seventh Brussels Conference succeeded in renewing that support, with France announcing a contribution of €40 million for 2023. Those around this table who claim to be most concerned about the modalities of aid, such as Russia, in reality have been providing little or none, and are content to contribute in the form of bombardments. Endemic corruption is at the root of the misappropriation of assistance, and it is the Syrian people who are the victims. On the other hand, we commend all those countries in the region that have been taking in refugees despite all the difficulties. And it is of course our duty to help them.

Only a political solution can put an end to the Syrians' suffering. The earthquakes of 6 February only exacerbated an already increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation. As the Secretary-General has

made abundantly clear, the cross-border mechanism remains essential. Renewing it for an additional 12 months would provide humanitarian actors with the necessary predictability.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the humanitarian response should not and cannot replace a political settlement. The restoration of stability in Syria and the region will be possible only through a political solution that meets the aspirations of all Syrians. Resolution 2254 (2015) is a road map with clearly identified parameters. Regrettably, the Syrian regime has not allowed any progress to be made on those parameters. That is why we have continued to be demanding. The regime must make tangible moves to enable a genuine political process to begin. In a context of deliberate obstruction, we reiterate our full support for the mediation efforts led by Geir Pedersen and call on all actors to support his step-for-step approach.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I too thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their valuable briefings.

As we heard, the needs in Syria are at their highest levels ever. As the 12-year conflict continues, the United Kingdom has continued to respond to those humanitarian needs. Our pledge of \$190 million in Brussels brings our total to more than \$4.8 billion to date. Last year that also included \$64 million for early recovery, including irrigation-facility rehabilitation, agricultural training, apprenticeships and business grants — in all, 495 early-recovery projects across all 14 governorates of Syria. I look forward to hearing Russia announce its contribution in due course, following the recent announcement that the Russian Government spends \$2 billion a year on the Wagner Group. And as this 12-year conflict continues, we see three ways in which the Council can respond to support the Syrian people.

First, as we heard, we need to ensure predictable and sustained humanitarian access to 4.1 million people in north-western Syria. When I visited the Türkiye-Syria border earlier this month, front-line humanitarians, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and local authorities told me consistently and repeatedly that they needed more access and for longer periods of time. We welcome the progress of a cross-line convoy of 10 trucks last week, the first since January, but nothing can replace the scale and scope of the indispensable cross-border operation. I saw that myself. Sixty trucks filled with life-saving supplies crossed the border on the day of my visit alone.

As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths reminded us, the Secretary-General has repeatedly stated that the extension of the Security Council's cross-border authorization for at least 12 months is a moral and humanitarian imperative, and has underlined that all three crossings, at Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, are essential to an effective United Nations response. The United Nations has repeatedly emphasized the value that the certainty and predictability of a Council mandate provides, including for donors. That is why we join the calls on the Council to extend and expand the Council's cross-border authorization ahead of 10 July. Let us be clear. This is not a maximalist approach but a humanitarian one.

Secondly, attacks on innocent Syrians should stop and there should be a nationwide ceasefire. The indiscriminate air attacks on a vegetable market in Idlib this week, which the Syrian authorities have confirmed that Russia was involved in, are reported to have killed nine civilians and injured many more. Our condolences go to their families and our sympathy and good wishes to the injured. That shows a total disregard for the welfare of the Syrian people. We call on all the parties to abide by international humanitarian law and protect the civilian population.

Finally, we know that only sustainable and inclusive peace can end the suffering of the Syrian people and bring stability to the region. Resolution 2254 (2015) is the framework for delivering that. We welcome all efforts that contribute to delivering on its promise, and we call on the regime to meaningfully engage in the process to deliver lasting peace for Syria — as Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi said, with real diplomacy and real solutions.

Mr. Moretti (Brazil): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Switzerland, and I would now like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity on the political aspects of the conflict in Syria.

I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi for her briefing and Special Envoy Pedersen for his continuing engagement with key stakeholders.

