



Security Council

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Letter dated 1 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference convened on Wednesday, 29 April 2020. A statement was also delivered by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 2 April from the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of members of the Security Council members (S/2020/273), which was agreed in light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefing and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria**

Last month, the members of the Security Council called on all parties to ensure a sustained period of calm throughout the country and reaffirmed the need for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That signal from the Council was timely, following the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire and my appeal for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria and all-out effort to combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Let me appeal to the Council to preserve this common purpose.

I strongly believe that Syria needs a ceasefire arrangement that results in sustained calm and is nationwide in scope — one that does not see new assaults across lines of contact and that enables Syrians to access the equipment and resources necessary to combat COVID-19. We cannot afford hostilities, which would undoubtedly lead to another surge in displaced vulnerable communities — something that we witnessed in horror only two months ago. We cannot afford such a scenario before the pandemic; the price now would only rise ever higher.

Over the past month, I have maintained active channels with the Syrian parties. I have also spoken with foreign ministers and senior officials from a range of key players, including Russia, Turkey and Iran, whose Foreign Ministers recently conferred virtually; the United States; the European Union and many European States; and the League of Arab States and several Arab countries. I have appreciated the engagement of all with my efforts to facilitate progress on the political track and to sustain ceasefire arrangements. I will be continuing active engagement with these and other interlocutors in the days and weeks ahead.

I welcome the fact that there has been significant calm in many areas of Syria, especially relative to the apexes of violence of previous years. We have not witnessed all-out offensives or further displacements since early March. Russian-Turkish arrangements have taken hold in the north-west and I do see a positive difference on the ground, including compared with previous arrangements. The level of incidents is low.

Six Russian-Turkish joint patrols have taken place. They have been challenged, but there have been responses to those challenges, too.

I appeal to all relevant parties to address internationally proscribed terrorist groups in a cooperative and targeted manner so as not to compromise the existing calm and the COVID-19 response, and so as to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

I also note that the different ceasefire arrangements between Russia, Turkey and the United States in the north-east also broadly continue to hold.

But this is an uneasy and fragile calm in both north-western and north-eastern Syria, and there is the constant risk of escalation in Syria. Just yesterday, a bomb in a market in Afrin reportedly killed more than 40 people. Security conditions in southern Syria are concerning. A worrying resurgence by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in desert areas in central and eastern Syria has continued. I am also concerned about reports of Israeli airstrikes in rural Homs and Damascus, the most recent of which was reported this past Monday.

The Syrian Government has continued to take increasingly significant steps to combat COVID-19, as have, in areas outside Government control, the Syrian Opposition Coalition and other de facto authorities. International donors have

pledged and provided financial and material support. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock will brief the Council this afternoon on the United Nations family's efforts to help build capacity to test and treat COVID-19 in Syria.

While testing remains limited, the officially reported COVID-19 caseload in Syria is comparatively low: 42 reported cases in areas controlled by the Syrian Government, 1 reported case in the north-east and no reported cases in the north-west. We all hope that these low numbers will continue, but in Syria as in all countries there is the risk of a major COVID-19 outbreak. The trend lines in the coming weeks will be very important, as will a ramping up of testing and treatment capacity in all parts of Syria, along with information sharing among all parties.

Syria faces many challenges that can hamstring a response to the pandemic. Syria also lacks sufficient health professionals and medical equipment and supplies. The health-care system is degraded in some areas and destroyed in others, following nine years of armed conflict. We all saw the recent findings of the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry, a terrible reminder of what has happened in this conflict.

Let me reiterate the need for full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access, using all modalities, including scaled-up cross-line and cross-border access.

As part of the global efforts, the Secretary-General has appealed for the waiver of sanctions that may undermine the capacity of the country to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and COVID-19 medical support to respond to the pandemic. This has been affirmed to the Syrian Government. The United Nations and I, personally, have directly engaged concerned States so that all humanitarian exemptions to sanctions remain available and are fully utilized to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. I note the positive response of different countries to the United Nations in this respect.

Turning to the economic situation, after nine years of conflict and a wide range of factors and measures, Syria faces extremely grave economic conditions. We have recently seen price increases and shortages, among other further worsening trends. The measures rightly taken by the authorities to combat COVID-19 in Syria have, as in all countries, also had an economic impact.

I have long urged the parties to move to large-scale and unilateral releases of detainees and abductees and more meaningful actions on missing persons. The pandemic makes this humanitarian imperative more urgent than ever. I continue to urge the Syrian Government and all other Syrian parties to follow the lead of other Governments around the world in releasing detainees. We really need to see this happening as part of all the efforts to stem the spread of the virus in Syria.

The need for an all-out effort to combat COVID-19 in Syria was conveyed to me on Monday in consultations with civil society actors in all different parts of Syria via our Civil Society Support Room, which included many medical non-governmental organizations and other grass-roots organizations. They are doing all they can to raise awareness and support local communities. They reflected the diversity of the challenges facing the various parts of the country and a common belief that more can and needs to be done to support the efforts under way.

The Syrian Women's Advisory Board has been convening virtually every week since the risk of a COVID-19 crisis emerged. I spoke with its members yesterday. They expressed support for a sustained ceasefire throughout the country, and the wish that access be granted for medical staff and the provision of food, medicine, medical supplies and equipment to all regions of Syria without delay or impediment. They emphasized that women are at the forefront of community-based initiatives to raise awareness and prevent the spread of COVID-19, and explained how they

are taking on additional caregiving responsibilities at home due to the movement restrictions. They also noted a heightened risk of domestic violence in isolation settings and a fear of the potential marginalization of women as the COVID-19 response gradually pushes some to assume more traditional roles. They stressed that nothing should obstruct the advancement of the political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

In that regard, I briefed the Council last month that the agenda for the next session of the Constitutional Committee had been agreed between the co-Chairs. It will be important to build on that with a substantive discussion during the next round. The Committee was clear in its dealings with me that reaching an agreement during that session on national foundations and principles is not a precondition to moving to other items in subsequent sessions. I remain in regular contact with the Committee on how to resume the meetings in Geneva as soon as the situation allows. I have also been in touch with the civil society members of the Committee and will continue to do so. We are still exploring whether any preparatory work can take place in the meantime. I urge all members to be diligently preparing for renewed work.

