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Seventy-eighth year

9371st meeting

Tuesday, 11 July 2023, 10 a.m.

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. França Danese
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Mr. Anyanah
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

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

Members of the Council have before them documents S/2023/506 and S/2023/507, each of which contains the text of a separate draft resolution.

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

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): As co-penholders, Brazil and Switzerland actively and constructively engaged with all Security Council members, as well as partners in the region and other relevant stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, throughout intense negotiations during the past few weeks. We spared no effort to try to achieve a text as consensual as possible. Throughout, we were guided solely by the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. The result of our effort is the amended draft resolution (S/2023/506) that we have put for the consideration by Council members today.

We listened carefully to the humanitarian actors on the ground. They firmly advocate for a year-long authorization as necessary to design and implement projects that go beyond life-saving supplies and that offer dignified solutions. Even though we support their call for a 12-month extension, the text before members provides for a nine-month renewal. It is our renewed attempt for a compromise. The draft resolution would renew the authorization for the Bal Al-Hawa border crossing, but we also worked to help ensure that the language reflected the commitment to humanitarian assistance to all those in need in Syria through all modalities. It includes a paragraph on the cross-line modality and calls for an expansion of humanitarian operations, more funding for enhanced early-recovery activities, as well as humanitarian mine action. It also addresses the demand for the creation of conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified returns.

We believe this draft resolution is a fair compromise. It represents a balance between the different positions of Council members. We are grateful to all Council members for their engagement to that end. The adoption of a consensual draft resolution on this crucial issue would show the unity and commitment of the Security Council with respect to humanitarian issues in general and to the needs of the Syrian people in this specific case. We now commend the draft resolution to the Council and ask all members to support it.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I deliver this statement before the voting on behalf of the 10 elected members of the Council (E-10).

The E-10 appreciates the extensive efforts by the co-penholders, Brazil and Switzerland, to draft a balanced text that reflects the views and legitimate concerns of delegations and, more important, meets the pressing humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. The draft resolution (S/2023/506) before us will guarantee the uninterrupted flow of aid to 4 million people in need of emergency humanitarian support in north-west Syria. Particularly after the devastating earthquakes in February, the cross-border aid mechanism remains a crucial lifeline.

The draft resolution authorizes a nine-month extension of the mechanism, and thereby allow humanitarian organizations to reach those in need effectively and with the better predictability, under the strict monitoring of the United Nations. We commend the efforts of all delegations, including the three African members of the Council and the United Arab Emirates, for their constructive proposals.

The text also reflects issues raised by Council members and the country concerned, such as humanitarian funding, humanitarian mine action, cross-line deliveries to all parts of Syria and the creation of conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified returns.

While the E-10 would have preferred a longer mandate authorization, we recognize the utility of upholding the Council's unified position and strongly urge all Council members to vote in favour of this draft resolution. It not only represents our collective diplomatic endeavour to produce a compromise text, but it also demonstrates our determination to meet the dire needs of the Syrian people.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): From the beginning, Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique, the three African members of the Security Council (A3), engaged in the

negotiations process in good faith, with the ultimate purpose of adopting a balanced text that would be acceptable to all members of the Security Council. In that connection, the A3 regrets that the Council has before it today two competing draft resolutions (S/2023/506 and S/2023/507) on the Syrian humanitarian situation. We have always aimed for the consensual adoption of a draft resolution that would be supportive in meeting the pressing humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. Between an annual mandate and a half-year mandate, we believe that the nine-month mandate reflects the best available option that should garner the consensus of the Council. The A3 will therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution (S/2023/506) supported by the 10 elected members of the Council, guided only by the defence of the supreme interests of the Syrian people.