While the path towards reconciliation presents countless challenges, we continue to believe firmly that by addressing the outstanding issues incrementally and collectively we can and must make significant steps towards a peaceful resolution. Since the tragic earthquakes hit Türkiye and Syria in February, there

have been some positive developments on the political track, especially within the region. Notably, the fact that Syria has rejoined the League of Arab States opens up avenues for dialogue, which may help address many outstanding issues.

Brazil welcomes the overall commitment to the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), in particular the plan for a peaceful resolution of the conflict while respecting Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. We appreciate that the joint statement adopted at the twentieth round of Astana talks last week reiterates the belief that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict, as well as the commitment to advancing a viable and lasting Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The joint statement also emphasizes the role of the Syrian Constitutional Committee and calls for a ninth round of the drafting committee, without further delay. For that process to succeed, renewed, sustained and visible political will is needed to change the status quo. It will be crucial for the Constitutional Committee to resume its activities, with the firm commitment of all parties to finding common ground and achieving concrete results for the benefit of the Syrian people.

A comprehensive ceasefire is also indispensable and urgent. Rebuilding Syria, in all aspects of that daunting task, and enabling its citizens to lead the dignified lives they fully deserve, will be possible only through peace and reconciliation, no matter how difficult that may be.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of Iran, Syria and Türkiye in today's meeting.

We acknowledge the willingness of the Syrian Government to keep the border crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai open. We reaffirm that the actions taken to guarantee access to humanitarian assistance must be accompanied by efforts aimed at ensuring the security of personnel on the ground. Ecuador supports the Secretary-General's proposal to renew access to the cross-border crossings for an additional 12 months in order to maintain the sustainability and predictability of the humanitarian assistance operation. As I mentioned in my statement at our briefing on cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States (see S/PV.9343), we believe that Syria's readmission to that

regional organization must come with a commitment to establishing a definitive ceasefire and a transparent system of transitional justice, which would enable the Syrian population to return to a path towards national and regional reconciliation.

In that regard, we believe it is imperative to strengthen the joint efforts to curb violent extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking, which especially affect the civilian population, undermine the possibility of laying the groundwork for viable governance and economic development and represent a threat to peace and security in the region. We commend the work of Special Envoy Pedersen, particularly with the Astana group, and look forward to the swift reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. We are also confident that he will be successful in his recent efforts to involve all actors in the step-for-step negotiation strategy.

We take note of the precarious humanitarian situation in Syria. The increase in the number of people who depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival, the deteriorating state of the infrastructure needed for the provision of basic services, the growing numbers of those sick with cholera and other indicators make the seriousness of the crisis clear. My delegation is also concerned about the numbers of people displaced as a result of violence and the lack of a response to the inquiries of the families of missing and arbitrarily detained persons. We know that women and children disproportionately bear the brunt of the conflict. We therefore acknowledge the full spectrum of the work being done by the United Nations teams on the ground. We also acknowledge the effects of implementing early-recovery projects, especially those aimed at preventing and mitigating the impacts of the winter months and floods and restoring schools and temporary shelters, which have alleviated the plight of millions of Syrians. We urge donors to continue contributing with a view to ensuring sustainable funding for the humanitarian response plan for Syria, which as of May had raised less than 12 per cent of the required total amount for 2023.

Ecuador reaffirms that the only possibility for Syria is to summon the will of all actors with the aim of finding a negotiated political solution to the crisis, based on the principles of sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their interventions.

As we just heard, humanitarian needs in Syria are at an all-time high, with 15.3 million people dependent on aid to survive, which is 40 per cent more than in 2020. Despite the multiple crises around the world requiring our attention, we cannot forget the voiceless Syrian people in need. In that regard, Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Yamada attended the seventh Brussels Conference, where he reiterated our determination to continue to provide assistance in line with the needs of Syrian citizens and neighbouring countries. Japan also welcomed the recent visit by Mr. Griffiths to Syria to discuss humanitarian assistance and early recovery with the Syrian leadership. Yet simply sending relief supplies and supporting early-recovery efforts are not enough. Ultimately, without a political solution that addresses the root causes of the protracted conflict, the humanitarian needs will only worsen. For that reason, the status quo is not an option for us. Japan therefore deeply deplores the lack of movement on the Syrian political track. We reiterate the importance of an inclusive political process, as envisioned in resolution 2254 (2015) and call for a renewal of dialogue among all Syrian parties at the Constitutional Committee and an appropriate handling of the venue issue.