I reiterate my appeal for a nationwide ceasefire and an all-out effort to ensure that Syrians across the country will have access to the equipment and resources needed to combat and treat COVID-19. I stand ready to work with the Government, the opposition and all relevant players on the ground, as well as with key countries with weight and influence. I urge all relevant players to come together in a joint effort to support sustained calm and to help scale up the response to the pandemic. That is the only responsible path and the only one that can pave the way for progress on the broader political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015). There is no military solution to the Syria crisis. We must act on the basis of our common humanity, help build trust and confidence — including via reciprocal measures — and begin to move towards a political settlement that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and fully restore Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

Annex II**Statement by Mr. Yao Shaojun, Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and I welcome Ambassador Ja'afari's participation in this meeting.

The security situation in north-west Syria has remained generally stable since Russia and Turkey agreed on ceasefire arrangements on 6 March as a result of diplomatic efforts. Those efforts are conducive to the political process and they should continue. As the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spreads globally, Middle East countries, including Syria, are exposed to the risk of an outbreak. In such a context, the Secretary-General, Mr. Pedersen and other United Nations envoys to the Middle East have issued several appeals to implement a ceasefire. China attaches great importance to those appeals and calls on the parties to actively promote inclusive political dialogue, to buy time for the prevention and containment of COVID-19 and to create conditions conducive to political solutions. We note that the Astana process meeting between foreign ministers was held last week. We believe those discussions will help address the multiple challenges in Syria.

Meanwhile, the issue of counter-terrorism in Idlib needs to be addressed effectively. I recall that the Special Envoy said that, in the current context, it is possible and necessary to discuss a more effective cooperative targeted counter-terrorism effort. We agree. Information shows that terrorist groups are still carrying out attacks in Idlib and pose an ongoing threat to the peace and stability of north-west Syria, which is unacceptable. We cannot let terrorists take advantage of the ceasefire to grow stronger. We call on all relevant parties to seek a comprehensive and long-term solution to the issue of Idlib through dialogue and negotiations.

Supporting a political solution to the conflict in Syria is our consistent position. We appreciate the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy, especially in this difficult time. We encourage the Syrian parties to maintain dialogue and work together in the Constitutional Committee for the interests of the people and the future of Syria. The Constitutional Committee must be independent and without foreign interference. The political process must be Syrian-led and-owned, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be upheld.

China is watching very closely the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Syria. We appreciate the efforts made by the Syrian Government to take responsible and forceful measures to combat the virus and will continue to offer our support. Meanwhile, we are seriously concerned about the negative impact of unilateral sanctions on countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic. Given that the Council will hold another meeting this afternoon on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we will elaborate on this issue then.

Annex III**Statement by Mr. Nicolas de Rivière, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations**

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. I echo his call for an immediate, complete and lasting nationwide ceasefire in Syria. It is an absolute priority in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

France is deeply concerned about the growing instability throughout Syria. The situation in the north-west is of particular concern, and we will continue to closely monitor its evolution. Although on the whole the ceasefire is holding for now, shelling continues and the military build-up on each side is particularly worrisome. It is essential that the regime and its allies do not restart an offensive.

Terrorist groups continue to pose a serious threat for international security. That is the case in the north-east, where the significant threat of Da'esh warrants our careful attention. Terrorist groups have also recently gained a foothold in regime-controlled areas. Nevertheless, the fight against terrorism cannot justify blatant violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.

The deterioration of the security situation in the south-west over the past few months is also worrisome. It clearly shows that returning to the regime's predation and security stranglehold cannot bring stability in the short term or in the long term. It is therefore urgent to implement the call of the Secretary-General and his Envoy for a complete nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

It is of the utmost importance that their call be heeded in order to enable the response to COVID-19 throughout Syria. We call on all parties to commit genuinely to that objective. In that regard, we recall that the Syrian regime has not responded to their appeal. The spread of the pandemic will further worsen the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, particularly in Idlib and in the north-east, and must be prevented. We will return to that point this afternoon.

The United Nations must be at the forefront of the efforts aimed at securing a nationwide ceasefire. That is in the mandate for it set forth in resolution 2254 (2015). Most important, it is the only way to guarantee a lasting and verifiable ceasefire that will not be a mere tactical pause and to create the conditions for the renewal of a credible political process.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to overcome the current political deadlock and to relaunch a broader peace process. We have taken note of the agreement reached by the parties on the agenda of the Constitutional Committee last month. However, the regime continues to block the work of the Constitutional Committee by trying to backtrack on this agreement and by refusing to allow any video-teleconference meeting of the Committee. In contrast, the opposition has consistently showed flexibility and openness. This situation has been going on for too long. We cannot continue to let the regime undermine the credibility of the United Nations and the Security Council.

In this context, we call on Geir Pedersen to make it clear to the Council when he deems it that he is no longer able to continue his efforts with respect to the Constitutional Committee. This is why it is key in parallel to launch a broader political process based on all elements of resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has our full support in this regard.

There is also an urgent need to secure progress on the subject of detainees, especially in the context of the spread of COVID-19. France fully supports the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a large-scale release of detainees

and abductees and for access to all detention facilities. Let me recall that over 100,000 persons have ended up in jail or in the hands of the security branches of the regime. We urge the Syrian regime to allow the release of the most vulnerable and of political prisoners who have not been granted presidential amnesty. Now is the time to move beyond the one-for-one approach and enhance the role of the United Nations.

As elections are looming, we need to reaffirm the conditions and standards for a transparent, free and fair ballot, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The elections should take place in a safe and secure country, under United Nations supervision and with the participation of all Syrians, including those from the diaspora. Absent those conditions, any election in Syria would again have no value. Moreover, let me reaffirm that, without a credible political process firmly under way, France and the European Union will not fund the reconstruction in Syria.