We thank the co-penholders, Brazil and Switzerland, for their efforts in trying to encourage all the members of the Council to come together. The A3 pledges to continue to play a constructive role in helping the Council forge a consensus position on the matter.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank the co-penholders. In a few moments, we will vote on the co-penholders' compromise draft resolution (S/2023/506). How we all vote will speak volumes. Supporting the draft resolution will extend humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and ensure that aid will not be cut off in the dead of winter. But should any Member State oppose the draft resolution, it will be voting to shutter a critical humanitarian lifeline. Today it is unconscionable that cross-border aid through Bab Al-Hawa is paused while humanitarians wait for the Security Council to act. And there is no time to waste. The Syrian people are counting on us — people like Mohammed Al-Fandi, who lives in a camp near the Syrian-Turkish border. When asked about the stakes of the vote on this draft resolution, Mohammed said,

“Closing the crossing to humanitarian aid means death by starvation for most camp residents.”

He says, “death by starvation”. The stakes of this vote are quite literally life or death. In a letter to the Council, 32 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) wrote,

“If the Council fails to renew this mechanism, it will send a message to Syrians that the Council is willing to accept preventable additional suffering and loss of life on its watch”.

Often the issues before the Council are contentious, and that is to be expected, but this vote should not be contentious or controversial. We know that the cross-border mechanism allows for food, water, medicine and other essentials to reach 2.7 million people in Syria every single month. We know that the cross-border mechanism is one of the most closely monitored and inspected crossings in the world. And I saw that first-hand during my two visits to Bab Al-Hawa. And we know that the humanitarian situation in Syria has never been more dire. Twelve years of war and this year's devastating earthquakes have pushed the Syrian people to the brink. This is the moment to increase our support for vulnerable Syrians. Following the earthquakes, we therefore surged assistance to the region. The United States is the single-largest humanitarian donor to the Syrian people, and we need others to step up and join us, especially right now, as the United Nations humanitarian appeal for Syria remains grossly underfunded.

But let us be clear. No amount of aid will meet the needs of the Syrian people if the aid cannot reach the Syrian people. The United States has lived up to its pledge to support for cross-line aid deliveries and early-recovery efforts, but nothing can replace the scope and scale of cross-border aid. And after the earthquakes in February, which temporarily closed Bab Al-Hawa, just as needs spiked, we saw how insufficient one border crossing point is. For that reason, the United States, together with humanitarian organizations and other Member States, called for this draft resolution to expand the cross-border aid mechanism to include all three border-crossing points currently in use, namely, Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai. Al-Assad has reportedly told the United Nations and some members of the Council that he is amenable to keeping those additional border-crossings open beyond 13 August, but he has yet to make that commitment publicly or call for an extension of the mechanism. If the regime fails to follow through, we will bring that to the top of the Council's agenda during our presidency of the Security Council in August. Council members have my word on that.

This text is a compromise and, in many ways, it really is the bare minimum. This draft resolution falls short of what United Nations officials and humanitarian leaders called on us to do. It falls short of what meeting the needs on the ground require. The Secretary-General and NGOs on the ground have urged the Council to extend the cross-border mechanism for 12 months. The

United States and the vast majority of Security Council members supported a 12-month extension. While we will support today's compromise draft resolution, we know that it does not fully meet the needs of the moment. Going forward, we will continue to work with our partners to meet the immense needs of the Syrian people. The bottom line is this: there is no legitimate or humanitarian justification for voting against this draft resolution. None whatsoever. We must extend this critical lifeline, and we must ensure aid continues to reach the Syrian people during the cold winter months. Let us therefore put aside geopolitical gamesmanship. Let us do the right thing. Let us do the humane thing, and let us continue to provide life-saving assistance to the Syrian people. The United States will vote in favour of the draft resolution, and we will encourage all Security Council members to do the same.

The President: The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolutions before it.

I shall first put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2023/506, submitted by Brazil and Switzerland.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

Russian Federation

Abstaining:

China

The President: The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention. The draft resolution has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council.

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

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland): Brazil and Switzerland are very disappointed that the Security Council did not adopt the draft resolution on cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria, on which we have just voted (S/2023/506).