Resolution 2672 (2023) will expire in 10 days. The cross-border assistance is a lifeline for 4.1 million people in north-west Syria. While we are pleased that the eleventh cross-line convoy carrying United Nations humanitarian supplies has arrived, Japan nonetheless believes that the Security Council must renew the cross-border aid mechanism for at least 12 months, as requested by the Secretary-General. If we fail to act, the United Nations will no longer be able to provide funding to the non-governmental organizations operating in the north-west. The accountability and predictability that are necessary for humanitarian actors and donors would be severely disrupted. More than 80 per cent of the aid to the north-west flows through Bab Al-Hawa. A failure to reauthorize the cross-border aid mechanism would be a disaster. It is therefore our duty as members of the Council to strive to find common ground in a spirit of compromise.

The 6 million Syrian refugees represent one of the world's largest crises, and the burden of hosting them has fallen on Syria's neighbours and countries beyond. Yes, the refugees have a right to return to their native country, but the conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return are not yet in place. The United Nations has noted the importance of addressing people's economic concerns, including the lack of livelihoods,

jobs and basic services, as well as safety and security concerns, and we call for concrete action by the Syrian Government in that regard.

Finally, later today the General Assembly will vote on establishing a new institution to address the issue of missing persons, as the Secretary-General recommended in August 2022 (A/76/890). We hope that the Syrian Government will not reject the initiative from the outset but will rather sincerely cooperate with the efforts of the international community.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for his briefing following his visit to Syria and Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi for her insights.

We remain deeply troubled about the persistently worsening situation in Syria. The air strikes on 25 June in north-western Syria have reminded us that the war continues. Albania condemns the attack and calls for an impartial investigation and accountability. We deplore the lack of good faith and goodwill shown by the Al-Assad regime in preventing the Constitutional Committee from reconvening and starting to make genuine progress on drafting a democratic constitution. There can be no alternative to the full and immediate implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015) if Syria is ever to begin a political transition towards a free and democratic country. At the same time, however, it is only natural that the immediate humanitarian needs of the Syrian people remain a priority for every one of us on the Security Council, considering that Syria is one of the most demanding humanitarian crises in the world, with 15 million people depending on life-saving humanitarian aid for their survival and more than 100,000 Syrians missing.

When it comes to missing persons, today we want to take this opportunity to underline once more the purely humanitarian nature of the independent institution proposed in the draft resolution that is before the General Assembly today (A/77/L.79), which is a key demand of Syrian families and recommended in the report of the Secretary-General (A/76/890). We call on all States Members of the United Nations to support the draft resolution in the General Assembly today, which will offer some relief to the families.

The next few weeks will be very important when it comes to responding to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people and with regard to the Council's responsibility to deliver, especially after the earthquake in Syria. In that context, we call on all members to

support the renewal of the Bab Al-Hawa cross-border mandate for another 12 months in order to ensure predictability and to make sure that the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings remain open for as long as they are needed. Keeping in mind what the Secretary-General underlined in his recent report (S/2023/419), there is no reason to reduce humanitarian access. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths mentioned, the 12-month extension will also help with early-recovery assistance. Syrians and humanitarian actors are looking to us to ensure humanitarian access for at least 12 months. Now is the time to recommit to supporting them and addressing Syrians' dire needs. There is no alternative. We should keep in mind that humanitarian aid must never be politicized by anyone, and that all must help to facilitate humanitarian access and the protection of relief workers. We deeply appreciate the generosity of donor countries and underscore the importance of offering them predictability by extending the mandate by 12 months.

In conclusion, let us repeat that a political solution is the only way to end the suffering of the Syrian people. Without it, the humanitarian needs will continue to further increase.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. The updates they have given us this morning underscore the need for the Council to come together and make sure that Syrians remain supported.