Although time is passing, the crimes of the Syrian regime cannot be forgotten or remain unpunished. The commission of inquiry set up by the Secretary-General and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons have clearly pointed to the responsibility of the Syrian regime in attacks against de-conflicted medical infrastructure and in the use of chemical weapons. As the trials that have commenced in Germany against senior members of the Al-Assad regime and the ongoing proceedings in France confirm, war crimes and crimes against humanity will not go unpunished. France will continue to firmly support all efforts to collect and preserve evidence and fight impunity, including through the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

Annex IV**Statement by Mr. Christoph Heusgen, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations**

Germany fully supports the call by Special Envoy Pedersen for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria. Although there has been a decrease in violence in the north-west, and the arrangements in the north-east are broadly holding, the security situation throughout the country remains very fragile, especially in the so-called reconciled areas.

Nevertheless, the Syrian city of Afrin was shaken yesterday by a devastating terrorist attack that reportedly killed dozens of civilians, including many children. We strongly condemn this crime. Our deepest sympathy goes to the families and the relatives of the victims. We wish the injured a speedy and complete recovery.

We will continue our efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict and an end to war, displacement, State persecution and terror. In the end, we need a lasting nationwide ceasefire. This has become even more urgent in the light of the crisis caused by the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We will discuss the humanitarian situation and the impact of the pandemic in Syria later this afternoon. But there is one point that needs to be made right now: an effective nationwide humanitarian response to COVID-19 is possible only once a nationwide ceasefire is in place.

The same goes for the political process under the leadership of the United Nations Special Envoy. We stress the central role of the United Nations in reaching the genuine and sustainable nationwide ceasefire called for in resolution 2254 (2015), keeping in mind that a nationwide ceasefire is a central element of the resolution and an important precondition for successful negotiations in Geneva. Sustainable peace, stability and security in Syria can be achieved only through a political process under the auspices of the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

We therefore call for a swift return to the political process and reiterate our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen in this regard, including for adapting working methods to the current coronavirus-related restrictions, so that progress can be made. In the end, the Syrian regime must finally stop obstructing the Constitutional Committee and start engaging meaningfully in the Committee and the political process more broadly. We call on Russia to use its influence over Damascus in this regard.

We also support the call by Special Envoy Pedersen for a large-scale release of detainees and abductees on humanitarian grounds. Bearing in mind that the overwhelming majority of detainees are held by the Syrian regime and that arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and torture for which the Syrian regime is responsible remain ongoing, it is important to move beyond one-for-one prisoner exchanges and to release political detainees at a meaningful scale, starting with elderly people, women and children and those with health conditions. Accordingly, we would like to recall United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Bachelet's call for the release of especially vulnerable detainees to prevent a catastrophic spread of COVID-19. We have taken note of the regime's announcement to do so but have yet to see evidence of actual steps taken in this regard.

We also call on the Syrian regime to allow immediate, unconditional and unhindered access for relevant humanitarian organizations to all prisons and detention facilities under its control. In addition, we call on the regime to ensure the provision of adequate medical care and protective measures for all persons in

detention, in order to prevent COVID-19 leading to still further misery and loss of life in Syrian prisons.

We will continue to support all efforts, in particular those of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the commission of inquiry, aimed at ensuring that the crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict do not go unpunished, that perpetrators are held accountable and that victims obtain justice. In this context, we also welcome the most recent reports of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and of the Board of Inquiry. There has to be follow-up to the findings of these two reports: impunity for those responsible for these serious violations of international law is not an option.

We remain convinced that national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will not be possible without justice and accountability.

The trial of two former officials of the Syrian regime's security service, charged with crimes against humanity, at the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz is an important step towards justice and accountability. For the first time, abductions, torture and abuse in Syrian prisons are being prosecuted before a court in Germany. That sends a clear message — those who commit crimes against humanity cannot feel safe anywhere.

To date, it has unfortunately not been possible to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) because of the Russian veto in the Security Council. For that reason, those who committed, and are still committing, international crimes cannot be prosecuted by the ICC, and they remain in power in Damascus. But, as the trial in Koblenz clearly shows, they should not feel safe and will eventually also be held accountable.

We encourage other States to initiate similar criminal proceedings under universal jurisdiction against individuals suspected of the most serious crimes. We call in particular on Russia to contribute to the fight against impunity and to ensure that those responsible for torture and killing in the prisons and detention facilities of the Syrian regime are held accountable.

There were reports that the Syrian national Hamadi Taha Al-But was tortured and murdered by mercenaries of the Wagner Group after being captured in June 2017 near the Al-Shaer gas field in central Syria. One of the perpetrators was identified as Stanislav Dychko, and evidence was reportedly submitted to Russian investigators. We would like to inquire about the current state of the criminal investigations by the Russian authorities into these alleged war crimes by the Wagner Group in Syria.

The position of Germany and the European Union (EU) on reconstruction remains crystal clear. We will assist in any reconstruction of Syria only once a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way. As long as the Syrian regime does not change its brutal behaviour and end its grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, there will be no lifting of sanctions. It is important to stress that the sanctions are targeted at the Syrian regime and do not affect the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need, as they contain specific provisions allowing for the provision of humanitarian aid, including the supply of medicines and medical equipment needed in order to respond to COVID-19 in Syria. We have specifically looked into allegations that EU sanctions were preventing the delivery of equipment for the treatment of COVID-19 in Syria, and we found out that that was not the case.

Annex V**Statement by Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations**

I wish to welcome Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari and to wish him Ramadhan Kareem. I would also like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen. It is good to see him looking well. We are glad to hear that there is significant calm relative to the apexes of violence of previous years. That is a positive development, albeit still a fragile situation. Since this is the holy month of Ramadhan, we hope that the calm situation will prevail.

