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Seventy-seventh year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri	(Ghana)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Ms. Koumby Missambo
	India	Mrs. Kamboj
	Ireland	Mr. Mythen
	Kenya	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico	Mr. Ríos Sánchez
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: In repeated briefings, I have warned of the dangers of military escalation in Syria. I am here in person today to tell the Security Council that escalatory dynamics are taking place, and that is worrisome and dangerous.

For many months, we have seen a slow increase in mutual strikes between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), on one side, and Türkiye and armed opposition groups, on the other, across northern Syria and with violence spilling over into Turkish territory. On 20 November, a week after the terrible bombing in Istanbul, which Türkiye attributed to "the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units" (PKK/YPG) — a claim that the SDF denied — Türkiye launched what it called the Claw-Sword Operation.

Turkish airstrikes immediately hit a large number of what they say were "YPG/PKK" targets across northern Syria and Iraq. The SDF and its affiliates say that some of those strikes hit civilian infrastructure and resulted in civilian casualties. There were also reports of SDF strikes on Turkish forces and armed opposition-controlled areas and inside of Turkish territory, with some reportedly hitting civilian infrastructure and resulting in civilian casualties.

The Secretary-General has called for all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation, whether in the air or on the ground. Let me stress that Türkiye, the armed opposition and the SDF should de-escalate now.

That call for restraint and de-escalation is relevant for all other areas in Syria too.

Idlib has seen very concerning incidents, including rounds of pro-Government air and ground-based strikes. Some of those hit camps for internally displaced persons, killing and injuring civilians, destroying tents and displacing hundreds of families, while others damaged health-care infrastructure. There were reported attacks by Security Council-listed group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham on Government forces and Government-controlled areas, with civilian casualties.

Strikes attributed to Israel hit Damascus, Homs, Hama and Latakia, prompting Syrian Government anti-aircraft fire in response. There were reports of airstrikes on the border between Syria and Iraq. The US said that rockets hit US-led coalition forces in Al-Shaddadi.

Dara'a, in the south, has seen a continuation of security incidents and tensions, as well as fresh military clashes between local factions and Syrian Government forces, amid a reported anti-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant operation by former opposition fighters, as well as security incidents on the border, which Amman related to drug smuggling.

The horrific rape and murder of two Egyptian girls reminds us that the situation in Al-Hol camp remains of grave concern.

The trend lines are deeply worrisome and carry real dangers of further escalation. Let me warn the Security Council of the scenario where large-scale military operations by one actor then have knock-on effects across all other theatres, unravelling the strategic stalemate that has brought about a measure of relative calm for almost three years. Such an escalation would not only compound the devastating harm already meted out to Syrian civilians, but it would also further endanger regional stability. And listed terrorist groups that are subdued but not defeated would immediately take advantage of any fresh instability.

Let me therefore call loudly and clearly on all actors to restrain themselves and engage in serious efforts to reinstate the calm and move towards a nationwide

ceasefire and a cooperative approach to counter terrorism in line with international humanitarian law.

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is absolutely essential. Syria needs less military activity and more focus on the political process and on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That was the message we have been relaying to members of the ceasefire task force in Geneva and that last week I brought to Astana, where I met with senior representatives of Iran, Russia and Türkiye, as well as Government and opposition representatives and representatives of Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon.

I want to remind the Council that Syrian civilians continue to experience terrible suffering in myriad ways, beyond the effects of violent conflict. Members know that 6.8 million have been forced to flee and remain internally displaced. Another 6.8 million are refugees. Some 14.6 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance, and I am sure Mr. Griffiths will say more about that. Those needs have grown in recent years in lockstep with catastrophic economic conditions resulting from more than a decade of war and conflict, corruption, mismanagement, the Lebanese financial crisis, the coronavirus disease, sanctions and the war in Ukraine. Only this week we saw the Syrian pound reach record lows. It is clear that steps from both the Government and outsiders are needed to halt the economic crisis. Let me remind members that any humanitarian effects of sanctions that could exacerbate the plight of ordinary Syrians must be avoided and mitigated, particularly in terms of overcompliance.

Let me also remind the Council that untold numbers of Syrians continue to see their human rights violated. I once again raised the issue of arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances and missing persons with all the key interlocutors whom I met in Astana last week, including senior representatives of the Syrian Government. Transparency, clear data and monitoring mechanisms remain core to the credibility of any release initiatives. My team also participated in the Astana Working Group on the Release of Detainees/Abductees, Handover of Bodies and Identification of Missing Persons. We reiterated our call for more substantive and frequent engagement in that area if some measure of concrete progress is to be achieved.

We continue to hold humanitarian task force meetings in Geneva and call for increased and unfettered humanitarian access to all people in need throughout

Syria via all modalities. Resolution 2642 (2022) is enabling cross-border access while highlighting the need for enhanced cross-line access, as well as early recovery, and I understand that progress has indeed been made in that area. It is important that the Council continue supporting that framework, not least as we see a cholera crisis unfolding in Syria.

We continue to engage the wider spectrum of Syrian stakeholders, among other things via the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and Civil Society Support Room, while seeking active advice on implementing resolution 2254 (2015). As always, I appreciated meeting members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board when they met recently in Geneva and conveyed their concern about the fact that the political process seemed to be at an impasse.

In the light of the realities on the ground and in the political context, I will continue to work closely with all stakeholders on step-for-step confidence-building measures to help build trust and confidence among all players and advance resolution 2254 (2015). I can see many areas where stakeholders could take mutual, reciprocal and verifiable steps that would begin to address legitimate concerns and, most importantly, the needs of Syrian civilians by alleviating suffering and contributing to a safe, calm and neutral environment, which is an essential element of the political process. I appreciate the increased interest in that approach from many players, including the members of the Security Council, several of whom have deepened the dialogue with me in sketching out steps that they could take. I look forward to further engagement with the Syrian Government on the issue when I visit Damascus next week, and of course to discussions on the full range of issues outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), as I will shortly also engage with the Syrian Negotiations Commission.

In that regard, I am concerned that the Syrian Constitutional Committee has not met for six months, as it is the only process in which Syrians nominated by the Government, the opposition and civil society meet and discuss aspects of their common future. The longer it lies dormant, the harder it will be to resume, and the absence of a credible political process can only promote further conflict and instability. The Russian Federation raised issues about the venue of the Constitutional Committee meetings that were comprehensively addressed, and I thank the Swiss authorities for their receptivity. A further issue has now been raised that is not in Swiss hands. In any case, if the will exists to

prioritize the importance of seeing the Syrians resume their work, I believe that there is a clear way forward that would enable the process to resume in Geneva. In Astana I appealed to the guarantors to support my call for the Constitutional Committee to meet in Geneva in January. If and when the Committee reconvenes, it will be important to ensure that there is some forward movement on the substance. I have specifically appealed to the Government co-Chair of the Committee to respond constructively to ideas that were shared in June and discussed in various contexts with him in order to expedite the work of the Committee. As the terms of reference stated, we must work expeditiously and continuously to produce results and make steady progress. That is essential if the Syrian people are to see the Constitutional Committee as a credible process.

I feel that we are at something of a fork in the road. I am troubled by the thought of a major military operation being resumed after three years of relative calm. I fear what that would mean for Syrian civilians and for wider regional security. I equally fear a scenario where the situation escalates, in part because today there are no serious efforts to resolve the conflict politically. However, in my opinion, there is a clear way forward. The steps we must take in the weeks ahead are eminently possible. Let me highlight a few of them. We should step back from escalation and restore relative calm on the ground, renew the framework in the Security Council on the humanitarian front, resume and make more substantive the Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva, prioritize work on the detained, disappeared and missing and deepen our work on identifying and implementing initial step-for-step confidence-building measures.

Through that approach, incremental progress would be achievable and would help create a dynamic and set us on the path to a more ambitious goal — a comprehensive political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians and restores Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. The alternative is deeper suffering and more violence and instability. I appeal to all the parties to reject that path and find ways of cooperating on a more constructive way forward.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: I want to say that the force of Mr. Pedersen's words absolutely gives us a context for today's discussion. I am very grateful to him for that.