Regrettably, after 12 years of conflict, the depth and breadth of needs are higher than ever. Continued fighting, political obstruction and deep distrust have led to the destruction of the remaining life-sustaining infrastructure and basic services across much of the country. Families facing hunger, violence, disease and a profoundly insecure future have turned to the most damaging, negative coping mechanisms just to make ends meet. Women and girls, elderly people and persons with disabilities are bearing the brunt of that trauma, as they do in many conflicts around the world.

Despite our divergent views in the Council, we have the ability to ensure the continued delivery of the critical protection and medical and humanitarian care that constitute the difference between life and death for too many in Syria. Malta is pleased to see the increase in early recovery, livelihoods and resilience across all of Syria's governorates. Whether through the rehabilitation of a maternal care clinic, the repair of a critical water pumping and treatment station or capacity-building

for schoolteachers, each action restores the innate dignity of the Syrian people and reduces dependence on cyclical, emergency humanitarian aid.

Malta welcomed the successful cross-line operation from Aleppo into the north-west of Syria last Friday, the first since before the earthquake in February. We also welcome the agreement between the United Nations and Damascus for the continued authorization of the crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai. While we urge for their continuation and for support for all modalities of aid delivery in Syria, we know that the scale, scope and transparency of the United Nations cross-border mechanism at Bab Al-Hawa cannot be matched at present. Malta therefore echoes the calls of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator for a renewal of the humanitarian cross-border mechanism at Bab Al-Hawa for a minimum of 12 months. Anything less would amount to the cynical politicization of humanitarian assistance.

What the people of Syria need now is predictable, safe, reliable humanitarian access for delivering aid, protection services and early-recovery and livelihood programmes throughout the country. In that respect, we were pleased to see members of the international community step up once again at the seventh Brussels Conference this month, pledging €5.6 billion to support humanitarian efforts in Syria and the region. At a time of great financial strain, those resources are precious, and every cent must be maximized for the benefit of those Syrians who need it most. We also note the extraordinary support that States in the region have provided by hosting refugees. They too must continue to be supported. However, Malta reiterates that any formal returns of refugees and those displaced within Syria must be safe, legal, voluntary and dignified.

On the political track, we reiterate our support for the Special Envoy's work. We urge the parties to take their obligations seriously, moving the political process forward in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Securing Syria's future requires coordinated, multilateral and inclusive efforts that engage Syrian civil society and women peacebuilders. Nothing less will usher in the change that is so sorely needed, and that is why we too call for reconvening the Constitutional Committee in Geneva without further delay. Malta is also deeply concerned about the air strikes in the past week in the north-west, which resulted in a dozen civilian casualties. We once again call for a nationwide ceasefire and the protection of all civilians across the country.

In conclusion, I can only stress and reiterate that at this critical time, the Council must work together and set aside its differences to support millions of Syrians in their hour of continued and clear need in an adequate and predictable manner. The situation demands nothing less.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Najat Rochdi and Mr. Martin Griffiths for their important briefings.

Nine years ago, the Security Council adopted the cross-border aid mechanism as an exceptional measure in response to the grave humanitarian repercussions of the Syrian crisis. Today the presence of the mechanism remains central to the delivery of relief aid. That is particularly true following the devastating earthquake that afflicted Syria at a time when humanitarian needs were already at their highest levels after 12 years of the crisis. For that reason, and as we approach the end of the mandate for the cross-border aid mechanism, in accordance with resolution 2672 (2023), we stress the importance of extending it for 12 months, based on humanitarian principles and immense needs. That is also pertinent given that the Bab Al-Hawa crossing is considered essential as the point where 85 per cent of aid passes through the Syrian-Turkish border. We stress that we all have a moral responsibility that requires that we consider our humanitarian duty apart from any political considerations and solely with regard to meeting the needs of our brother people of Syria.