Since we will have another video-teleconference meeting on Syria later this afternoon, I will aim to limit my statement to the political aspect, albeit both political and humanitarian issues are indeed closely linked. As we all know, the path to a lasting political settlement of the Syrian conflict faces an additional obstacle. The threat of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) could potentially distract from, if not disrupt, the efforts to begin the political track, particularly the ongoing process of the Constitutional Committee.

However, my delegation believes that, if all key parties are committed to working constructively together to advance the peace process, we will be able to overcome these obstacles. Obviously, it is not easy, and the road ahead is still long. In that context, I would like to stress the following points.

First, we fully support the appeal made by Special Envoy Pedersen for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria. We are pleased to hear that the ceasefire is holding in the north-west, and we commend Russia and Turkey for their strong efforts and appreciate the joint patrol to ensure calm. However, the situation is still fragile, with occasional shelling being reported.

In addition, we must not lose focus on other areas at potential risk of violence. My delegation is particularly concerned about the ongoing tension in southern Syria, where more security incidents were reported. During this very complex situation, we cannot afford to have more hostilities in the country.

Secondly, all the relevant parties need to remain firm in their commitments to an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations. Indonesia reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a necessary foundation for advancing the political process within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015).

Thirdly, strengthening the levels of diplomatic cooperation is badly needed. My delegation supports the Secretary-General's call in his latest report (S/2020/327) for extensive levels of diplomatic cooperation and fortitude to refocus on the political process and to bring an end to the conflict.

We also strongly support the work of Special Envoy Pedersen and his team in engaging all key parties to reconvene the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. Clearly, the pandemic has not made that possible. However, the preparation needs to continue. We wish to re-emphasize that compromises and flexibility are required in that regard.

I am glad to hear that Special Envoy Pedersen continues to engage with interlocutors and all related parties amid the difficulty of COVID-19. The political track needs to continue for the sake of the people of Syria. As the pandemic spreads, the impact will be unpredictable and potentially catastrophic. The Syrian people therefore need all parties to lay down their weapons as part of a nationwide ceasefire to confront COVID-19. We appreciate the efforts that have been undertaken by the

Syrian Government to combat COVID-19, but the international community should continue its support with the needed health capacity and medical supplies. We would like to echo Geir Pedersen's appeal in that regard.

In the context of achieving a political solution, as I mentioned earlier, the road ahead is indeed still long, but we believe that there are opportunities at every turn. We have full confidence in the Special Envoy's efforts to maintain the momentum for peace.

Annex VI**Statement by Mr. Abdou Abarry, Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations**

I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his briefing and his commitment.

Let me begin by reiterating that the Niger continues to fully support the calls of the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria and beyond to enable an all-out effort against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

My delegation takes note of the report of the United Nations Board of Inquiry. That report is very important, as it attributes responsibility to the perpetrators of the attacks on hospitals that are on the United Nations deconfliction list and other civilian facilities in north-west Syria. The Niger condemns those attacks and calls for the international community to take appropriate actions to hold anyone involved accountable.

As it relates to the humanitarian situation in Syria, I am sure that Mark Lowcock will give us a better picture this afternoon. However, as we know, food security and humanitarian assistance are essential during these difficult times. My delegation therefore calls on all parties to work together to make sure that the aid reaches all Syrians in need.

It is also worth noting that since Russia and Turkey agreed on a ceasefire agreement on 6 March, there have been fewer hostilities in Syria. My delegation commends the Astana guarantors, Russia and Turkey for their diplomatic efforts and encourages them to continue them for the sake of millions of Syrians. The Niger calls on Council members and Special Envoy Pedersen to build on this momentum in order to make progress on the political front, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

My delegation is pleased to hear that the agreement on the agenda was reached, and we call on the parties involved to continue their efforts and participation in the Constitutional Committee. However, discussing the process of the meetings should not be the only item on the agenda. The Constitutional Committee should also begin talks on various issues aimed at furthering the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and leading Syria to the holding of free and transparent elections.

In the same vein, my delegation supports the Special Envoy's call for a large-scale release of all arbitrarily held detainees on humanitarian grounds, and we call on all parties to ensure medical care for all detainees.

Because the current unilateral sanctions are affecting Syria's economy and the spread of COVID-19 will only make things worse, my delegation supports the Secretary-General's appeal to waive sanctions that could undermine Syria's capacity to respond to the pandemic.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on Council members and the international community to show unity and compassion by helping the Syrians navigate through these terrible times.

Annex VII

Statement by Mr. Vassily Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has affected the way in which we address conflict resolution, including the political settlement in Syria, but the Special Envoy is continuing his efforts nonetheless. We welcome the agreement by the Syrian parties on the agenda of the third round of negotiations within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. When that meeting will take place, nobody can predict today — the sooner the better, but only the World Health Organization (WHO) knows. We will still continue to support the Special Envoy; to engage with the Syrian parties; and to facilitate dialogue between Damascus and territories in the north-east of the country.

News of the death of Astana, which some of our colleagues rushed to announce in the Security Council Chamber last month, proved to be fake. A teleconference of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Turkey and Iran took place on 22 April. The Ministers underscored the leading role of Astana in promoting a Syrian settlement, including the stabilization of the situation, the facilitation of the return of refugees and the resolution of the humanitarian problems facing the civilian population, as well as the intra-Syrian dialogue within the Constitutional Committee. The Ministers agreed to continue intensive contacts in order to prepare for the next Astana-format summit.

The ceasefire in Idlib established as a result of the Russian-Turkish protocol of 5 March is generally being observed. The situation has de-escalated significantly, but illegal armed groups and terrorists from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continue to perpetrate violations. Hundreds of civilians died in February and in March. Yesterday we all heard about a suicide bombing that claimed more than 40 lives in Afrin. In the north-east, from 20 to 31 March alone 82 people died and 100 were wounded. Radicals are impeding the work of the Russian and Turkish military in Idlib, organizing provocations and creating blockades. It remains necessary to divorce the moderate opposition from terrorists. The pandemic cannot be used as a pretext to whitewash terrorists.