The Council has heard me or my Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Joyce Msuya, brief members on the humanitarian situation in Syria for the past year at least once a month. My statements are completely predictable. I tend to speak about numbers — the number of trucks crossing lines, the number of early-recovery projects implemented and where they are situated and how many jobs are created. Those are technical details.

Everyone has heard our responses to the questions in last week's informal interactive dialogue, and of course I will not repeat them today. We need to focus our attention back on the people of Syria and re-evaluate how effectively we meet even the most basic of their needs, while taking into account the alarming concerns that Mr. Pedersen shared with us today.

The trend is clear: more people need our support each year to survive. The slight ray of hope that emerged in 2017, when the number of people in need started to decline, has quickly been erased since 2020. We expect to see a surge in the number of people needing humanitarian assistance — from 14.6 million this year to more than 15 million in 2023. In other words, almost 12 years since the conflict in Syria started, 80 per cent of the country's population depend on aid. And as I have said in this Chamber many times, we continue to fail them in that respect each month, each year, a little bit more, as the gap between needs and funding continues to grow.

Communities in Syria are caught in the middle of extremes. They have lived through a cataclysm. They are struggling to survive. Earlier this month, as Mr. Pedersen so clearly outlined, shelling, air strikes and clashes in the vicinity of Idlib city destroyed the homes of hundreds of displaced families in three camps supported by humanitarian organizations. At least nine civilians were killed and 75 were injured, including children. More than 400 families were displaced in that attack alone. Only last week, air strikes struck close to a clinic of the Bab Al-Hawa hospital, causing damage and leading to the evacuation of at least 90 patients who were receiving care in that hospital, as well as aid and health workers and other civilians. The recent hostilities in the north-west and north-east of Syria, as Mr. Pedersen noted, have had a detrimental impact on

civilian lives and critical civilian infrastructure, which is of course protected in principle by international humanitarian law. Civilians have fled their homes in both Aleppo and Al-Hasakah governorates. Some humanitarian services had to be temporarily suspended. I repeat, as I always do, that all parties must take care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout their military operations, please. Like Mr. Pedersen — I will not repeat what he said — I am equally horrified by the death of two girls, 12 and 15 years old, in Al-Hol camp. Life there is a misery, but their death is a tragedy.

Insufficient rainfall and severe drought-like conditions combined with low water levels in the Euphrates River, as well as damaged water infrastructure, continue to deprive millions of people of safe drinking water — that is as good an example as one will get anywhere of the consequences of conflict and climate change coming together. We have consistently alerted the Security Council to the water crisis in northern Syria and have discussed it in this Chamber. The current rapid spread of cholera, a waterborne disease, should therefore come as no surprise, and neither should the fact that cholera has also seeped into Lebanon. As we know only too well, disease knows no borders.

People in Syria struggle a little bit more every day to put food on the table. Skyrocketing global food prices have hit them particularly hard, since the country is highly dependent on the import of essential commodities — a supply chain now imperilled by events elsewhere. Supply chain disruptions for key staples, such as wheat and vegetable oil, as well as high inflation rates, have further contributed to the surge in food prices, which have also been affected by the increase in transport costs due to energy price increases. And the price of the World Food Programme's standard food basket has increased fourfold in the past two years. Prices for most commodities in it climbed by no less than 40 per cent this year alone — I repeat, a 40 per cent increase in staples this year alone. Another harsh winter, which is soon to be with us, will soon bring snowstorms, cold weather, strong winds, rains and flooding to millions of families who live in tents, who have lived there for years, who know what is coming but have no way to avoid it.

We could go on with more examples, but that is not the purpose of this briefing. Today we are exactly six weeks away from yet another expiration of the authorization by the Security Council of cross-border

assistance, for which we are grateful. As I have said before each time, cross-line deliveries can — and should and must and will — be an important complement to cross-border operations, and we hope to see further progress in those operations as well. Cross-border operations remain essential nonetheless for the lives of the more than 4 million people who now live in the north-west.

I return, in conclusion, to the points made by my colleague and friend Special Envoy Geir Pedersen. What the people of Syria want is to see me go and him to arrive, to see the need for aid to disappear and the arrival of peace to be celebrated among them and shared by them. That is the principal task and the *raison d'être* of the Security Council, and we must hope that we will soon see those things happen.

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

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

Ms. Juul (Norway): I deliver this statement on behalf of the co-penholders on the Syria humanitarian file, namely, Ireland and Norway.

Let me first thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his sobering briefing, and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for his candid statement to the Security Council today. The humanitarian situation in Syria is dire, and we appreciate the clear message to the Council with regard to humanitarian access.

We are alarmed by the continued escalation of hostilities in Syria. People are being killed and maimed, families are again being displaced and separated, many persons are still missing from previous fighting and infrastructure is once again being destroyed. International humanitarian law must be respected, and civilians must be protected. The cold winter will place a heavy additional burden on people who are struggling to survive and already face growing food insecurity, prevailing water shortages, a widespread cholera outbreak and scarcity of fuel and energy. We are particularly concerned by the danger and desperation experienced by children in camps and detention facilities in Syria. With the multitude of crises, life-saving aid and protection must continue to be delivered. People need food, water, medicine and warm, safe and dignified shelter.

It is also important to continue to build resilience through humanitarian early-recovery projects,

including those involving electricity, in order to restore access to basic services. We commend the United Nations and humanitarian organizations for their efforts in that regard. The vast humanitarian needs in Syria are a clear example of how the destruction of civilian infrastructure affects civilians for years. Syria has also reportedly recorded the highest number of landmine casualties anywhere in the world. The efficient clearance of mines and other explosive remnants of war is important to protect civilians from the protracted harm caused by more than a decade of conflict. Mine clearance brings children back to schools, enables the scaling up of food production and livelihoods and is critical for humanitarian access.

As co-penholders, Ireland and Norway have been vocal in their support for the use of all modalities for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian access must not be denied. Humanitarian organizations must be able to use the most effective access modalities to reach the many who need humanitarian assistance and protection. We commend the progress made with cross-line deliveries to all parts of Syria, including to the north-west, the north-east and recently to Ras Al-Ayn. This must continue.

The humanitarian cross-border mechanism remains the critical lifeline for the delivery of the humanitarian response to the north-west. There is currently no substitute that could replace the scale and volume of the transparent and well-monitored humanitarian cross-border mechanism. With the onset of a cold and harsh winter, humanitarian needs will again rise. It is therefore imperative that the Council remain committed to following up on resolution 2642 (2022) in good faith by confirming the extension of the humanitarian cross-border mechanism. This is a matter of life and death for millions. The Security Council must not fail them. We must give them hope for a better future.

I will now make this statement in my national capacity on the political situation in Syria.

Like the Special Envoy, we are deeply worried by the continued escalation of hostilities in Syria, which may further destabilize the region. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and abide by their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Attacks against civilians are simply unacceptable and only serve to exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation. We urge all parties involved to take positive steps to contribute to lowering tensions.

There are no military solutions to the conflict in Syria. Syria needs a nationwide ceasefire. For this, the parties must sit down together at the negotiation table. I would like to reiterate Norway's full support for the work of the Special Envoy and his step-for-step approach, and I would underline the importance of implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

We are disappointed by the continued lack of progress on the political track, namely, the stalled process in the Constitutional Committee. Let me reiterate that progress towards finding a sustainable end to the conflict must be a priority for us all. We welcome the recent Astana talks and continue to urge all parties to cooperate constructively with Special Envoy Pedersen.

We were pleased to note the convening earlier in November of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board in Geneva, whose participation and advice on the political process is essential to addressing the concerns of those most affected by the conflict. Similarly, we urge continued focus on the important issue of missing and arbitrarily detained persons in Syria. Accountability and justice will serve as the building blocks for lasting peace in Syria.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): Let me begin by acknowledging and thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings.

India supports Secretary-General's call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid any further escalation. We attach utmost importance to maintaining the ceasefire agreed between the various parties in March 2020 and also reiterate the utmost respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We are gravely concerned about reports of the impact of increasing hostilities against civilians, including in internally displaced person camps in Idlib. We emphasize that civilians and civilian infrastructure must continue to be protected in accordance with international law. Such acts of violence by neighbouring States set us back on the pursuit of a nationwide ceasefire, as mandated by resolution 2254 (2015), which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council in 2015 (see S/PV.7588).

