



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8888th meeting

Wednesday, 27 October 2021, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Kimani (Kenya)

Members:

China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Estonia	Mr. Lipand
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
India	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland	Mr. Kelly
Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
Niger	Mr. Aougi
Norway	Ms. Heimerback
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Prince
Tunisia	Mr. Ben Lagha
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Farrey
United States of America	Mr. Mills
Viet Nam	Mr. Pham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) (S/2021/890)

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21-30816 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) (S/2021/890)

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 Turkey 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; Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki, General Coordinator of the Syrian National Conference.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/890, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021).

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Last week, from 18 and 22 October, I convened the sixth session of the small body of the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee in Geneva. In accordance with the agreement that I facilitated between the two co-Chairs, titles of constitutional principles were submitted before departure to Geneva by the three delegations, namely, the delegation nominated by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the delegation nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission and the middle third civil society delegation.

Joined by my Deputy, Ms. Khawla Matar, I convened the first co-Chairs' meeting in advance of the session, and they met in that format as required throughout the week. The co-Chairs' interactions were frank, open and business-like. With United Nations facilitation, they agreed how titles would be selected and when they would be discussed during the first four days. Together with me, they also met the middle third civil society delegation.

Accordingly, draft constitutional texts on four titles were presented in advance of each meeting and then discussed in the Committee.

On Monday, the delegation nominated by the Government submitted a draft constitutional text on the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. On Tuesday, the delegation nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission submitted a draft constitutional text on the army, the armed forces, security and intelligence. On Wednesday, some members of the middle third civil society delegation submitted a draft constitutional text on the rule of law. On Thursday, the delegation nominated by the Government submitted a draft constitutional text on terrorism and extremism.

Let me note that the co-Chairs had agreed on that distribution for the session with the understanding that, in the next two sessions, other delegations would take their turn in presenting draft constitutional texts on two titles during the week.

Each principle was the subject of discussion for one day. However, the co-Chairs were not able to agree on the mechanism for progressing the discussion further during the final day on Friday. The co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission made proposals on that, but there was no co-Chair agreement. However, the co-Chairs agreed that delegations that had further material to present regarding the texts discussed to date should be free to do so in the plenary meeting on Friday.

In that meeting, the delegation nominated by the Government stated that it had no revisions to present of its draft constitutional texts and that it did not see any common ground. The delegation nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission and some members of the middle third delegation each presented revised versions of their respective draft constitutional texts, stating that those were attempts to build common ground in the light of discussions earlier in the week. The delegation nominated by the Syrian Negotiations

Commission also presented comments on, and proposed amendments to, the texts that had been presented by the other delegations for the same stated purpose.

The meeting concluded without any points of consensus or provisional agreement in the Committee.

Let me remind the Council that the Constitutional Committee's mandate, as agreed by the parties, is to prepare and draft constitutional reform for popular approval. In accordance with its mandate, it may also amend the current Constitution or draft a new constitution. That is what constitutional reform means in that setting.

Last week, for the first time, all delegations submitted draft constitutional texts. However, in the absence of an agreed mechanism to revise the draft texts and begin to identify commonalities, the 45 members of the small body were not able to move from submitting and discussing initial draft constitutional texts to developing a productive textual drafting process. During the week, the co-Chairs also discussed possibilities for dates for the seventh and eighth sessions before the end of the year, but an agreement on dates and a commitment to meeting twice before the end of the year was regrettably not possible. It was for those reasons that I viewed the outcome, particularly the last day's discussions, as a disappointment.

It is important that the Constitutional Committee continue its work with urgency and purpose — indeed, that it works, as its terms of reference state, expeditiously and continuously to produce results and continued progress. That is what we agreed upon between the two parties. I will continue my active consultations with the co-Chairs and engage the middle third to address the challenges that have arisen. We need a common understanding on a working mechanism to help the Constitutional Committee discharge its drafting mandate. We also need to set the dates of the forthcoming sessions. I remain convinced that progress on the Constitutional Committee could, if made in the right way, help to build some trust and confidence. But let me stress that this requires real determination and the political will to try to build some common ground.

As the Council knows, the Constitutional Committee has approximately 30 per cent women among its members, and the civil society delegation is indeed comprised of nearly 50 per cent women. We continue to stress the importance of their full participation in the Committee's work.