We see the picture clearly. The situation is difficult in those Syrian territories that are not under the control of the Syrian Government. And, as before, we do not have a clear picture in areas that are illegally occupied. We hear many appeals to the Syrian Government — what it should do and what it should not do. But we hear very little about what is happening in areas under occupation or out of the control of Damascus. We would recall once again that the responsibility and accountability for everything that happens there lies with the occupying Power. We hear about riots in prisons in the north-east and prisoners escaping to neighbouring countries in the region. We hear about aid sent by the coalition to the north-east, supposedly to fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), that included batons, shields and other anti-riot equipment.

We would be interested to learn what is happening in the Rukban and Al-Hol camps and what measures are being taken there to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

On our part, we would like to share with the Council this story. Two weeks ago, a group of 34 militants belonging to the Jaysh Maghawir Al-Thawra was able to leave Rukban and surrender to Government forces. They fought their way out, because one cannot just leave Rukban freely. Those people told Western reporters what was happening in the camp, in particular that they had been trained in subversion

operations and that the humanitarian assistance that reaches Rukban camp is resold. I would ask members to read their interviews themselves and broaden their horizons.

A simple conclusion: without the return of the entire territory of Syria to the control of its legitimate Government, the prevailing problems will not be solved. This also applies to the fight against the pandemic. We would recall also that appeals to Damascus to step up its efforts to fight the pandemic are irrelevant, as 30 per cent of its territory is under the effective control either of foreign troops, the opposition or terrorists. Those controlling the territories should be responsible for that.

We state once again that unilateral sanctions are not only crippling the Syrian economy and affecting the population first and foremost but also blocking the supply of medicines and equipment to the country, thus exacerbating the difficulty of the fight against the pandemic. Syrians live throughout Syria, not just in Idlib or in the north-east. We urge our colleagues not to exploit the current situation but to actually help all Syrians.

There is a positive side of this story: we welcome the steps taken by several Arab States to establish contacts with the Syrian Government in the interests of helping that country overcome the economic and humanitarian crisis and combat the coronavirus. Syria is an integral part of the regional landscape. Syria needs to return to the Arab family. That will both facilitate a Syrian political settlement and improve the overall situation in the Middle East.

In response to the statement by the representative of the United Kingdom, I wish to say the following.

I will be brief. I will not engage in a dialogue with Christoph, who, as I understand it, co-opted himself in the Board of Inquiry. I must say frankly that his inquiry does not ring a bell with me. If it does, I will come back to him on that. But I would recommend concentrating on those Syrians who during the nine years of conflict have been tortured, beheaded and killed by the terrorists. I think that there is ample room for inquiry here.

However, I wanted to address another issue. I admire the power of deduction of our British colleague, who so elegantly presented his deep analysis of the Board of Inquiry. The members know that we do not recognize the Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General in excess of his authority. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, even using a magnifying glass, the board could not establish a single civilian death caused by, to quote the report, alleged shelling by the Syrian air force or its allies. But the board did manage to uncover victims of shelling by terrorists. According to the report, not a single medical facility was destroyed; only minor damage is reported. We know that some of the members were not very pleased by that finding. In fact, some were immensely disappointed. But the finding represents a clear trend, whatever the members might say to the contrary. We have been saying it for long time, and, strangely, now it has been confirmed by an unusual source, namely, the report of the so-called Board of Inquiry.

Annex VIII**Statement by Ms. Inga Rhonda King, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations**

I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines echoes the appeal for a complete, immediate and nationwide ceasefire in Syria. The agreement of 5 March to address hostilities in the north-west was a welcome development, and we are pleased that it broadly continues to hold. However, we recognize that it is fragile and that a nationwide ceasefire is critical now more than ever. Indeed, a total cessation of hostilities is vital for the creation a safe and stable environment, which will help to further the political process. That is also the only way to truly enable Syria to effectively fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We are pleased to hear that, thus far, the number of COVID-19 infections across the regions is low.

The political process is a complex one that requires dedication, mutual respect and compromise from all parties. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reiterates its support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy in the wider political process. Continued engagement with the parties will only serve to advance that process. We particularly appreciate the steps taken to consult with women's civil society organizations to ensure their meaningful participation. It is well known that women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution can improve outcomes before, during and after conflict. The inclusion of women will undoubtedly lead to more constructive and equitable outcomes for all.

We look forward to the convening of the third round of talks of the Constitutional Committee. It is commendable that the parties have reached an agreement on the agenda, and we urge all to continue to cooperate for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Confidence-building measures are necessary to restore trust, promote active participation and contribute to the viability of the wider political process, as emphasized in resolution 2254 (2015). In that vein, we reiterate that the question of arbitrarily detained and missing persons ought to be addressed. It is essential that the Council support efforts aimed at realizing the goals of the resolution. We must also remain mindful that our actions must respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Syria will not know peace through military action. Only through a credible, balanced and inclusive political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people can lasting peace and stability be achieved.

Annex IX**Statement by Mr. Jerry Matthews Matjila, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations**

I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing on the political situation in Syria.

South Africa is encouraged that the ceasefire agreement of 5 March between Turkey and Russia continues to hold, despite sporadic instances of shelling. In that regard, we call on all parties to work, especially during these challenging times, towards a permanent nationwide ceasefire that will pave the way to a conducive environment in which an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue can be held.

For Syria to attain peace, it would be necessary for all external interference in Syria to come to an end and for all unauthorized foreign forces to have left. In addition, we wish to reiterate that all States have the sovereign right to address the threat of terrorism in their countries. However, any action to counter terrorism must be in line with international law, including obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The ultimate goal should be a lasting political solution that is reflective of the will of the Syrian people and brings sustainable peace and stability to the country, as well as the opportunity to rebuild its economy and to repair the damage caused by 10 years of war.