India continues to support the Special Envoy's step-for-step approach, for, in our view, his efforts towards making incremental progress by engaging with all

parties is the only way to end this protracted conflict, which is now in its twelfth year. To this end, we support the Special Envoy's engagements with Damascus and the Astana guarantors as well as with other regional partners, namely, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and Jordan. We need to continue to build bridges of trust between all sides.

On the humanitarian side, as Syria is staring at a long and hard winter, the outbreak of cholera has further added to the woes of Syrian people. We continue to urge for greater donor support for the humanitarian resource plan for Syria, which remains chronically underfunded and woefully inadequate to meet the humanitarian needs of over 15 million Syrians. We continue to call on the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to further increase the focus on early-recovery projects, including power, water and health services, which are also meant to generate livelihood opportunities and support for the most vulnerable sections of the Syrian population, including the elderly, women and children. We must not politicize humanitarian development. We also look forward to the discussion on the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian assistance to Syria due in December.

While it is true that all modalities of aid delivery must be explored for delivering aid to Syria, we continue to believe that the cross-border aid mechanism cannot be allowed to become an end in itself. We call upon OCHA and other United Nations agencies to continue to hold a constructive engagement with Damascus for ensuring greater efficacy for cross-line aid operations. I would also add that, as the Chair of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, we continue to be concerned by reports of resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the region and continue to call on all sides to tackle the menace of terrorism with utmost seriousness.

Finally, let me conclude with a brief report on the recent successful visit to India by Syria's Foreign Minister. During the visit, discussions focused on the reconstruction of Syria, including through extending humanitarian assistance and development support, capacity-building for Syrian youth and collaboration in such sectors as renewable energy, information technology and pharmaceuticals. India already established a next-generation centre for information technology in Damascus last October and provided more than 1,500 individual scholarships, including approximately 200 scholarships this year, for Syrian

students to continue their studies in India in diverse streams. We have recently organized, in Damascus, artificial-limb fitment camps, known as the Jaipur Foot, for the benefit of the Syrian population. India has also offered lines of credit worth \$280 million for building a power plant and a steel plant in the country.

In conclusion, we stand ready to do more in future to help our Syrian brothers and sisters in their hour of need. India's continued support to Syria in its endeavour to seek lasting peace and stability remains steadfast and unwavering.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

What we heard today confirms that the overall situation in Syria remains tense. The terrorist threat on the ground remains, alongside an ongoing unlawful foreign military presence in the north, north-east and south of Syria, while the humanitarian, social and economic situation is deteriorating. The suffocating unilateral sanctions are having a deleterious effect, and the results of that are compounded by the plundering of the country's natural resources and insufficient international assistance, mainly in the sphere of early recovery.

Against the backdrop of another military escalation along the northern borders, cells of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have been activated, mainly in the Afrin region. Terrorist activity also remains high in the south of the country, using the cover of the so-called security area established arbitrarily by Washington near Al-Tanf.

Regarding the political track of a Syrian settlement, we have consistently supported the promotion of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated political process within the framework established by resolution 2254 (2015). We note the efforts of Geir Pedersen to resume and improve of the Constitutional Committee. At the same time, we believe that fundamental decisions on the modalities for holding further rounds of inter-Syrian dialogue in the context of the Committee should be taken by the Syrians themselves without external interference. In that regard, we support the Special Envoy's contacts with Damascus and representatives of the opposition,

which, unlike the step-for-step initiative, is his explicit mandate.

Together with our partners in the Astana format, Iran and Türkiye, we held the nineteenth international meeting on Syria in Astana on 22 and 23 November, which resulted in a joint statement. We intend to continue to contribute to achieving long-term normalization in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Rukban and Al-Hol refugee camps continue to be breeding grounds for terrorism and illegal activities. In the latter, attacks on residents have become a cruel routine. The recent incident of the beheading of two young girls is deeply shocking. The responsibility for what happens in those camps lies entirely with the State that occupies the trans-Euphrates area and Al-Tanf. We urge Washington to take concrete measures to ensure that the United States occupying forces in Syria comply with international humanitarian law, rather than calling for compliance with it.

Long-term and lasting peace and security on the ground can be achieved only by fully restoring Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while eradicating the terrorist hotbeds of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in Idlib and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in the trans-Euphrates region.

Under those conditions, and given the deteriorating humanitarian situation, Syrians continue to struggle for survival. The evidence is clear: there has been a massive outbreak of cholera in all the country's provinces, compounded by hepatitis. The main cause is acute water shortages, primarily because of the limited flow of the Euphrates River and the destruction of water and electricity infrastructure.

Food shortages hit another record high, with 12 million people already affected and another 2 million at risk of facing the same situation. The main problems are unilateral sanctions and the chronic underfunding of the United Nations humanitarian plan for Syria, under which, at the behest of Western donors, the vast majority of funding for early-recovery projects goes to areas outside the control of Damascus, which are inhabited by less than a third of the country's population. At the same time, so-called fighters against terrorism continue to plunder Syria's natural resources. Just last month, more than 160 truckloads of oil and wheat were transported from Syria to Iraq with the help of the United States military. Yet, year after year for more than a decade, the United Nations has

managed to collect at best half of the funds requested for the implementation of a humanitarian plan for the country, with only 44 per cent of the funds received as of late November.

A topic that our former Western partners are trying to avoid discussing at all costs deserves particular consideration. I am referring to unilateral sanctions. During her recent visit to Syria, the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Ms. Douhan, collected an extensive body of evidence regarding not only the damage caused by such illegal restrictions, including to United Nations humanitarian operations, but also the futility of the so-called humanitarian exemptions. Her report is readily available on the Internet. We believe that the lack of any mention in the Secretary-General's December special report of the problem of sanctions and ways to resolve it would be a great omission on the part of the United Nations Secretariat. In addition, we request the newly appointed United Nations Resident Coordinator in Damascus, Mr. El-Mostafa Benlamlih, to expedite the work on a separate relevant case study, which we have been hearing about for a year.

After the issuance of the Secretary-General's special report, we hope to hold a final round of informal interactive talks to substantively discuss the progress on the Syrian humanitarian track over the past six months. During the discussion, we particularly expect to hear from the new United Nations Head of Office in Gaziantep, Türkiye, Mr. Justin Brady. In that way, we want to obtain the information that we need to make an informed decision on the future of resolution 2642 (2022). We look forward to an engaged and constructive approach to this aspect by our Security Council colleagues.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

Today I would like to focus my remarks on four pressing challenges in Syria: the stalled effort to reach a political solution, the need for a nationwide ceasefire, the acute humanitarian crisis and the urgency of renewing the cross-border mandate.

First, we note Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to reconvene the Constitutional Committee. It is long past due to achieve a political solution to the conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). One would hope that our Russian colleagues would share that goal, but their

actions suggest otherwise. Russia continues to obstruct progress by protesting arbitrary details, and those complaints give cover to the Al-Assad regime, which seems all too happy to maintain the status quo. The people of Syria, who have endured far too much pain and violence, deserve better. They deserve peace. We call on the Al-Assad regime to commit to engaging in the Constitutional Committee meetings in good faith.

Secondly, we reiterate our call for the cessation of violence in north-west Syria. The incidents, so far sporadic, between rival factions risk spiralling into widespread fighting. It is incumbent upon all sides to agree to, and implement, a comprehensive, nationwide ceasefire that protects civilians from violence. The United States urges an immediate de-escalation in northern Syria. We are deeply concerned by the recent military actions, which destabilize the region, threaten our shared goal to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and endanger civilians and United States personnel.

As we work towards a sustained peace, we must address the situation at the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps, homes to thousands of third-country nationals, and in detention centres in north-east Syria. As we just heard reported by the Special Envoy, those camps are plagued by violence, and thousands of vulnerable children are growing up without access to education and other basic services. We also know that the camps and detention facilities are targets for ISIS, underscoring the urgency to facilitate voluntary, safe and dignified returns and repatriation, which we call on all States to support.