Over recent weeks, we engaged with all Council members, as well as partners in the region, and did not spare any efforts — any efforts — to accommodate

concerns and reach common ground. We engaged constructively and in good faith, always keeping one single and clear aim in our minds: to ensure that millions of people in need would get the humanitarian assistance on which they rely to survive in the most difficult circumstances.

The text would have ensured that life-saving humanitarian assistance continued to reach those in need in north-west Syria by all modalities, cross-border and cross-line, and by all humanitarian actors with no exception. The Secretary-General, as well as humanitarian partners working on the ground, have stressed that the 12-month mandate duration would provide humanitarian actors with the predictability necessary for their operation planning.

Even though we hear and support their call, we made a further compromise — for a nine-month extension. This timeline would allow for bridging the harsh winter months and still enable the expansion of humanitarian activities, including early-recovery efforts called for by the draft resolution. And in a context of humanitarian needs worldwide that is far outgrowing the available funds, it would still improve the cost efficiency of the whole-of-Syria humanitarian response.

The briefings the Security Council receives monthly leave no doubt that the humanitarian needs in Syria are greater than ever before. The earthquakes in February have further compounded an already very complex humanitarian crisis. We have continuously stressed the need for all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line, to be available for humanitarian actors across Syria. The cross-border operation remains a lifeline for millions of Syrians who are dependent on humanitarian aid.

We welcome the engagement from all sides during this negotiation process. We are thankful for the support that our approach and text received from the vast majority of Council members. We deeply regret that this compromise was rejected through the use of one veto.

As co-penholders, Brazil and Switzerland are guided by the humanitarian imperative. We will therefore not let this veto cease our tireless efforts to find a solution. We will continue to engage with all Council members to ensure that humanitarian aid keeps reaching those in need.

Last night, the mandate for the cross-border mechanism expired and left millions of people wondering if they will continue to receive much-needed

life-saving humanitarian aid. We, the members of the Security Council, cannot fail the millions of people in Syria who depend on assistance. We cannot fail the thousands upon thousands who help them day by day, and we cannot keep watching the situation on the ground get worse. The Council has a responsibility to renew the mandate for cross-border aid, and we will keep on working to find common ground and to ensure that we collectively live up to that responsibility.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): This is really a sad moment. It is a sad moment for the Syrian people, and it is a sad moment for the Security Council, save for one country. What we have just witnessed — what the world has just witnessed — was an act of utter cruelty. The majority of the Council stood together to extend this humanitarian lifeline to save lives, but one permanent member blocked this draft compromise resolution (S/2023/506), and I just have to ask why.

Russia has not lived up to its responsibility as a permanent member of the Security Council, which is beneath the dignity of this body. This is a gross affront to the values we all hold dear, to our efforts to advance peace and security, and, above all, to the Syrian people who have endured so much needless suffering and violence at the hands of the Al-Assad regime.

As I said earlier, this text was a compromise, and in so many ways it was the absolute minimum that we could achieve. But the United States and other Council members supported the co-penholders' draft resolution in the spirit of compromise. And Russia could not even do that. Now Moscow must answer to the international community, and its delegation to the Security Council has to answer to the Syrian people. It will have to go before the General Assembly and explain why it neglected the dire humanitarian needs of more than 4 million Syrians. Russia will have to try to justify the unjustifiable.

We cannot accept this obstruction. We must keep at this. The Syrian people are counting on us, and we must all urge Russia to come back to the table in good faith. There is no time to waste. Lives hang in the balance.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): Japan deeply regrets that the Security Council failed to adopt the draft resolution that would have reauthorized the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism in Syria for another nine months (S/2023/506). We are extremely disappointed

that the veto was cast today, which hinders the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to over 4 million people in need.

Ongoing violence and insecurity, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, the cholera outbreak and, to make matters worse, the 6 February earthquakes, have gravely worsened the already dire humanitarian situation in Syria. The vetoed draft resolution was intended to encourage further life-saving assistance to Syria through all modalities, including support for early recovery. The Council must demonstrate unity, make compromise and ultimately alleviate the suffering of Syrians.