With regard to developments pertaining to the Constitutional Committee, South Africa welcomes the co-Chairs' agreement on the agenda for its next meeting, as reported by the Special Envoy in his previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8727). We urge all parties to continue to engage substantively and constructively in the Constitutional Committee process as part of the wider political process supported by the Special Envoy. As we have learned through our own constitutional drafting process, engagement and confidence-building are essential components in finding a sustainable and peaceful solution to the crises in Syria. Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the framework for the political process in Syria, and it would be important that it be fully implemented. The Security Council should continue to support the work of the Constitutional Committee and the role of the United Nations and the Special Envoy in the mediation process.

South Africa has noted the release of the Secretary-General's summary of the report by the Board of Inquiry on Syria into incidents in north-west Syria. We welcome his intention to appoint a senior independent adviser to consider how best to respond to the recommendations contained in the report.

In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and of reports of three COVID-19-related deaths, South Africa fully supports the joint appeal by the Secretary-General's Envoys to the Middle East. We reiterate our full support to the Special Envoy's call for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria in order to ensure that the necessary supplies, equipment and personnel are available to efficiently and effectively respond to the pandemic. The conditions in parts of Syria raise the risk of COVID-19 spreading quickly. In those parts of the country, the fragile health system, overcrowded detention centres and camps for internally displaced persons, the lack of adequate access to water and sanitation infrastructure, access challenges for the delivery of humanitarian aid and continuing conflict are all factors impeding efforts to stop the spread of the virus.

As we address the humanitarian consequences of the pandemic, it is vital that economic measures placed on Syria should be eased. This is necessary to ensure that the required supplies and equipment are provided to combat the pandemic. We also support the Special Envoy's consistent call for the substantive release of prisoners

and detainees, particularly women, children, the elderly and those with disabilities. Given the challenging conditions in detention centres, this appeal is even more relevant and necessary today.

The situation in Syria requires the international community to support both the political and humanitarian tracks. These processes are interlinked, and progress must be supported on both tracks to create the necessary conditions for a sustainable and peaceful settlement to the conflict.

Annex X**Statement by Mr. Kais Kabtani, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing.

The imperative of an immediate, comprehensive and lasting cessation of hostilities in Syria cannot be overstated if progress is to be made on the political track. We again echo the call of the Secretary-General and Special Envoy Pedersen for a silencing of the guns throughout Syria. United Nations engagement is key to mustering Council members' efforts and sustaining ceasefire initiatives in conflict zones.

We remain concerned about persistent tensions, particularly in northern Syria, when focus should remain consistently on curbing the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We call on parties to rise to this critical occasion, maintain calm and exhibit self-restraint so as to put in place the conditions for the true battle of saving lives.

The resurgence of Da'esh activities, particularly in southern Syria, is also very concerning. In fact, Da'esh never went away and has adapted quickly to its losses. It is now widely acknowledged that Da'esh sees the COVID-19 outbreak as a timely moment to ramp up its deadly terrorist attacks.

Tunisia stresses that collective and determined efforts must be marshalled to eradicate the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other Security Council-designated terrorist groups in Syria and beyond. Such efforts are essential for a long-term political solution to the Syrian conflict. We credit the 5 March agreement on Idlib with having introduced a specific reference to terrorists designated by the Security Council.

Tunisia welcomes the unlocking of progress in the Syrian political process following the agreement reached among Syrian parties on the agenda for the Constitutional Committee discussions. We express our hope that the third round of the Constitutional Committee will be held as soon as possible. Tunisia extends its renewed support to the Special Envoy and his team for their able facilitation of the Constitutional Committee's work. We urge the Syrian parties to exercise flexibility, seek common ground and engage constructively and without preconditions in the negotiations, while adhering to the terms of reference and core rules of procedure of the Committee.

We also reaffirm the importance that the political process be accompanied by progress in releasing detainees and abductees. In the light of the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic spreading among detainees, their release has become more than a confidence-building measure: it is a humanitarian necessity.

In conclusion, Tunisia reiterates that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The only viable way forward is through a political settlement with Syrian ownership and leadership, along with United Nations sponsorship, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), that safeguards Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity, and meets Syrians' legitimate aspirations for a free and a dignified future.

Annex XI**Statement by Mr. James Roscoe, Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations**

I thank you very much, Sir, and I also thank the Special Envoy for his characteristically clear briefing.

As we said the last time we discussed this matter (see S/2020/254), we remain deeply concerned about the devastating potential impact that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) could have in Syria, a country already devastated by a nearly decade-long conflict. It is clear from many of the statements today that that sentiment is shared across the Security Council. As my Chinese colleague has just said, we will discuss the humanitarian challenge this afternoon. But with 43 confirmed cases and undoubtedly many more, it is vital that all parties heed the Special Envoy's call for a nationwide ceasefire.

The Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire is not just about rightly helping those in conflict zones, but also to allow for our full attention to be devoted to the fight against COVID-19. We can only defeat it if we defeat it everywhere.

We are also appalled to receive news of yesterday's bomb attack in Afrin, which killed at least 40 civilians, many of them children. Yet more families are mourning, and our thoughts and prayers go out to them today. That such a senseless act should take place during the holy month of Ramadan makes it all the more egregious.

Preventing a major outbreak of COVID-19 in any part of Syria must be a common task for us all. This virus knows no lines of control or geographical, political or cultural boundaries. It is therefore vital that all parties adhere to existing ceasefires in north-western and north-eastern Syria and abide by their responsibilities to facilitate humanitarian aid.

The current crisis reinforces the need to work together to reach across the divide and resolve this conflict. The process of seeking a political solution in Syria must not cease. In this context, it was encouraging to hear at the last meeting that an agenda for the next round of Constitutional Committee talks had been agreed. It is important that this opportunity be seized before momentum is lost again, and we encourage the Special Envoy to look at ways for talks to go ahead and meetings to continue.