Thirdly, the Council has a solemn responsibility to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, which, 11 years into the conflict, has never been more dire, and which has been exacerbated by the intensification of violence across the country, the growing cholera outbreak and the onset of winter. We know that cross-border and cross-line aid and early-recovery efforts are critical to meeting the needs on the ground. We welcome reports from United Nations humanitarian officials that the cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance is reaching the most vulnerable and that cross-line deliveries have increased in both frequency and scale. We also welcome reports of the nationwide implementation of early-recovery projects designed to more efficiently increase vulnerable Syrians' access to basic services.

The United States has delivered on its commitment to funding early-recovery activities, including through contributions to the United Nations pooled fund. Between January and September of this year, the United Nations worked to programme more than \$500 million towards 374 early-recovery projects. Those projects were in all 14 governorates of Syria — all 14. There is no denying that that represents real progress in early recovery. More than 2.4 million Syrians have directly benefited from that work. Unfounded claims attributing the humanitarian crisis to sanctions, allegedly lacklustre Western funding and supposed shortcomings in early-recovery programmes are deliberate misinformation, malicious in intent and nothing but a dangerous distraction designed to steer the conversation away from the real issue at hand, which is renewing the cross-border mechanism in Syria.

Finally, as the cholera outbreak spreads and the cold winter sets in, the cross-border mechanism has never been more vital. If we come together and do the right thing, we will save lives — plain and simple. We must ensure the continued, transparent, efficient and apolitical delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of Syrians in dire need. That is not a political decision. It is a decision based on the needs on the ground. We have heard time and again from the experts inside and outside Syria that the cross-border operation is the difference between life and death. Its continuation is a moral imperative, as the Secretary-General rightly told the Council this summer (see S/PV.9068). We cannot allow attempts to make noise on issues unrelated to the delivery of humanitarian aid to cloud the clarity of this choice. The Council will need to act in the next six weeks to continue the mechanism in accordance with resolution 2642 (2022).

The four challenges that I have laid out today will not be resolved overnight, but as members of the Council we have a responsibility to do everything in our power to make forward progress and build a more just, peaceful and secure future for the Syrian people.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Let me start by thanking Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their comprehensive and informative briefings, which reveal even more clearly the serious situation facing Syria and the Syrian people. I also welcome the delegations of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye to this meeting.

Brazil is alarmed by the upsurge in fighting and violence in Syria. We condemn the attacks that are affecting densely populated camps for internally displaced persons such as those in rural Idlib in north-western Syria, and which have caused further deaths, injuries and displacement. Once again, civilians are suffering as a result of the tragic consequences of continuing hostilities. All attacks on civilians must cease immediately. International humanitarian law must be upheld, and that applies to counter-terrorism activities as well. We join the Secretary-General in his repeated calls to all the parties to exercise maximum restraint, maintain the ceasefires agreed on and respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Brazil welcomes the conclusion of the nineteenth round of Astana talks in Kazakhstan, which reaffirmed commitments to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which should be universally respected and complied with. Resolution 2254 (2015) established a basis for the political process aimed at solving the Syrian conflict by peaceful means and negotiations. We thank the Special Envoy for his commitment to the implementation of all the applicable Security Council resolutions and for his continuing engagement with a wide array of stakeholders, working to foster confidence among the parties while dealing with crucial issues such as that of missing persons. The Constitutional Committee must resume its work so that we can move forward. And we agree with Mr. Pedersen that a decision on the venue will lead nowhere if the parties do not agree to return to the negotiation table with a renewed commitment to concrete results.

According to the World Food Programme, conflict, food, energy prices and drought-constrained agriculture are crippling people's ability to counter food insecurity, not only in Syria but in many countries of the region. And after long years of conflict, countries have obviously become more vulnerable to disease outbreaks, including those that can be prevented by ensuring access to clean water, basic sanitation and appropriate housing. In Syria we are now seeing outbreaks of cholera and leishmaniasis. We hope that the ongoing early-recovery actions, together with the tireless work being done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization and other United Nations agencies on the ground, can help alleviate the suffering of people in Syria. As

the challenges and crises mount, humanitarian funds grow increasingly scarce. With the arrival of winter, we are once again faced with the precarious situation of people, most of them women and children, living in makeshift tents. According to OCHA, 6 million people are in need of winter assistance. Significant funding gaps persist, and the precarious humanitarian situation clearly exacerbates security problems, as we have seen in Al-Hol camp, for instance.

Let me assure the Council that Brazil remains committed to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process as a means to ensure a political resolution of the conflict. Our credentials for playing a constructive role in that regard are reinforced by the historical ties that bind Brazilians and Syrians through our humanitarian cooperation, including our national policy on Syrian refugees, as well as by our continuing diplomatic presence in Damascus during even the most acute phases of the conflict. Soon the Security Council will once more have to take action related to the expiration of the authorization of cross-border humanitarian assistance. Brazil will continue to support the need for humanitarian assistance across Syria through all modalities, and we sincerely hope that the Council can find common ground through a process that is as smooth as possible. We look forward to the upcoming report of the Secretary-General and to any additional information on how we can work to alleviate the impact of sanctions for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

Every time we meet here to discuss the situation in Syria, we look for a thread of good news. Unfortunately, we end up lamenting how the situation is going from bad to worse, with little or no clear prospect of progress in sight. And this time is no different. The humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate. Innocent civilians continue to be killed, and the political process, despite the tremendous and much-appreciated efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen, exists in name only. We remain deeply distressed by the continued wanton killing and widespread destruction in Syria, including the shelling of civilian infrastructure and the recent air strikes and indiscriminate shelling in Idlib that killed nine civilians, including women and children, and injured 75 others. The deliberate destruction of basic civilian infrastructure continues to create further obstacles to the delivery of aid, forcing more people to

become displaced. There are also reports of the use of cluster munitions.

Humanitarian needs, as described by Under-Secretary-General Griffiths, remain dire and reflect the overall bleak and desperate situation in the country. Winter and the cold weather will only worsen the situation for millions in need, including the deteriorating situation in the Al-Hol and Rukban displacement camps. We greatly value the work of the United Nations and all countries that contribute to its programmes in their efforts to alleviate suffering. We support all modalities for delivering aid to those in need and support the full implementation of resolution 2642 (2022). The cross-border delivery of aid is and remains an indispensable part of the operation by the United Nations and its partners to reach all people in need. Cross-line operations can complement cross-border access, but they are not and cannot be an alternative to it. Therefore, the extension of the cross-border mechanism in January 2023 — a few weeks from now — is vital, and we expect all members of the Council to be united in delivering for the Syrian people. We should do everything to avoid the politicization of basic humanitarian aid and call on all actors to refrain from using humanitarian access as an object of undue political games.

From day one, the situation in Syria has been and remains a disastrous humanmade catastrophe that continues to worsen. We have reiterated many times that the political process is vital to begin to address the daunting challenges. Sadly, nothing has changed on that front. We used to count successive meetings, despite the lack of results — now they are not even being held at all. We know why and who is responsible: the Syrian regime and its backers continue to frustrate and block all meaningful steps towards a political transition. The Syrian regime continues to inflict pain and suffering on its people, whom it claims to represent. It continues to kill, arbitrarily detain and forcibly disappear civilians. Inflicting untold pain on civilians is the true trademark of the Syrian regime — there is no other way to describe it. It continues to keep nearly every single family in the dark with regard to the whereabouts of the more than 130,000 persons who are missing without a trace. Such despicable behaviour cannot be tolerated and must be condemned by all, including those present in the Council.

We welcome the proposal to set up a mechanism to address the issue of missing persons and stand ready to

work together with all countries of goodwill to make it a reality. We reiterate our call for the immediate release of those arbitrarily detained, for the fate and whereabouts of all those forcibly disappeared to be revealed and for access to be provided to all places of detention. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy to shed light on that tragedy and provide closure for the aggrieved. We deplore all crimes committed in Syria and reiterate our call for those responsible to be held fully accountable. Syrians need all the help they can get. The situation will not change overnight, but for the Syrian people to advance towards a free and democratic country, impunity must be defeated and a genuine political process must be put in place in good faith.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their clear briefings and their commitment to Syria.