We reaffirm the urgent need to deliver aid by every possible means in order to ensure access to all in need. In that context, we believe that the Syrian Government's recent decision to extend the opening of two additional crossings for another three months in response to the urgent needs resulting from the earthquake is a crucial step. That decision contributed to the transfer of thousands of tons of humanitarian aid across the Syrian-Turkish border. As for cross-line aid, we take note of the passage of an eleventh convoy for the first time since February this year, just days before the extension of the cross-border aid mechanism. We repeat our calls for increasing the number of those convoys consistently and regularly, with no impediments. We call on all parties to permit the passage of cross-line convoys and to refrain from obstructing the delivery of aid or using it as a bargaining chip. We emphasize that the obstruction of aid delivery is unacceptable.

Appropriate facilities must be provided for the passage of humanitarian convoys by all the parties concerned. In that regard, we welcome the Syrian Government's decision to grant the United Nations prior approval for the delivery of cross-line aid as part of its measures to facilitate aid delivery.

While the United Arab Emirates continues its humanitarian efforts to alleviate the difficult living conditions of Syrians, we stress the need to focus on early-recovery projects, the reconstruction of infrastructure and the rehabilitation of public facilities.

Syrians are still suffering from chronic shortages of electricity, fuel and water. More than 12 million people face acute shortage of food, and more than 15 million people are in need for aid, half of whom are women and girls.

Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates believes that early-recovery projects are essential to providing basic services to Syrians. They contribute to building schools, hospitals and homes and provide job opportunities. They are essential to addressing the humanitarian situation through a sustained approach that will create the conditions conducive to the voluntary return of refugees and to alleviating pressure on their host countries.

As part of its efforts to support early-recovery projects in earthquake-affected areas, the United Arab Emirates has worked to build 1,000 temporary housing units and rehabilitate 40 schools. In addition, plans are under way to start the construction of 500 additional temporary housing units.

My country also notes the importance of supporting demining efforts on the Syrian territories as part of early-recovery projects. Those activities help facilitate a return to normal life and to avoid the catastrophic repercussions of those mines on civilians, especially children and humanitarian workers.

In conclusion, while we emphasize the need to extend the cross-border aid mechanism, we also stress that the Council should not be satisfied with addressing the humanitarian situation and overlooking the need for finding a peaceful and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis that addresses its security, humanitarian and political dimensions. In that context, we also look forward to continued Arab diplomatic efforts, which we hope will achieve progress to help Syria overcome the various challenges it faces.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Sabbagh (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): The brutal attacks and the criminal practices of the Israeli occupying forces against the Syrian Arab Republic have intensified recently, including in the occupied Syrian Golan. On 20 June, substantial Israeli occupying forces, accompanied by bulldozers, stormed the area of Al-Hafayer, east of Masada village, in the occupied Syrian Golan. They razed agricultural lands in order to prepare for the implementation of their colonization project to install wind turbines. Given the seriousness of that plan and its negative effects, our defenceless citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan opposed the occupation forces in order to reject that colonization plan. The occupying forces responded with a barrage of bullets and smoke bombs that led to 50 casualties, some of them very serious. Others were also detained. The following day, our fellow citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan declared a general strike and a day of rage. They rejected the criminal occupation practices used against them and their land. That strike is part of general strikes that they organized since 2019 in order to counter Israeli settlement projects that target the occupied Syrian Golan. Those projects threaten to confiscate thousands of dunums of agricultural land, in stark violation of a number of relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981).

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms all of those crimes, aggressions and illegal practices. We call on the Security Council to break its deafening silence and to carry out its responsibilities, under the Charter of the United Nations, to put an end to all occupation and aggression policies and to hold the perpetrators accountable. I would have liked to hear Ms. Rochdi mention, in her briefing, the suffering of our people in the occupied Syrian Golan as a result of the practices of the Israeli occupation. Those Syrians are a part of the Syrian people.