As we all know, the needs of Syrians are at their highest level since the start of the conflict. The result of this negative vote means a major disruption of humanitarian activities in Syria. The veto will therefore be interpreted as utter disregard for the suffering and lives of the Syrian people.

Moving forward, Japan will continue to work constructively with other Council members to find a realistic arrangement that holistically addresses the severe humanitarian situation in Syria. Until we achieve an inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015), we must put the needs of the Syrian people at the top of our agenda.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): We thank the co-penholders, Brazil and Switzerland, for their tireless efforts during a most constructive process of negotiations. We were happy to work actively with them and other members of the Security Council, but unfortunately these efforts were wasted.

What just happened is a terrible setback. It is one of those sad days for the Council, the United Nations and the entire humanitarian world. It is a stab in the back to solidarity — one of the *raison d'être* of the United Nations.

Millions of Syrians in need and hundreds of humanitarian actors ready to help them have been anxiously looking to the Security Council to guarantee humanitarian access for a period of 12 months. This case has continuously been made by the United Nations at the highest level and in this Chamber — and it has been made many times by the United Nations officials on the ground — in order to ensure predictability, preparedness and efficiency.

As was mentioned before, a group of 32 non-governmental organizations operating in Syria — people who live every day with those in need, and not in New York — describe Bab Al-Hawa as the most critical supply line for providing food, medical care and shelter. A mandate of nine months as proposed, although not ideal, would nonetheless have provided and continued to provide humanitarian aid for more than 4 million people in north-western Syria, who need it not for comfort but for survival; not as an option but a critical vital need.

The Council, which is responsible for peace and security, has been taken hostage by another shameless misuse of the veto. Today the Council, which in a normal world represents people's hopes for a better world, decided to starve people in need, deprive children of food and deny the elderly medical care. Russia's position is wrong because its decision goes against life. This is one of those days when it becomes harder to convincingly face the people who criticize the United Nations — those who think that there is something seriously wrong with our Organization, the Security Council and the way it functions nowadays, with the misuse of the veto and the sickening geopolitical games played at the expense of innocent life. Helping people in need should never be mixed with politics. One permanent member did that just now — unfortunately, unsurprisingly, regrettably and shamefully.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today we are once again being obliged to witness yet another act being played out by Western countries in the show entitled the cross-border mechanism for providing humanitarian assistance to Syria. Its main distinguishing characteristics are a complete disregard for the interests of the Syrian people, that they supposedly want so much to protect, and a desire to artificially provoke Russia into using the veto. We heard today and will probably hear again later Russia accused of killing the cross-border mechanism. It is dishonest and disingenuous. With the 12 or 9 months that were portrayed as a compromise in the extension of the cross-border mechanism, our Western partners wanted to gift the Syrians with a whole lot of nothing.

When we tried to reach a compromise in good faith, we saw what some of our colleagues had written in the correspondence on the issue. They said that they had already made an incredible number of concessions to Russia, specifically on cross-line activities, demining, refugee returns and early recovery. Is everything that I

just listed what we call concessions? Our colleagues are simply giving themselves away by calling provisions that draft resolution S/2023/506 should have contained by default “concessions” to Russia and Syria. It betrays their true attitude to the cross-border mechanism, which they are interested in only so that their aid can supply the terrorists in Idlib. And yes, they talk about a life-and-death situation in the context of the cross-border mechanism. It is all disingenuous and hypocritical. There are ways to help people without the cross-border mechanism if the desire is there. They try to convince us that closing the Bab Al-Hawa crossing will lead to a collapse of humanitarian aid to people in Idlib, completely ignoring the fact that through its own sovereign decision the Syrian Government has opened two additional and functioning cross-border points.