As we and other Council members have made clear before, the political process under resolution 2254 (2015) extends beyond the Constitutional Committee. In addition to a nationwide ceasefire, the Syrian regime should also take other important confidence-building measures. These include releasing, wholesale, arbitrarily detained prisoners and ensuring humanitarian access to all parts of the country. Given the risk of COVID-19 taking hold in prisons, we would also strongly urge the Syrian regime to undertake the widespread release of political prisoners and vulnerable people and to ensure that medical care is available to those still in detention. The reported release of 40 detainees in Deir ez-Zor province is a small step in the right direction.

We also note that the issue of sanctions has been raised by a number of members of the Council in relation to COVID-19. We want to confirm, as I think was well explained by our Estonian colleague, that goods and medical supplies used for humanitarian purposes are not subject to European Union sanctions, which the United Kingdom continues to apply, and additional exemptions from sanctions are available for humanitarian activity in Syria.

I would also note that the United Kingdom and our European partners are among the leading donors of humanitarian aid to Syria, including in regime-held areas. In reality, the problems facing the Syrian health sector and economy are a result not of sanctions, but of the Syrian regime, through its cronyism, corruption and brutal conduct of the war. If the Syrian regime and its allies wish to see the removal of sanctions, then they know what they have to do — engage seriously with Special Envoy Pedersen and the United Nations-led political process to achieve a peaceful end to the Syrian conflict.

Finally, we also wanted to say that, despite the looming prospect of a virus that could heap further suffering on the Syrian people, we cannot ignore the findings in the recent reports issued by the commission of inquiry, the Board of Inquiry set up by the Secretary-General and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

We welcome the release of the Secretary-General's summary report from the Board of Inquiry on 6 April. Even though the report does not explicitly identify Russia as the regime's ally that is responsible for some of the attacks on civilian infrastructure, it is clear which country it must mean when there is only one country flying military aircraft over Idlib alongside the regime. That conclusion is supported by the findings of the commission of inquiry, which identified Russia as responsible for attacks on civilian infrastructure.

These are flagrant breaches of the international rules, which we all agreed cannot be tolerated, and those who have committed crimes must be held to account. That is our responsibility. We note with deep regret that the very hospitals that were bombed by the regime and by Russia are the same hospitals that could have been used now to fight against COVID-19.

The time for action is now. We must ask ourselves how we can now come together to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

Annex XII**Statement by Ms. Cherith Norman-Chalet, Acting Deputy
Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the
United Nations**

I thank Special Representative Geir Pedersen for his continued work on this important file and for his briefing today. It is good to see him today, and I hope he is staying safe and healthy in these challenging times.

Today the United States reaffirms its support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. We agree wholeheartedly with Special Envoy Pedersen that there should be a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria. That kind of ceasefire is necessary to enable an all-out effort to suppress the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) among some of the most vulnerable people in the world. The spread of COVID-19, especially in north-west and north-east Syria, only increases the urgency of securing a sustained ceasefire to ensure effective responses.

While we note that the so-called Astana guarantors held a teleconference last week to discuss the peace process in Syria, we firmly believe it is the United Nations that must be at the centre of any effort to establish a comprehensive, enduring and verifiable nationwide ceasefire. Special Envoy Pedersen has the authority to monitor existing lines of contact to ensure that ceasefire agreements are honoured, and it is the Organization's responsibility to advance stability in Syria with the aim of achieving a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The Council should do everything in its power to support the United Nations in that endeavour.

In its report released on 6 April, the Board of Inquiry found it was "highly probable" that the Al-Assad regime and its allies launched attacks that destroyed medical facilities — an utterly inexcusable action. We also note and welcome the Secretary-General's stated intention to appoint a senior independent adviser to address the board's recommendations. The Council must hold those who threaten Syria's peace and stability accountable. To that end, it is vital that the Board of Inquiry's evidence be shared with the commission of inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. If justice means anything to us, every Council member should support the Secretary-General's pursuit of it.

In conclusion, the United States reiterates its call for the Al-Assad regime to protect the fate of thousands of civilians held arbitrarily in detention centres, in which crowded and inhumane conditions are prime for the rapid spread of COVID-19 — an outcome we can and must work to avoid. We demand the immediate release of all civilians detained arbitrarily, including women, children and the elderly. Moreover, the Al-Assad regime must immediately grant impartial and independent entities, including medical and health organizations, access to regime detention facilities. This is now more necessary than ever as we work to combat the spread of COVID-19.

While these times are uncertain, the Syrian people can rest assured that the Trump Administration's commitment to them has never been stronger. In the days ahead, we urge each member of the Council to take the steps that will help the Syrian people move towards greater safety, prosperity and dignity. That is the future they have been asking for and it is the future we all have the responsibility to help deliver.

Annex XIII**Statement by Mr. Dang Dinh Quy, Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations**

I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing today.

My delegation notes with encouragement the recent political and security developments in Syria, including the agreement between the co-Chairs of the Constitutional Committee on the agenda for the next session, as well as the relatively calm situation on the ground over the past few weeks. It is crucial that the parties concerned be able to translate it into further encouraging progress, which would subsequently bring a peaceful end to the decade-long unrest in Syria.

However, we remain concerned about the fragility of the situation in the Syria, in general, and in north-west Syria, in particular. The ceasefire in place in Idlib since 6 March is a good opportunity for intensifying efforts for a peaceful solution, and that should not be squandered. We would also like to voice our deep concern about the continuing dire humanitarian situation in Syria, which is now compounded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, especially in the north-west, after months of intense hostilities. In the current context, my delegation would like to stress the following points.

First, we urge all parties in Syria to heed the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire and translate it into a permanent nationwide ceasefire, thus creating an environment conducive to dialogue and negotiations. We also urge all parties in Syria to refrain from any action that could trap Syrian people in the ongoing vicious circle of conflict and instability, and to continue to build trust and confidence among themselves in an effort to promote peace and reconciliation.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the common enemy. It not only targets people, especially the most vulnerable, but also hampers peace efforts and undermines consolidated gains. The role of the international community in helping to support the Syrian people in that regard is therefore essential for both humanitarian reasons and to bring about the overall conditions that could enable progress. Furthermore, we call on all members of the Constitutional Committee to continue to make every effort — through all channels — to cooperate in good faith during this difficult time.