On 20 and 21 June, the twentieth meeting on Syria of the guarantor countries of the Astana process was held in the capital of Kazakhstan. Since its inception, the Astana process has made important achievements to push back terrorism in Syria. In their joint statement, the participating States recalled their firm commitment to the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and its unity, independence and territorial integrity. Those

States recalled their commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and their determination to work together to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. They also recalled their opposition to the separatist agendas that seek to undermine Syria's sovereignty, stability and territorial integrity. Finally, they condemned the activities of terrorist organizations and affiliated groups that operate under various names in various parts of Syria.

We listened to the briefing of Mr. Martin Griffiths. Last week, during an informal interactive dialogue, we discussed aspects of the implementation of resolution 2672 (2023). We primarily discussed progress made in the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syrians and the provision of basic services to them through early-recovery projects. My delegation would like to indicate that humanitarian needs are rising. Access to basic services has become even more limited. That is compounded by a severe water crisis plaguing nearly 1 million Syrians in Al-Hasakah governorate and its surroundings. That crisis also contributed to the cholera outbreak.

In addition, an acute shortage of electricity is exacerbating the living conditions of the Syrian people. My delegation underscores that the Syrian Government has taken exceptional and urgent measures following the earthquake of 6 February. We have provided approvals and facilities for the United Nations, including our sovereign decision to open two more border crossings and extend their work for a period of three months, ending on 13 August.

We also wish to refer to several developments that have had a negative impact on the entire humanitarian response in Syria. Those developments include the fact that there has been no progress at all in providing cross-line humanitarian assistance to people in need who are difficult to reach through the borders. Indeed, terrorist groups have prevented the delivery of that assistance. Since the beginning of the year, those groups have prevented any humanitarian convoy from reaching the north-west of the country through the crossing lines. Some hostile States, in coordination with their terrorist accomplices, allowed only one convoy to pass prior to the extension of the relevant resolution. That is a dangerous game that manipulates the faith of those who need humanitarian assistance.

My delegation also stresses that the limited increase in the number of early-recovery projects and the small increase in funding will not allow those projects to meet

the minimum required of them. They will therefore not achieve a tangible improvement in responding to the immense humanitarian needs in Syria. The real impact of those projects remains unclear.

The reduction of funding is a true source of concern. The World Food Programme has announced that it will have to reduce the number of beneficiaries, which threatens to put an end to the urgent food assistance that is to be delivered to 2.5 million people in July. That will affect people in all parts of Syria. This reduction is due to an acute shortage of financing because international donors have not honoured their pledges to the humanitarian response plan in Syria. Indeed, this year's funding for the humanitarian response plan of \$5.4 billion stands at only 12 per cent to date, which hampers the full implementation of resolution 2672 (2023).

The question we now face is the following. What could improve predictability: delivery on pledges to finance the plan or the 12-months period? The answer is clearly funding the plan. Without this funding, it is impossible to do anything.

At the seventh donors' conference in Brussels, pledges were made that show the willingness and seriousness of donor countries to honour their commitments and make sure that humanitarian work does not follow any political agenda. Yet all donor conferences cannot compensate for the wealth of the Syrian people that has been pillaged throughout the years of the crisis by occupying foreign forces.

I also wish to refer to the impact of unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States and the European Union (EU), affecting various humanitarian sectors in Syria. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/419) describes the impact of those measures on the payment and procurement activities of the United Nations. My delegation stresses once again that all the so-called exemptions that have been announced by the United States and the EU after the earthquake have not had any impact on the ground. Some EU leaders continue to maintain a hostile position towards Syria and politicize its humanitarian situation as well as the suffering of the Syrian people. They also continue to impose coercive measures that are inhumane and immoral. These leaders are excluding the Syrian State from the Brussels donors' conference while it is the Syrian State itself that is first and foremost concerned about the needs and challenges of its people.

The United States is responsible for the security and humanitarian situation in areas it controls. It is worsening in the camps that are in Syrian areas illegitimately controlled by United States forces, such as the Al-Rukban and Al-Hol camps. Indeed, it is the destructive policies of the United States against Syria that have pushed millions of Syrians into insecurity and instability. It is those policies that have turned a significant number of them into refugees and internally displaced persons, causing them to lose their food security and putting them in a dire humanitarian situation.