On top of that and as part of our continuing commitment to ensuring that peacemaking efforts provide real openings for Syrian women to meaningfully participate in all facets of the political process, in parallel with the Constitutional Committee, we convened near Geneva the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. The discussions among that diverse group of women from inside and outside Syria brought real insights on the impact of the conflict on Syrians from all backgrounds, both inside Syria and in the diaspora. They showed a sense of common purpose and urgency about the need for the political process to move forward. They also stressed the need for effective institutional arrangements to guarantee the protection and full participation of women in the future of Syria, and they gave me and my deputy valuable ideas and advice. We will continue to consult them closely.

Let me also stress a third focus of our diplomacy last week. On the side-lines of the Constitutional Committee, I raised with the representatives of the three Astana guarantor States — Iran, Russia and Turkey — the need to accelerate collective efforts on the crucial file of detainees, abductees and missing persons. As part of that, I called for convening more frequent meetings of the working group on the release of detainees/abductees, the handover of bodies and the identification of missing persons. As the Council knows, tens of thousands remain detained, abducted or missing. I continue to press this issue in all my engagements.

Today I will not elaborate on a range of other issues. However, I want to stress that, as we facilitate this difficult work, we never lose sight of the deep suffering of the Syrian people in all its dimensions.

As our efforts were under way in and near Geneva, violence continued on the ground in Syria. We saw terrorist attacks, air strikes and heavy shelling, which all led to casualties, including dozens of civilians. Some of those incidents also underlined the constant risks of a regional escalation. The violence must stop. I continue to call for a nationwide ceasefire and to stress that the obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure must be respected. I also reiterate my call for international cooperation to counter terrorist groups effectively and in a manner that strictly adheres to international humanitarian law.

Mr. Griffiths will shortly update Council members on the grave humanitarian situation. For my part, let

me simply recall here today that more than 12 million Syrians remain displaced, either as refugees or as internally displaced persons, and poverty levels are in the vicinity of 90 per cent.

The current trajectory of developments in Syria is deeply concerning. We have to break out of this dynamic. As part of that, I am continuing to ask key States to work with me in exploratory discussions on concrete, mutual and reciprocal steps that are defined with realism and precision, can be implemented in parallel and are verifiable. We need a constructive Syria diplomacy to help save lives, ease suffering, promote stability and further the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

I will shortly be embarking on consultations in a number of capitals, as well as engaging the Syrian parties directly, as I seek to both facilitate the Constitutional Committee and develop a wider political process, step for step and step by step, to promote the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: As the Security Council hears every month, and as we just heard from Mr. Pedersen, the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to worsen. Accordingly, each month the Council hears me, as the Emergency Relief Coordinator, say the same. Yet without a change of course, each month that will remain true. As my role is to bear witness in the Council to the suffering of the Syrian people, I hope that you, Mr. President, will bear with me.

Ten years into the conflict, life remains very difficult for millions of Syrians, as Mr. Pedersen just told us. It is increasingly difficult for many of them. Violence continues to kill and injure civilians, including women and children. Attacks and security incidents increased throughout Syria this month. Only last week, an attack in Ariha, in Idlib governorate, reportedly killed 11 civilians and injured over 30, including schoolchildren. A market supported by a United Nations project was also damaged.

Again as Mr. Pedersen said, all parties to the conflict must respect civilians and civilian infrastructure, as is required by international humanitarian law, and make every effort to spare them the consequences of conflict.

Daily life in Syria is becoming less and less affordable. Over 90 per cent of the population now lives below the poverty line. Many people are forced to make very difficult choices to make ends meet, and therefore face a greater risk of exploitation. That means that an expansion of early recovery programmes must be central in our efforts to address needs in a sustainable way. Progress has been made. Along with other mechanisms, our pooled funds have increased support to early recovery activities. However, much more is needed. For my part, I will continue to urge donors, agencies and implementing partners to enable communities to have access to basic social services and rebuild dignified lives.

On top of increasing poverty, the water crisis and worsening food security, people in Syria are also facing a resurgence of the coronavirus disease. Cases are surging, intensive care units are at full capacity, and vaccination rates remain below 2 per cent. And now, exhausted by years of conflict, poverty and the pandemic, Syrians are about to face another bitter winter.