The key to ending the conflict is through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome Special Envoy Pedersen's untiring efforts to facilitate a sustainable resolution to the conflict and the clear steps he set out this morning. Reconvening the Constitutional Committee in Geneva is the step we particularly need to see, and Russia must stop standing in the way of that. Political progress is desperately needed. While the conflict drags on, we continue to receive reports of torture and killings in detention centres across Syria, in particular at Sednaya prison. United Nations States Members have been clear in condemning those systematic violations of human rights, and this month the Third Committee adopted a draft resolution on human rights in Syria (A/C.3/77/L.36/Rev.1). We condemn those violations and again call for the release of detainees.

In that context, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. This is clearly not about sanctions, which are strictly enforced against the entities involved in repressing the civilian population and include specific humanitarian provisions and exemptions. Let us therefore be clear about the facts: 14.6 million Syrians are in desperate need of humanitarian aid, which is a huge increase since three other border crossings were unnecessarily closed in 2020. The United Nations has repeatedly told us that the cross-border mechanism is a lifeline for 4.1 million people. On average, 20 trucks of food and life-saving medicines passing through Bab Al-Hawa reach people in need every day. Nothing can replace the scope or scale of that cross-border

humanitarian operation, which must continue. The fate of that mandate is the fate of 4.1 million people who rely on its assistance. Those who are concerned with the humanitarian situation will not delay or compromise that lifeline.

The current cholera outbreak highlights the importance of an effective and predictable United Nations response, including in early recovery; 30 per cent of the United Kingdom's funding to Syria in 2022 will go to such projects, most of which are focused on water and health care. We also welcome progress on cross-line efforts, but that is slowed by the Syrian regime's insistence on new approvals for each convoy, as well as the ongoing fighting. It is simply impossible to replicate with cross-line assistance what is being delivered through the cross-border operation. As winter approaches, the Council should do everything it can to respond to the needs of the Syrian people.

Mr. Ríos Sánchez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings. I also welcome the presence of the delegations of Syria, Iran and Türkiye.

Mexico has taken note with great concern of the report of the Special Envoy, to whom we reiterate our full support. The increase in violence in the north-east and north-west of Syria is cause for alarm. We also acknowledge the consultations he held with key international partners in recent weeks, including in the Astana format, as well as his meetings with civil society, in particular with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. As the Special Envoy mentioned, we once again highlight the need to resume the work of the Constitutional Committee, which has not met for six months.

Economic reconstruction, the safe and voluntary return of refugees and the fight against terrorism are complex issues that can be resolved only with the political will of the parties. In that regard, we insist that any action in the fight against terrorism must comply with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Once again, we express our alarm at the abuse of invocations of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, which are supposedly justified in the name of the fight against terrorism. We call for full respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as the Secretary-General has underscored. There is an urgent

need to put an end to hostilities, which aggravate the humanitarian situation.

As we heard, the civilian population in various regions of Syria continues to lack access to basic services and lives in precarious conditions, which particularly impacts vulnerable groups, including children. Again this month, several densely populated areas, including displaced persons camps in Idlib, have come under attack. We again condemn the violence in Al-Hol camp, in particular the killing of two girls this month. We reiterate our call for the countries of origin of the foreigners in that camp to take the necessary steps for their repatriation. Mexico considers that the demands for justice and accountability for arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances and human rights violations must be met in order to open the way to reconciliation in Syria.

Regarding the implementation of resolution 2642 (2022), we welcome the continued efforts to expand cross-line deliveries, which have become more predictable, benefiting a greater number of people. We also take note of the various early-recovery projects under way. However, given the food crisis, the cholera epidemic and winter needs, it is clear that we must have a channel for the distribution of humanitarian aid. It is therefore vital that the Council renew the authorization of the Bab Al-Hawa cross-border mechanism.

Resolution 2254 (2015), adopted unanimously by the Council, is the road map to guide the political process towards sustainable peace. We renew our call for all parties to commit to its implementation and to avoid any unilateral action that contributes to prolonging the suffering of the Syrian people.

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

The situation in Syria remains a regional destabilizing factor. The war in Syria is not over, and too many civilians continue to pay the price every day.

The recent escalation in the north of the country is a cause for concern. We are deeply concerned by the announcements of a possible ground intervention by Türkiye in north-eastern Syria. We call for restraint and avoidance of any initiative that would threaten the stability of the region and the security of its inhabitants, at a time when the threat posed by Da'esh remains strong.

The regime continues to play the waiting game, to the detriment of the Syrian people. The status quo is in no one's interest. The Syrian people aspire to peace. However, the regime systematically refuses any political negotiation within the framework of the road map set out in resolution 2254 (2015). The work of the Constitutional Committee is at a standstill. The regime refuses to engage in the step-for-step approach promoted by the Special Envoy, which we support.

Syrians inside and outside Syria are demanding justice. More than 100,000 Syrians are still missing. All United Nations reports give a detailed account of the crimes committed by the regime. France will continue to fight relentlessly against the impunity that the regime still enjoys today — without justice, there can be no lasting peace.

The suffering of Syrians is the result of the brutality of the regime, and the regime bears full responsibility for this situation. The destruction of the country and its infrastructure is the result of the bombings carried out by the regime and its allies, which did not hesitate to use chemical weapons. That brutality has allowed Da'esh and other terrorist groups to flourish.

In the absence of any progress on the political process in Syria, French and European positions on the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction will remain unchanged. Contrary to the spurious accusations of Russia and the regime, those sanctions are targeted. They aim to limit the room for manoeuvre of those responsible for these war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Finally, as winter arrives, the civilian population continues to suffer the consequences of war. It is essential that the cross-border mechanism be maintained. With an eighth convoy, progress on cross-line access continues, but it is not a substitute for cross-border operations, which continue to be important to the 6 million people who will need assistance in the north-west — 30 per cent more than in 2021, according to the United Nations.

Furthermore, the regime's lack of respect for international humanitarian law and human rights prevents Syrian refugees hosted by neighbouring countries from being able to return safely to their country. No lasting solution can be found without the commitment of the Syrian regime.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. In the light of the evolving situation on the ground, I would like to make the following points.

First, we must stand firm in preserving the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Syria. For some time now, the security situation in Syria has been volatile. Türkiye launched air strikes against Syria and announced it would conduct ground military operations against Syria. Israeli air strikes on Syria have also continued. All of those acts grossly violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and could lead to the escalation and spread of the Syrian conflict. China expresses its grave concern in that connection. Foreign military intervention is one of the major factors contributing to the complicated, intractable and protracted crisis in Syria. We call on Türkiye and Israel to immediately stop cross-border attacks, avoid any action that could escalate the situation and rely on dialogue and consultation alone to resolve the relevant issues. The unlawful presence of foreign forces in Syria also must end.

Secondly, we must combat terrorism with a zero-tolerance stance. Terrorist activities remain rampant in Syria. Da'esh and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continue to wreak havoc. The Monitoring Team of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, has issued many reports that indicate that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, or Turkestan Islamic Party for short, is also active in Idlib governorate, carrying out recruitment, terrorist financing and terrorist activity.

Terrorism is the common enemy of the international community. We must work together to combat all terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council in Syria, in equal measure, completely cut off their sources of weapons, personnel and funding and stop condoning, harbouring or politically exploiting those terrorist forces. Counter-terrorism cooperation will also help all parties concerned to build mutual trust on the Syrian issue and create enabling conditions for progress in the political process.

Thirdly, we must continue to promote a Syrian-led and -owned political process. We support Special Envoy Pedersen's continued engagement with all parties in

order to address roadblocks so that the Constitutional Committee can hold meetings and, by way of the step-for-step approach, build up conditions for a broader political process. Since its inception, the Astana format has played a constructive role in coordinating efforts to de-escalate the conflict in Syria and bring an end to the hostilities. The recently concluded Astana meeting sent an important signal of support for the political process in Syria. China welcomes that development and looks forward to the process playing a larger role in the comprehensive settlement of the Syrian issue.

China also welcomes the communiqué of the thirty-first summit of the League of Arab States, which expresses support for Syria resuming its rightful place in the Arab world and in the international community, as that is conducive to building synergy at the regional level towards peace efforts.