The repeated claims by the United States that it is providing humanitarian assistance to Al-Rukban camp in the Al-Tanf region through its non-governmental organizations are just an attempt to provide support to terrorist organizations present in that area, such as Maghawir Al-Thawrah. It is time that the responsibility of the United States for the humanitarian situation in the camp is recognized. My delegation stresses that the only solution to the worsening conditions in the Al-Rukban and Al-Hol camps is to close them for good.

My delegation also stresses that Member States must uphold their responsibility and repatriate their citizens who are part of the foreign terrorist combatants group present in Al-Hol camp in order to prosecute them, and in particular rehabilitate and reintegrate their women and children.

In conclusion, I would like to state that improving the humanitarian situation in Syria requires lasting solutions that support Syrians, especially following the earthquake. Those solutions must reduce dependency on life-saving humanitarian assistance and strengthen people's resilience. Moreover, avoiding politicization of the return of refugees or preventing their return is essential. Their return requires rebuilding necessary infrastructure so that their return is dignified, which includes providing financing for de-mining efforts and clearing explosive remnants. Donors must uphold their pledges to the humanitarian response plan and early-recovery projects. As for the immediate and unconditional lifting of unilateral coercive measures, it is a moral and humanitarian obligation of countries that impose them to lift them in order to stop starving the people of Syria and their children.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi, Mr. Martin Griffiths and the Secretary-General for their informative briefings and the update on the humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic.

As highlighted by today's briefers and in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/419), the humanitarian situation in Syria was significantly worsened by the devastating earthquake on 6 February 2023, and the needs of the affected population have reached their highest level since the beginning of the conflict. Meanwhile, insufficient funding of the humanitarian response plan is a cause for concern and requires greater support.

Mr. Griffiths' recent visit to Damascus, where he engaged in fruitful discussions with the President and Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, and specifically addressed the humanitarian situation in the country, is a positive step. We commend Mr. Griffiths for his tireless efforts and extend our gratitude to the United Nations and its partners for their unwavering dedication to assisting the Syrian people and for diligently working towards alleviating their immense suffering.

United Nations reports confirm that the Syrian Government's decision to open the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, along with the subsequent three-month extension of such opening until 13 August, has significantly facilitated direct and efficient access to affected individuals. We commend the Syrian Government for its constructive cooperation, which has played a crucial role in enabling enhanced humanitarian operations.

According to the report of the Secretary-General, the ongoing unilateral sanctions have impeded humanitarian assistance and access to vital services. Specifically, the sanctions have had a significant impact on two major areas, namely, procurement and payments, and the compliance sections of banks have been refusing or delaying the processing of financial transactions. The report demonstrates that the alleged humanitarian exemptions are ineffective and impractical. We strongly emphasize the urgent need to repeal those illegal measures. We also renew our call for humanitarian assistance to be provided unconditionally and in accordance with the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination. Political considerations should not obstruct the delivery of assistance to those in need.

Despite the clear emphasis placed in resolution 2672 (2023) on the need to improve cross-line delivery throughout the country, there was no significant improvement in cross-line deliveries over the past month. Cross-line deliveries serve as an essential legal means for providing humanitarian assistance, and their effectiveness is indispensable. We support the provision of assistance through the cross-border mechanism. However, we reiterate our position that that mechanism is a temporary arrangement that must be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner, while fully respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

As one of the three basic pillars of resolution 2672 (2023), early-recovery projects serve a key role in improving the overall humanitarian situation and setting the groundwork for a sustained recovery in Syria. Those projects should aim to restore vital infrastructure, including water, electricity, sanitation, health-care facilities and educational institutions, and to prioritize demining efforts. It is important that the United Nations and its partners continue to demonstrate steadfast support for those projects and to work diligently to ensure their implementation, with transparency and without any form of discrimination.