We would like to thank our Emirati, African and Brazilian colleagues, who made appreciable efforts to somehow avoid the show that was put on today and reach a compromise. To do that, it was above all important to consider the position of the State whose interests are directly affected by the draft resolution in question — that is, Syria. However, our colleagues from Switzerland, who have essentially monopolized the Syrian humanitarian file, proved completely incapable of that. From the very beginning they have been promoting the interests of the Western members of the Council alone, while ignoring Syria's legitimate demands. The result was a draft resolution that does not allow us even a hope of an actual improvement of the mechanism, the need for which many Council members have underscored. It is not a compromise text, as it has been disingenuously presented by some of our colleagues.

We are not about to give our blessing to a mechanism whereby terrorists from Idlib, with impunity, will be able to prevent cross-line humanitarian assistance provided for by the Security Council resolution from entering their enclave, while Western countries essentially fund early-recovery and humanitarian aid projects only in areas that are not under the legitimate Government's control and while Syria itself is being strangled with inhumane sanctions. Not to mention that, as we all know, the cross-border mechanism is an obvious violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria that was permissible five to seven years ago but looks completely anachronistic today. We would advise the United States representative to ask the Syrian people about the Syrian people. It would be a

better idea to talk to Syrians about the Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act, which will completely strangle Syria. And speaking of the Syrian people's suffering, let them talk about how their sanctions do not even allow Syrians to buy life-saving medicines and equipment.

The problems that the Swiss penholders for the Syrian dossier failed to resolve today have nothing to do with the draft resolution's timetable. They are about its content. Essentially, our colleagues from Switzerland unfortunately overplayed their hand and led us all into an impasse, making no effort to lead us out of it. Of course, we can get out of it and salvage the situation, but only by supporting our draft resolution (S/2023/507), which we will vote on after the voting on the Swiss draft resolution (S/2023/506), and that provides for practical measures to repair the cross-border mechanism. I am warning everyone right here and now that if our draft text is not supported, the cross-border mechanism can be closed. In the circumstances, we will not accept a technical rollover for any time period, and as our Swiss colleagues have eloquently indicated in the past few days, they are not willing to compromise and the Council has simply run out of time. I would like to ask any member who is interested in preserving the cross-border mechanism to bear that in mind when voting on our draft resolution, which takes genuine account of the interests of the Syrian people.

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

I want to start by joining others in thanking Brazil and Switzerland for their work as penholders. The Secretary-General was absolutely clear. He asked the Council to give humanitarians a 12-month mandate to deliver aid to 4.1 million people who desperately need it. The humanitarian partners who brief us regularly have set out the case for that again and again. And countries in the region that are directly impacted by the conflict in Syria have also called for a 12-month mandate. The partners I met on the ground last month at the Syrian border were clear. A 12-month mandate was a minimum lifeline, and all the more so after February's earthquakes.

The penholders and a majority of the Council worked in good faith to try and deliver that, including through an eleventh-hour compromise to try and find common ground. But Russia has yet again used its veto to restrict life-saving humanitarian access to 4 million Syrian people. There is no rational or moral argument to

veto this draft resolution. Humanitarian access should respond to humanitarian need and should not be taken hostage by Russia.

Since 2014, year after year, Russia has chipped away at this humanitarian lifeline. Today, it has continued its efforts to restrict access to people in need. As the United Kingdom, we will continue, as we have done every year, to put our humanitarian responsibility above politics. We call on Russia to do the same. We need to put the needs of the Syrian people first.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2023/507, submitted by the Russian Federation.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

China, Russian Federation

Against:

France, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Abstaining:

Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates

The President: The draft resolution received 2 votes in favour, 3 against and 10 abstentions. The draft resolution has not been adopted, having failed to obtain the required number of votes.

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

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council has just voted on two draft resolutions on the renewal of the mandate for cross-border humanitarian assistance into Syria, and neither of them was adopted. China regrets the failure of Council to reach consensus on this important matter.