Fourthly, we must implement resolution 2642 (2022) in a comprehensive and balanced manner. The cross-border modality is a temporary arrangement made under special circumstances. The transition to cross-line humanitarian aid to citizens needs to be accelerated. We note with regret that in the past month, there was no new cross-line delivery to north-western Syria. Members of the international community should dedicate the same level of effort to promoting cross-line deliveries as they do to promoting cross-border operations and strive to provide the entire population in Syria with access to humanitarian resources, without discrimination.

China welcomes the continued improvement in the funding of early-recovery projects. As we speak, Syria is facing crises in public health, water resources and electricity supplies. The United Nations should prioritize the implementation of projects in those areas in order to meet the most pressing needs of the Syrian people. Explosive remnants of war have taken a heavy toll on regular economic production and life in Syria. China expects that work in the relevant areas will be included in the scope of early recovery as soon as possible. The ongoing cholera epidemic in Syria and its spread into neighbouring countries is of deep concern to China. We welcome the extension of the United Nations cholera response plan and call on the international community to continue to support Syria in fighting the epidemic.

Ms. Alena Douhan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral

coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, recently issued a report clearly stating that unilateral sanctions and their excessive implementation have exacerbated the Syrian humanitarian crisis. China once again calls on the countries concerned to immediately lift all unilateral sanctions not authorized by the Security Council.

Mr. Mythen (Ireland): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their very stark briefings today. I will focus on the political situation in my statement, as my Norwegian colleague has spoken on behalf of Ireland on humanitarian issues.

Let me begin by reiterating Ireland's serious concern about the continuing hostilities on the ground in Syria, particularly given the worrisome escalation of hostilities in the north and north-west of the country. Ireland condemns the series of strikes conducted by pro-Government forces earlier this month in Idlib and its environs, which hit several civilian areas and camps that hosted internally displaced persons. The attacks resulted in the deaths of at least 10 people, including children, and injured at least 27 others. At least 400 families face being newly displaced, which is simply unacceptable. We offer our sincere condolences to the families of the victims. All parties to the conflict are obliged under international law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Indiscriminate attacks are unlawful and must cease. Such violations must be investigated without delay in order for the perpetrators to be held accountable. We reiterate the urgent need for a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We call on all the parties to exercise maximum restraint and maintain previously agreed ceasefires.

We underscore our condemnation of the killing of two young girls in the Al-Hol camp earlier this month. The utter barbarity and cruelty inflicted on the victims serve as a stark reminder of the severe protection challenges in the camp, particularly for women and children. The perpetrators of those heinous crimes must be brought to justice. Ireland also remains greatly concerned about the plight of those detained and missing in Syria. Tens of thousands of families are being forced to suffer in painful limbo without any knowledge of the fate of their loved ones, which will continue to traumatize generations of Syrians to come. Ireland therefore supports, in principle, the recommendation of the Secretary-General to establish a new international body aimed at providing support

to families in desperate need of answers about their missing loved ones.

Finally, we thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his continued efforts on step-for-step confidence-building measures. It is regrettable that Damascus and its allies refuse to meaningfully engage in the process and that the ninth session of the Constitutional Committee has been prevented from proceeding in Geneva in line with the agreed terms of reference. As we highlighted in January, Ireland and the European Union Foreign Ministers fully support confidence-building measures, and we are here to assist Mr. Pedersen. We reiterate that only a political solution can bring stability and security to the Syrian people. All efforts must be fully inclusive and ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. In that regard, we welcome the recent convening of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and encourage efforts to facilitate the continued involvement of Syrian women in securing a lasting peace.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their valuable briefings.

As the years have passed, the Syrian crisis has become more complex and fractured, and has come to encompass issues that include refugees, internally displaced persons, foreign interventions, terrorism and economic collapse. This year has seen more unsettling developments, especially at the geopolitical level. Against the backdrop of these intractable issues, we stress the importance of prioritizing the needs of the Syrian people. Their interests must prevail above all other considerations, particularly with the upcoming renewal of the cross-border mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria, which, as a humanitarian instrument, should not be politicized.

With regard to the political dossier, and in the context of recent developments in Syria, we stress the need to adhere to dialogue, the principle of good neighbourliness and de-escalation in the entire region. We also reaffirm our rejection of foreign intervention in Syrian affairs and demand an end to them with a view to safeguarding Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. It is unfortunate that the political stalemate has continued on a matter that requires increased diplomatic efforts at various levels in support of a peaceful solution, which remains the only way to end the Syrian crisis. It is also important to move the Constitutional Committee beyond the paralysis that

has afflicted it in the past few months by convening meetings again. We appreciate the efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria and reaffirm that the Committee is currently the only platform for conducting a constructive national dialogue among Syrians, under Syrian leadership and ownership, without external interference or geopolitical complications and aimed at advancing the constitutional process. That should include not only logistical matters but also a clear time frame and an agreed plan for the next steps.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, we stress the importance of early-recovery projects that contribute to building Syrian society and restoring its infrastructure, including through the delivery of electricity to many Syrians, which in turn can enable access to other basic services. In that regard, we are pleased that 158 of 374 early-recovery projects in the humanitarian response plan have helped to provide electricity to homes, hospitals and schools, in addition to supporting sources of renewable energy. Regarding the alarming spread of the cholera outbreak in Syria, we thank the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its tireless efforts in responding urgently to that issue, especially in recent months. That includes extending the response plan to the outbreak for a period of six months, owing to the enormous and continuing needs in all of Syria's governorates. On a larger scale, we stress the importance of delivering humanitarian aid to all regions in Syria, both across borders and across conflict lines. In that regard, we welcome the delivery of aid to the Ras Al-Ayn area and the crossing of an eighth convoy into north-west Syria, which included more humanitarian aid than previous convoys.

The camps in Syria are witnessing an increase in the level of violence, particularly Al-Hol camp in north-east Syria, where the number of murder cases reached 42 this year alone, including the gruesome killing of two girls in the camp earlier this month. That situation requires greater international efforts to ensure the protection of the thousands of women and children in those camps.

In conclusion, we underscore the urgent need to end the Syrian crisis and its worsening humanitarian consequences by breaking the current stalemate on the political track, which will support the establishment of security and stability in Syria and the region.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Gabon, Ghana and Kenya (A3).

We thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings and updates on the political and humanitarian situation. We also welcome the participation in today's meeting of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye.

Despite our deliberations every month, the situation in Syria remains unchanged. It presents a profound test to multilateralism and the ability of the United Nations and the Charter of the United Nations to deliver on its promise to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The unrelenting violent conflict continues to take a toll on millions of lives. It has resulted in a colossal refugee and internal displacement dilemma. The worsening humanitarian situation and the impoverished state of the entire population remains greatly concerning. The resumption of military operations and the escalation of kinetic activity on the front lines, characterized by air and ground strikes as well as terrorist attacks, push Syria into deeper levels of instability.

We condemn the targeting of innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, and we remind all parties that they are obliged to adhere to the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and international humanitarian law. The A3 also reminds the parties to the conflict that an escalation of violence will only jeopardize and undermine peace efforts and further dampen hopes for peace for the people of Syria. We therefore call on all parties, State and non-State actors alike, to exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalation and honour all ceasefire understandings and agreements. They should bear in mind that military options will not yield sustainable solutions and must refrain from threatening regional peace and security, while protecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Given the escalation of violence, the need for a political solution to the conflict is ever more urgent. The parties in Syria must therefore commit to the political process, including by cooperating in breaking the current deadlock in the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated Small Body of the Constitutional Committee. The Syrian people look to them to mobilize the necessary political will, focus on the greater good of the country and collectively

make an effort to seek sustainable solutions to address the multiple challenges, including the heightened insecurity, political instability and economic meltdown.

Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the foremost road map for achieving the desired political solution that takes into account the widest spectrum of Syrians, including the voices of women and civil society. In that regard, we hope that the Special Envoy's upcoming visit to Damascus will be fruitful, not only in breaking the current deadlock but also in securing a much-needed momentum in the implementation of that important resolution.