Secondly, we fully support the continuation of any viable diplomatic and political engagement that could bring hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy in revitalizing the work of the Constitutional Committee after months of postponement. We reiterate once again our full support for the facilitation role played by the United Nations. In this regard, we welcome the proposals that the Special Envoy mentioned in his briefing and urge all parties in Syria to consider them seriously.

Last but not least, our consistent belief is that the one and only viable path towards peace and security for the people of Syria is through an inclusive political solution, led and owned by the Syrian people, in conformity with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015).

Annex XIV**Statement by Mr. Bashar Ja'afari, Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations**

I would like to thank my colleague the Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic for presiding over the work of the Security Council this month.

All Security Council resolutions pertaining to the situation in my country, Syria, have stressed an unavoidable conclusion, namely, the need for the full commitment by all States Members of the United Nations, both inside and outside the Security Council, to respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. However, eight years after the adoption of its first relevant resolution (resolution 2042 (2012)), the Security Council is still unable to enforce respect for this fundamental principle by some Member States despite the fact that no realistic or sustainable solution to the crisis can be envisaged without full implementation of this principle.

Nine years have passed since the start of the so-called Syrian crisis, which is in fact a barbaric and terrorist war waged by the Governments of well-known States that have espoused the game of hegemony and sought to legalize interference in the affairs of my country and other countries of our region, the shedding of the blood of their people and the looting of their resources under false and fabricated pretexts. In these nine years, a wide range of weaponry has been deployed against my country, whether it be through large-scale information and media warfare, an investment in terrorism, the sponsorship of criminal Takfiri organizations, direct military interventions, bombing, aggression and occupation by the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Turkey and Israel — including the recent Israeli aggression two days ago, which killed three civilians and wounded four others — or through economic terrorism and collective punishment of the Syrian people by the imposition of unilateral coercive measures, all of which constitute a flagrant violation of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, and a challenge to the mandate and resolutions of the Security Council as well as its ability to fulfil its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security.

We reiterate that we will not shy away from upholding the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, no matter how intense the pressure or to what degree the plots against us are escalated. Furthermore, we will not give up on the liberation of our occupied territories, whether they be occupied by the United States, Turkey, Israel or their affiliated terrorist organizations. We also stress that any foreign military presence on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic without the explicit consent of the Syrian Government is an act of aggression and occupation and will be dealt with as such in accordance with our rights under international law.

Not only has the Turkish regime violated its commitments under the Astana, Sochi and Moscow understandings and supported the armed terrorist groups affiliated with the many organizations it transferred to Idlib province, it has also shamelessly reinforced its illegitimate military presence on the territory of my country by allowing the daily access of convoys loaded with weapons and many other types of heavy equipment across the borders with a view to supporting the armed terrorist groups. But that was not all: the Turkish Defence Minister recently infiltrated the Syrian province of Idlib to hold meetings with leaders of some terrorist organizations operating there, with the aim of continuing Turkey's investment in terrorism and in preparation for upcoming rounds of armed confrontation. Accordingly, the representatives of countries participating in today's meeting should now realize that many Turkish infantry units have entered occupied Syrian territories and that Turkish air-defence systems are even being deployed.

Turkey has strengthened its military forces in Idlib with Hawk anti-aircraft missiles that were sent from the United States of America in clear violation of international law and the United Nations Charter. The presence of Turkish air-defence systems in the Syrian province of Idlib proves Turkey's true aim: to sustain its occupation of the Syrian territories, given that the sole purpose of deploying air-defence systems on the occupied Syrian territories is undoubtedly to destroy such air targets as planes and helicopters, which clearly means that these systems' missiles will not be used against the radical terrorist groups that are in fact allies of the Turkish regime. My delegation warns that if these Turkish air-defence systems fall into the hands of the terrorist organizations operating in Idlib — Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, Huras Al-Din and the Turkistan Islamic Party in Syria — there will be grave and dangerous consequences.

For years, the Turkish regime has recruited tens of thousands of terrorists from Central Asia and the Caucasus, including Turkmen, Uighurs and others, and brought them to my country. Yet many theoreticians in the Security Council and the Secretariat have somehow been blind to that fact, as there have been no references to this terrorist activity in any of their reports or briefings. The Turkish regime is now expanding its sponsorship of terrorism by recruiting Syrian and foreign terrorists to fight in Libya by offering tempting monthly salaries. Thousands of these terrorist recruits have been transported by Turkish aircraft to Libya undeterred and without accountability.

The world's media have been flooded with images of the hundreds of terrorists transported by Erdoğan to Libya and killed there. My European colleagues in the Security Council know the magnitude of the threat this Turkish behaviour poses to the security of Europe and the world, but their alliance with Turkey through NATO has prompted them to impose the silence of the grave on the Security Council, thereby limiting its ability to fulfil its mandate. In this context, and in order to preserve the Council's credibility and maintain international support for the Moscow agreement, the Turkish leadership, both political and military, must focus on implementing the agreement instead of shirking its responsibilities by failing to put it into effect.

Terrorist groups have taken advantage of the period of calm following the adoption of the Moscow agreement together with the international concern that has arisen in relation to combating the coronavirus disease pandemic to reorganize their forces, principally with the support of the American and Turkish occupation forces. In mid-April, the leadership of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham/Jabhat Al-Nusra announced that it had reorganized its forces and formed three new brigades in preparation for upcoming confrontations in north-west Syria. This reaffirms the need for the Security Council to require certain States to commit to stopping their support for terrorism and to upholding the absolute priority of bolstering the efforts of the Syrian State to fight terrorism and eradicate this tumour from the Syrian body. This must be done in order to completely restore security and stability in the country and help it achieve what it hopes for most: a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led solution without any foreign interference.