China's position on the humanitarian issue in Syria has been consistent and clear. We have always maintained that humanitarian assistance to Syria should be provided in a way that respects the sovereignty of Syria and the Syrian Government's ownership. Cross-line relief should become the primary modality for humanitarian assistance to Syria. The cross-

border relief mechanism was an expedient, temporary arrangement made under specific circumstances, and there is a need to speed up the transition to cross-line assistance and to phase out the cross-border mechanism over time until its eventual discontinuation.

Over the past years, every time the Council has addressed this matter, the discussions have been invariably very heated and the debate fraught with difficulties and twists and turns. Since last July, the Council has, in effect, come to a regularized arrangement whereby this matter is reviewed every six months, which provides the Council with the necessary flexibility to assess the implementation of the resolution in a timely manner and to promptly adjust and optimize the mandate. Facts have shown that the length of the mandate's extension is not the main obstacle to humanitarian assistance to Syria, nor should it be the main obstacle to consensus among Council members. In considering today's mandate renewal, in view of the current humanitarian situation in Syria, China supports the continuation of the cross-border mechanism. At the same time, China maintains that the Council must take seriously the problems and inadequacies of the existing humanitarian relief mechanism and make efforts to address those problems and inadequacies.

First, practical measures should be taken to prevent the parties in de facto control of north-western Syria from once again obstructing cross-line relief efforts and to ensure a significant increase in the frequency and scale of cross-line relief efforts as compared to the same period last year.

Secondly, the scope of human humanitarian activities should be further expanded. Humanitarian demining should be integrated into early recovery, alongside efforts to support the Syrian people in key areas to achieve sustainable development in order to consolidate early recovery gains.

Thirdly, we must ensure adequate humanitarian funding for Syria, which is also an important aspect of measuring how well the resolution is implemented.

Fourthly, we must acknowledge the negative impact of unilateral sanctions on humanitarian assistance and take practical measures to eliminate those negative effects.

Generally speaking, any action taken by the Security Council should be conducive to easing the situation in the Middle East and promoting political reconciliation

between Syria and the countries concerned, rather than creating new tensions and difficulties.

In the recent period, Brazil and Switzerland did a great deal of work as co-penholders. The United Arab Emirates, China, Mozambique and other African members of the Council also made positive efforts towards resolving the issues at hand. However, the positions within the Council were sharply divided, and in particular, consensus failed to materialize on major issues such as unilateral sanctions. As a result, the Council was unable to make meaningful decisions on a comprehensive and effective solution to those issues.

Dialogue and consultation are the best possible means for resolving differences and forging consensus. In order to resolve the current difficult situation facing the Council, we call on all the parties to be rational and pragmatic, demonstrate the necessary political will, abandon double standards and the politicization of humanitarian issues, continue to negotiate patiently and to seek the greatest common denominator and solutions that accommodate each other's concerns.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): France regrets that draft resolution (S/2023/506), submitted by Switzerland and Brazil and supported by nearly all members of the Security Council, was not adopted owing to the lone veto of the Russian Federation. That decision jeopardizes international humanitarian aid in Syria and the survival of millions of people, at a time when the needs have not been so high since 2011.

France commends Switzerland and Brazil's tireless efforts to reach a compromise. Cross-border humanitarian aid remains vital for millions of Syrians. The earthquake of 6 February tragically demonstrated the importance of that channel. There is currently no alternative means for providing assistance to more than 4 million people, at a time when the Syrian regime continues to use aid for political ends.

The United Nations has been very clear. A one-year renewal is necessary for the planning of humanitarian operations. The Russian Federation has consistently opposed that duration out of cynicism and political manipulation. The draft resolution (S/2023/507) that it submitted is proof of that and clearly does not take into account the humanitarian needs in Syria. Let me remind the Council that more than 90 per cent of humanitarian aid to Syria is funded by the European Union and its member States, the United States, Canada and Japan. Russia provides virtually no humanitarian aid to Syria.