Addressing the situation of detainees, including by facilitating the release of detained vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and women and children, as well as by clarifying the status of missing persons, would be a significant confidence-building measure. Progress in that area would also contribute positively to the Special Envoy's step-for-step approach to creating an environment that is conducive to political progress, which must be in accordance with international humanitarian law.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, the rising levels of violence, coupled with the economic slump, have afflicted millions of Syrians, including refugees and the internally displaced, with a worsening food insecurity environment and a lack of reliable access to safe water and malnutrition, among other challenges. The dire situation has pushed some of the needy to resort to unacceptable coping mechanisms, such as early marriage and recruitment into armed and terrorist groups. Clearly, we must all work together in support of humanitarian action for the people who are suffering in Syria.

The cross-border aid mechanism and cross-line deliveries remain a crucial avenue for humanitarian assistance and must be sustained in the interest of the people. We also commend efforts to expand cross-line deliveries across north-western Syria and encourage more progress in that regard. As the expiration of the mandate contained in resolution 2642 (2022) approaches, we urge all members of the Council to constructively engage with a view to ensuring the renewal of the cross-border mechanism in order to guarantee life-saving assistance for millions of Syrians, especially in the wake of the concerning cholera outbreak and the arrival of the winter months and the increasing needs that it brings.

Furthermore, in order to ease the colossal humanitarian burden in camps, we call on States to repatriate their citizens, especially women and children, from camps in Syria, such as Al-Hol, which have been subjected to severe insecurity, in a safe and dignified manner, in line with the standards of international humanitarian law. There is also need for concerted international action to address the plight of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, particularly those in Lebanon, in view of the current challenges faced by that host country. It is imperative that future international humanitarian assistance to Syria also incorporate an element of support in order to deal with the needs of Syrians who fled the conflict to neighbouring countries.

The A3 also encourages support for the activities of the early-recovery and livelihoods programme under the United Nations humanitarian response, which is fundamental for assisting Syrians in getting back to their normal lives. The recent informal interactive dialogue shed light on the progress and implementation of early-recovery projects and programmes. We welcome those opportunities and are fully convinced that they will gradually reduce the humanitarian burden if they are prioritized. It is imperative that those programmes be sufficiently supported with the flexibility that is given to non-earmarked funds so that they can meet their intended goal and also build resilience and support livelihoods.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates that progress on the political track is a critical lifeline for the people of Syria. We urge the Council and each of its members to demonstrate through unified action that the multilateral system can be an effective mediator of global peace and security. The A3 stands in solidarity with the people of Syria in their quest for peace, which can be delivered only by a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, with the support of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Dandy (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council once again meets to discuss the political and humanitarian situations and other issues in the Syrian Arab Republic. Up to four meetings on those issues are held every month. It appears that some members of the Council wish to waste the Council's time and resources, as they continue to ignore the fundamental challenges facing Syria,

namely, terrorism, the continued violations of Syrian sovereignty and the catastrophic suffering of the Syrian people as a result of unilateral coercive measures.

A week ago forces of the Turkish regime and its terrorist mercenaries launched a series of military attacks targeting northern Syria. They claimed the lives of a number of civilians and military personnel and seriously damaged service facilities and civilian infrastructure in those areas, in flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns the Turkish attacks in the strongest possible terms. The pretexts that the Turkish regime uses to justify those attacks have been exposed and no longer fool anyone, especially since the Turkish regime has continued to support terrorist groups and sponsor Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front to this very day. Syria calls on the Security Council to compel the Turkish regime to end its illegal military presence on Syrian territories immediately. Nor should the Council ignore the continued illegal presence of United States forces on Syrian land in support of militias in north-eastern Syria. That is another violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. My country once again demands an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of United States forces from Syrian territory.

The Security Council has remained silent while Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan and its wrongful practices against our people in the Golan have persisted, in a similar way to the subversive role that the United States and Türkiye have played on Syrian territory. The Council's silence has emboldened Israel to escalate its attacks on Syrian territory based on flimsy justifications. Israel has also attacked civilian infrastructure, leading to casualties among civilians and military personnel and to a dangerous escalation in the region.

In parallel with its efforts to counter terrorism, the Syrian State has been pursuing local settlements and national reconciliation. We have taken a number of important measures, including the President's issuance of amnesty decrees, most recently Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2022, which is comprehensive in its scope and in the way it treats terrorist crimes. These measures have been taken to ensure a return to normalcy and enhance national unity, and have enabled many Syrians to return to their normal lives. Despite all those efforts, it is surprising that some still insist on ignoring the

achievements of the Syrian State in this area. We have been engaging positively with initiatives to settle the crisis that are Syrian-led and -owned, and with no foreign interference. In that regard, Syria emphasizes that the Special Envoy needs to continue to play his role as facilitator, as stipulated in his mandate.

Concerning the humanitarian situation, the Syrian Arab Republic is doing its utmost to provide assistance to all Syrians without discrimination and to improve their living conditions while providing them with basic services, and is cooperating with the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies in Syria to that end. My delegation stresses the importance of supporting the efforts of the Syrian State in that regard. We call on Western States to stop politicizing humanitarian work in Syria, uphold the guiding principles of humanitarian action and honour their pledges to provide the necessary funding to the humanitarian response plan in Syria. In particular, they should support and expand early-recovery projects, as stipulated in resolution 2642 (2022). Less than 42 per cent of the necessary funding has been provided so far, and we are approaching the new year.

Mines and unexploded ordnance planted by terrorist groups have claimed the lives of hundreds of women, children and farmers. We need to focus on clearing Syrian territories of such explosives and provide the necessary funding for the clearance, which would help to ensure the return of the displaced and refugees to their villages, homes and lands and their ability to take up their normal lives again.

My delegation was outraged at the refusal of some Western States on the Security Council to invite Ms. Alena Douhan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, to participate in the informal interactive dialogue held on 21 November. We consider that an attempt to obfuscate the Special Rapporteur's recommendations and conclusions and to hide those States' true intentions, thereby exposing their false claims for the unilateral coercive measures that the United States and the European Union have imposed on the Syrian people. Those measures have led to the deaths of innocent Syrians and of innocent people in every country where they have been imposed. In that regard, I want to point to the Special Rapporteur's statement that they are inconsistent with international rules and are there to put pressure on Syria. They worsen the Syrian people's

suffering and hinder early-recovery efforts. They have also caused severe shortages of medicine and specialized medical equipment needed to treat rare and chronic diseases, as well as hindering access to food, water, electricity, fuel, transport and health care, all of which have grave repercussions for public health and food security. That is why the Special Rapporteur stressed the importance of lifting those measures immediately.

With regard to the various aspects of humanitarian suffering in Syria, we should also address the United States occupation forces' continued systematic plundering of Syria's resources, such as oil, wheat and other agricultural produce, as well as the behaviour of the Turkish regime and its mercenaries, who are using water as a weapon against civilians by halting the operation of the Allouk water station and depriving a million Syrians in Al-Hasakah and its surroundings of water. They are manipulating the water levels of the Euphrates River, increasing the likelihood of thirst and dangerous pandemics and diseases, especially the spread of cholera. The Syrian Arab Republic condemns the Western States, most recently France and the Netherlands, that continue to send delegations to north-eastern Syria and infiltrate Syrian territories illegally. We emphasize that such practices constitute a violation of Syrian sovereignty and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In conclusion, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic stresses that Council meetings on the situation in Syria will continue to be fruitless if the fundamental challenges are not addressed. They include fighting terrorism, halting the support and financing of terrorism, ending the illegal United States and Turkish military presences and the Israeli attacks on Syrian territory and immediately lifting the unilateral coercive measures on Syria, which can only be described as inhumane and immoral.

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

Mr. Jalil Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

Syria's humanitarian situation is dire, and the country's continued economic difficulties have had a widespread impact. The frightening spike in suspected cholera cases reported across the country has aggravated the already precarious humanitarian situation. We commend the efforts of the United Nations

and its agencies to provide humanitarian relief to those in need, as well as their cooperation in implementing resolution 2642 (2022).