Iran remains committed to cooperating with its partners in the Astana process to achieve long-term and sustainable normalization in Syria. During the recent meeting held on 20 and 21 June, the representatives of Iran, Russia and Türkiye, as guarantor countries of the Astana format, emphasized, among various priorities, the importance of facilitating the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their respective homes in Syria, while ensuring their right to return and to receive support. They also reiterated their opposition to the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues that belong to Syria and condemned the actions of countries supporting terrorist groups, including illegitimate self-rule initiatives in the north-east of Syria. We highlight our support for the continued Syrian-Turkish dialogue, recognizing its crucial role in those broader efforts.

The fight against terrorism must be carried out with full respect for Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without using it as a pretext to violate those fundamental principles of international law. The illegal presence of foreign military forces, including the United States forces in Syria, constitutes a blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law and is a primary source of

insecurity in the country. We call for the immediate and complete withdrawal of those unlawful forces, which is essential to creating an environment conducive to resolving the crisis and restoring peace and stability in the region.

We support the resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings at the earliest opportunity to continue the progress made towards resolving the crisis. In that context, we are steadfast in our support of the Special Envoy's efforts and his active engagement with all the parties.

In conclusion, we strongly condemn the continuing acts of aggression and military attacks by the Israeli regime against Syria, particularly those that target civilian infrastructure, alongside the persistent occupation of the Syrian Golan. The Security Council must abandon its current double standards and address the malicious activities and acts of aggression by the Israeli regime, which clearly contravene international law and international humanitarian law and violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Moreover, those malign activities not only destabilize the region but also exacerbate tensions.

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

Mr. Önal (Türkiye): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi for their briefings.

In order to bring an end to the 12-year conflict in Syria and its destabilizing implications, it is crucial to effectively address its various dimensions in a synchronized and gradual manner. It was with that understanding that we participated in the twentieth meeting of the Astana format high-level meeting last week. During the meeting, the importance of preserving Syria's territorial integrity and national unity, effectively combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and disrupting separatist agendas were emphasized. We underlined the need to keep the situation calm on the ground while creating the conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees, as well as facilitating the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance. With a view to overcoming the current political impasse, the Constitutional Committee should be reconvened as soon as possible. We support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to that end.

The terrorism in Syria of the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units is a major threat, not only to the stability and territorial integrity of Syria but also to our existential national security interests. Since the beginning of this year, that terrorist organization perpetrated a total of 67 attacks from Tell Rifaat and Manbij on targets inside Türkiye and in the opposition-controlled areas in Syria. Türkiye is determined to do whatever is necessary to eliminate that threat and to safeguard its citizens and borders, in full compliance with international law and international humanitarian law.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains grim. This month, we have seen two reports by the Secretary-General demonstrating the devastating consequences of the earthquake, as well as the extent of the ongoing humanitarian needs on the ground. We appreciate the role of United Nations in terms its efforts to alleviate the plight of the affected people. Since the earthquakes, more than 3,000 aid trucks and more than 140 United Nations inter-agency missions have crossed our borders into north-west Syria. In addition to the ongoing massive operation at the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, the use of two additional border crossings — Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai — has also been useful.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners need predictability, with a longer-term perspective to be able to sustain their crucial operations. The World Food Programme's announcement that the number of beneficiaries would be reduced by half, leaving

2.5 million people at risk unless additional funding were provided, is deeply worrisome. We hope that that undesired outcome can be offset by securing sufficient financial support. It would also be timely to develop new modalities of assistance by increasing access to livelihoods through early-recovery and rehabilitation activities in accordance with resolution 2672 (2023). Cross-line aid deliveries are also important to complement other humanitarian efforts. A cross-line mission to Idlib was successfully completed last week. We continue to encourage all the parties to facilitate regular cross-line missions.

Under the current conditions, especially in north-west Syria, which suffered the most damage from the earthquakes, the United Nations cross-border mechanism remains the only viable lifeline for millions of Syrians in need. The Security Council's extension of the mandate of the cross-border mechanism for 12 months will therefore be critically important. Expanding the scope of the mandate to include additional border crossings would also contribute to predictability, which is needed to make better use of those crossings. We call on the members of the Council to remain guided solely by humanitarian considerations and to act accordingly.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.