The humanitarian community unanimously agrees that a mere six-month renewal is insufficient. Humanitarian operations require predictability and stability. A renewal for six months would be all the more problematic, since it would plunge Syria into uncertainty in the middle of winter at the very moment when aid is most needed. That is why France voted against the text proposed by the Russian Federation, whose adoption, incidentally, was soundly rejected just now. France calls on all Council members to show unity and responsibility and to pursue dialogue with a view to renewing this vital mechanism, as the Secretary-General himself has called for, along with humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations. France's determination and mobilization can be counted on to that end.

Ms. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): The United States is committed to reauthorizing the cross-border mechanism. And as I said earlier this morning, that is a moral and humanitarian imperative. The Syrian people are counting on us to get it done. However, the United States could not in good conscience support the text that Russia forced on the Council. Russia's draft resolution (S/2023/507) would not have been able to ensure that aid would continue to reach the Syrian people during the cold winter months. Let us be clear. Both penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file made every effort to listen to all Council members and broker a compromise, and the 10 elected members of the Council were united. But Russia refused to meaningfully participate in negotiations and instead demanded that everyone accept its ultimatum, like a bully in the playground. For Russia's representatives it was my way or the highway, and they delayed the vote while they pretended to negotiate. And then this morning we hear them say that if their draft resolution is not adopted, it is over. That is their way of negotiating. It is not the behaviour of a responsible country, a permanent member of the Council. Russia was not forced to exercise its veto this morning. It chose to use it.

The United States will continue to work with all Council members to renew this life-saving mechanism, and we must urge Russia to reconsider its position, but in the meantime, I want to make it clear that we will continue to support the Syrian people.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): Brazil abstained in the voting on draft resolution S/2023/507, some elements of which, it is important to note, we included

in our co-penholders' draft (S/2023/506). In our capacity as co-penholder on this very difficult file on the Security Council agenda, we worked tirelessly and transparently with our dear Swiss friends and partners in this to garner support for a consensus text guided by the humanitarian imperative.

On one hand, Brazil has strong historical and human ties to Syria, especially because of the presence in our country of a long-established, sizable and vibrant Syrian-Brazilian community. We are deeply concerned about the acute humanitarian needs that the Syrian people are facing these days, especially in the wake of the deadly earthquake that hit it in February. On the other hand, we insist that the text that the co-penholders submitted is the best option for responding to the humanitarian imperative in Syria today. It provides for an extension of the current mechanism for a time period that corresponds more closely to that which was legitimately and authoritatively requested by all humanitarian actors, governmental and non-governmental, and in addition addresses legitimate concerns raised by Syria. Now the absolute priority is to ensure the uninterrupted and timely provision of crucial aid to all Syrians in need, regardless of any other political or ideological considerations. Given the continued disturbing impasse in the Council, it is paramount that we set aside political differences and respond effectively to the Syrian people's call for humanitarian assistance. In its role as co-penholder with Switzerland, Brazil remains committed to seeking common ground and forging an essential compromise, and will keep to that commitment until the end.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I asked for the floor not in order to enter into polemics with my French colleague as regards the assistance to Syria that he says Russia is not providing, nor to recall the Brussels Conference, to which Syrians are not invited and where aid is collected for people who are outside Syria, without giving anything to Syria itself and even creating obstacles to aid to Syria, including through early-recovery projects. That is not why I took the floor.

I understood that in one of the statements there was a mention of work on the future fate of the cross-border mechanism, and I would like to repeat what I said when I spoke after the vote on the Brazil-Switzerland resolution.