The ongoing unilateral coercive measures imposed by Western countries have exacerbated the humanitarian situation despite the efforts of the United Nations. In particular, they present substantial difficulties to public health and food security. The United Nations and its humanitarian organizations' work in Syria is also affected by these illegal actions. Meanwhile, donor countries remain hesitant to contribute the necessary funding for Syria's humanitarian response plan, which, according to the United Nations report, has not exceeded 42 per cent of the total funding required.

We support the eighth cross-line delivery of humanitarian aid. However, a lack of visible progress in the cross-line delivery, as well as inequitable and discriminatory distribution of early-recovery projects, remain challenging and must be improved based on resolution 2642 (2022). We further emphasize the importance of the cross-border mechanism. We believe that for the subsequent time of extension, the mechanism's shortcomings and the Syrian Arab Republic's associated legitimate concerns must be addressed.

On the political process, Iran supports convening the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee, as the Committee's ongoing work is critical to reaching a political solution. The cessation of the occupation and the full restoration of respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic are prerequisites to any political solution. In the meantime, the Astana format will continue its efforts aimed at bringing the crisis to an end and alleviating the sufferings of the Syrian people.

In support of these efforts, during the two-day meeting that was held in Astana on 22 and 23 November, the senior representatives of the Astana-format guarantors emphasized the Constitutional Committee's critical role and reaffirmed their willingness to support ongoing interactions between their members and the Special Envoy as a facilitator, in order to ensure the long-term stability and effective work of the next sessions of the Committee. They also expressed deep concern about the humanitarian situation emphasizing the need to remove impediments and increase humanitarian assistance to all Syrians across the country without discrimination or preconditions.

The security and stability in the north of Syria can only be achieved by preserving and fully respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We once again condemn the theft of the Syrian people's natural resources, particularly oil products, in areas occupied by foreign forces. This criminal act is an obvious violation of Syrian territorial sovereignty, relevant Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Charter.

The Security Council must strongly condemn ongoing aggressions and terrorist attacks by the Israeli regime against Syria. The Israeli regime's repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its systematic and intentional targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, particularly the attacks on commercial airports and humanitarian shipments, are a flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the United Nations Charter. We acknowledge that the Charter and international law provide the Syrian Arab Republic with a legitimate right to self-defence.

We support Syria's standing in the region and its improved bilateral relations. The international community must support the Syrian Government's ability to achieve economic and social stability and to improve the living conditions of the Syrian people. A secure, stable, and prosperous Syria benefits the Syrian people and is in the interests of the region and of the international community. It can also facilitate the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin in Syria, upholding their right to return. Iran continues to support the people and the Government of Syria in their efforts to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.

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

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Türkiye): First, let me thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for their briefings.

For more than a decade now — 11 years — the conflict in Syria has been the primary breeding ground for one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes globally. Türkiye is taking all the necessary measures to facilitate United Nations cross-border aid and cross-line convoys. Since the adoption of resolution 2642 (2022), there have been regular cross-line deliveries to north-west Syria, and, through the single border crossing of Bab Al-Hawa,

cross-border humanitarian aid has reached millions of Syrians every month in the north-west of the country. Among those in the region are 2.8 million internally displaced persons; heartbreakingly, a majority of them are women, children and the elderly.

The attacks earlier in November, which saw three different internally displaced persons camps in Idlib being targeted, resulted in the killing of 9 civilians and the wounding of 70. We are concerned that the strengthened shelters constructed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and located in the same area have also sustained serious damage. These attacks had a further adverse impact on the dire humanitarian situation. We invite all relevant parties to abide by the existing memorandums and end attacks on civilians once and for all. Syrians are not and never will be a target.

It is crucial that all regions in Syria benefit fairly from early-recovery and resilience efforts. These projects should be implemented throughout the country based on the needs assessment of the United Nations. In this context, we expect that the needs communicated by the Syrian interim Government are also duly integrated in early-recovery and resilience planning of the United Nations. The Syrian interim Government has long been requesting that the Ras Al-Ayn and Tel Abyad regions also benefit from United Nations humanitarian assistance. After three years of persistent appeals, UNICEF and the World Health Organization finally delivered medicines for leishmaniasis and cholera through cross-line assistance to these regions in October. It is crucial that this not be relegated to being a one-time aid delivery but that it continues in accordance with humanitarian needs in these regions.

It is also crucial to approach the electricity and water problems in northern Syria in a holistic, comprehensive and durable manner, including through addressing the water shortages in Al-Bab and the electricity shortages in the Ras Al-Ayn and Tel Abyad regions. Significantly, the cholera outbreak has raised the need for the supply of water and electricity in these areas to new heights.

We are now weeks away from the renewal of the United Nations cross-border aid operation. Let me be clear: cross-border assistance is a moral and humanitarian imperative. It is not a political issue. It is about sending food, blankets, diapers, personal-hygiene products, medicines and vaccines to the people who depend on them for their survival. It is not up to the

Security Council to decide who in Syria can receive humanitarian aid and who cannot. Rather, the onus is on the Council to support this highly scrutinized and meticulous United Nations humanitarian operation in order to save lives. We renew our call on all members to be guided solely by humanitarian considerations. We cannot afford to politicize this issue. Doing so would condemn civilians to death.

Türkiye is committed to ending the Syrian conflict through a viable and sustainable political process facilitated by the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We hope that the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee takes place as soon as possible under the auspices of and hosted by the United Nations. We support United Nations efforts to this end.

The Syrian opposition has displayed a constructive attitude since the beginning of the process. The regime should abandon its intransigence and instead actively engage in the political process.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) terrorist organization, sheltering in northern Syria, poses a significant threat to my country's national security. Our borders have repeatedly been targeted in the past three years. The PKK/YPG and its offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), are now openly claiming responsibility for their attacks against Türkiye, audaciously on their own social media accounts. The terrorist attack that took place at Taksim, the heart of Istanbul, on 13 November killed six people, including children, and wounded more than 80 civilians. Last week, the PKK/YPG perpetrated further attacks in Karkamis, a border district of Gaziantep, after its ringleaders called for "revenge" on Türkiye, targeting civilian areas, including three schools. Once again, innocent people lost their lives, including a 22-year-old woman teacher and a 5-year-old boy. That is totally unacceptable. We cannot abide that, just as no member of the Council would.

The obligations stemming from the agreements of October 2019, which we concluded with the United States and the Russian Federation, have so far not been fully implemented. That results in an increased terrorist threat against our borders. No Member State can tolerate deliberate attacks against its people or territory, neither should they. We will continue to carry out counter-terrorism operations to protect our people and ensure our border security, in the exercise of our inherent right of self-defence, as reflected in Article 51 of the Charter

of the United Nations and in accordance with Security Council resolutions on the fight against terrorism.

The statements expressing concern that our counter-terrorism operations against the PKK/YPG may adversely affect the fight against Da'esh cannot be further from the reality. The fact is that Da'esh above all remains a threat to neighbouring countries due to the wrongdoings and ill-advised strategies of those who make those kinds of statements. On countless occasions, we warned against the mistake of subcontracting the fight against Da'esh to another terrorist organization, namely, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, which in reality are nothing but the PKK/YPG itself. One can change the name of that terrorist organization as many times as one wants, but there is no changing its intent. One can even make a mockery of global counter-terrorism efforts, rebranding them as "democratic". That is an affront to democracy. But one cannot change the fact that it is a terrorist organization, which has the blood of Turkish and Syrian civilians on its hands.

In that regard, adding insult to injury, today we heard a reference to the so-called SDF claiming that

they deny the terrorist attack in Istanbul. Referring to a terrorist organization's statement in the Security Council is completely unacceptable, and it is an insult to our intelligence. The goal of the PKK/YPG and the so-called SDF is not to end the threat of Da'esh in Syria, but rather to maintain the support that it receives from certain members of the international community by keeping Da'esh on the agenda. The real fight against Da'esh can be carried out only with legitimate actors.

Those making suggestions to us with regard to preventing escalation and instability in the region should review their own positions and demonstrate genuine solidarity with us in the fight against terrorism, which is, in itself, a major source of escalation, instability, human rights violations and humanitarian suffering. Türkiye will never stop pursuing what is right and just in order to achieve peace and security, as set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

As for the statement made by the representative of the Syrian regime, I will not honour it with a response.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.