“Of course, we can ... salvage the situation, but only by supporting our draft resolution (S/2023/507), which we will vote on [after...] the Swiss draft resolution, and that provides for practical measures to repair the cross-border mechanism. I am warning everyone right here and now that if our draft is not supported, the cross-border mechanism could be closed down. In the circumstances, we will not accept a technical rollover for any time period”.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): From the first day of consultations related to the extension of the provisions of the resolution on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syria, the Syrian Arab Republic has firmly adopted a constructive approach aimed solely at meeting the humanitarian needs of Syrians in all parts of Syria, without any politicization, discrimination or exclusion, particularly in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that struck Syria in February. That disaster has had enormous humanitarian repercussions and significantly compounded an already fragile humanitarian situation. It has made it imperative to address the situation more effectively and promptly, deliver an expanded humanitarian response and find sustainable solutions to providing necessary basic services to Syrians.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, the primary party concerned with conveying the needs of Syrians, engaged in an open and positive manner with the humanitarian penholders and with friendly countries on the Security Council. We expressed our substantial concerns about their draft resolution clearly and transparently, based on an objective assessment of the application of resolution 2672 (2023), which has revealed weaknesses in its implementation and shown the scale of Syrians’ actual humanitarian needs. A quantum leap is needed to upgrade the humanitarian response so that it can address the living conditions and service needs of Syrians effectively. In view of that, my delegation expressed its view of how this Council should respond to the humanitarian situation.

First, there is a need to accelerate cross-line deliveries, particularly in view of the catastrophic failure to facilitate any humanitarian convoys in the past six months and in taking the necessary measures to that end.

Secondly, there is a need to strengthen early-recovery projects in order to incorporate sustainable development solutions, especially after the earthquake.

In addition, other vital sectors of importance to the Syrian people must be included in those projects, such as support for demining and the removal of explosive devices, given their significant impact on preserving Syrian lives.

Thirdly, the necessary requirements must be met for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes and lands.

Fourthly, there should be assurances that the illegal and immoral unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union do not interfere with humanitarian relief operations that benefit the Syrian people. They hinder the implementation of the early-recovery projects referred to in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/284). Those who spoke today of life and death should immediately lift their inhumane sanctions against the Syrians, rather than shedding tears for them.

Fifthly, concerns about the decrease in funding for the humanitarian response plan should be addressed and donor countries should be called to honour their pledges and increase humanitarian funding. The World Food Programme alone will reduce its food assistance to more than 2.5 million Syrians as a result of that funding shortfall.

Sixthly, the duration of the resolution should be six months, which would allow for a process of continuous evaluation and regular follow-up of the implementation of the aspects of that resolution.

We appreciate the efforts made by the humanitarian co-penholders, but it is regrettable that the draft resolution they presented (S/2023/506) did not reflect the aspirations of the Syrian people, nor did it reassure us that it could be implemented in good faith.

My delegation was surprised by the insistence on extending the mandate of the cross-border mechanism for a period of more than six months under the pretext of the need for planning and predictability. At the same time, we are left wondering how planning and predictability can be ensured in the light of the huge funding shortfall, which has not yet reached 12 per cent of what is needed this year.

My delegation deplores the insistence of some Western delegations in the Council on distorting the facts and diverting the debate from the justified and objective concerns expressed and supported by the delegation of the Russian Federation, among others. The

continued politicization of humanitarian work by the United States and its Western allies, their obstruction of any sincere effort to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and their perseverance in using the cross-border mechanism as a tool of political pressure and blackmail against my country is what led to the divisive positions within the Council that we have witnessed today.

My delegation thanks the delegation of the Russian Federation for its initiative to submit the draft resolution just voted on (S/2023/507). Our thanks go also to China for its support based on its keenness to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria by strengthening aspects of resolution 2672 (2023) and ensuring the implementation of its essential pillars

to reflect positively on the humanitarian situation in Syria. The draft resolution submitted by the delegation of the Russian Federation represents a sincere attempt to enable the Council to fulfil the responsibility entrusted to it to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria in a real and effective manner.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to thank the delegation of our sisterly the United Arab Emirates for its sincere efforts to reach a consensus-based text. The time has come for the Security Council to unite around an acceptable objective and balanced approach to the humanitarian issue in Syria aimed solely at meeting the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.