As temperatures start to drop, rain, cold and winter conditions will compound hardship for millions of people. Close to 2 million people in the north-west, for example, mostly women and children, live in camps, often in overcrowded and flimsy shelters, in valleys that flood, or on rocky hillsides exposed to the elements. And they have lived in these temporary arrangements for some time. Although the United Nations and its humanitarian partners are doing everything possible to assist the most vulnerable, significant funding gaps remain.

The United Nations and its partners continue to make every effort, as required by the Security Council, to scale up assistance. I was in Aleppo last August when the World Food Programme's cross-line delivery of food aid reached Idlib governorate. This was a vital step towards expanding the humanitarian response, but we must now ensure that aid is distributed. As I speak, full agreement from the parties remains pending, and I would urge swift movement on next steps to those withholding such agreement.

Preparations are also under way for another the World Food Programme cross-line delivery in November. Beyond this, the United Nations has developed a plan for a series of regular and predictable inter-agency cross-line operations to deliver multisectoral assistance

in the coming six months and to complete the assistance coming across the border. We have already submitted the request for the first inter-agency convoy under the six-month plan to the Government of Syria. Support for the plan from both the Syrian and Turkish Governments as well as relevant parties in north-west Syria will also be critical.

I am quietly optimistic that we will be able to further expand cross-line access over the coming months. The Security Council can be sure that we will certainly do our part. I therefore urge all concerned parties to ensure that cross-line missions and the aid distributions that come with them proceed without delays. If cross-line operations are to be a sustainable way of reaching more people, then we need agreement on a suitable distribution modality that is acceptable to all the relevant parties and on security guarantees from parties on the ground. This is a complicated matter, and one that takes time, but all our efforts are behind it.

When it comes to delivering life-saving aid, all channels should be made and kept available. Therefore, as I mentioned earlier, cross-border assistance remains the central part of the humanitarian response to ensure that aid effectively and transparently reaches millions of people in need in north-west Syria.

Constructive discussions with the Syrian authorities have shown that previous mission-approval rates have been misrepresented, including in at least one previous report of the Secretary-General. I apologize for this, and I assure Council members that, through our cooperation with the Government, we will make every effort to prevent this in future.

Therefore, to sum up, communities are determined to restart their lives, yet still face so many difficulties. What is needed is this: we need an urgent injection of life-saving aid, especially as Syrians prepare for winter; we need more aid for early recovery and livelihoods, as Syrians want to be able to support themselves with dignity; and we need to expand access to basic social services, because Syrians, like all of us, want to send their children to school, have electricity and water, and a reliable health clinic — that is the least that we can help them to achieve. And, of course — perhaps most importantly — Syrians need peace and support for the efforts of the Special Envoy.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Albarouki.

Ms. Albarouki (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian National Conference is a group of Syrian women and men within Syria and abroad from various but independent political and civil currents. It considers United Nations resolutions, in particular resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué, to be the fundamental road map for getting out of the tragic situation in Syria. Our political activity is therefore focused on achieving the greatest national consensus on these resolutions and the means of practically implementing them. As for our humanitarian activity, it focuses on addressing the humanitarian issues resulting from the ongoing complex war, and on the need to prioritize all urgent matters.

With respect to the Constitutional Committee and its work, we believe that there is a need to move from the current working mechanism of exclusively closed sessions to public discussions, that is from internal conflict among negotiators, to a national dialogue on drafting a modern Syrian constitution. To this end, we organized and are still organizing large meetings with in-person or remote participation to integrate the idea of the Constitutional State into the collective consciousness.

We have also called upon the Special Envoy to invite the largest number of specialists, politicians and jurists to Geneva to expand the circle of action and influence, while constantly emphasizing that the matter of a new constitution is part of a whole that includes building trust, bringing about a political transition and addressing the difficult humanitarian issues that Syrians are being subjected to in different regions of the country. The political negotiating process in Syria has been limited to the constitutional issue alone, with almost complete disregard for the confidence-building measures mentioned in paragraphs 12, 13 and 14 of resolution 2254 (2015). In the past few years, this has led to some emergency humanitarian needs being set aside or not given the attention they need.

The number of displaced Syrians has reached 6.7 million citizens to date, many of whom have been forcibly displaced. More than 1 million of them live in tents while more than 2 million live in so-called temporary shelters. They are the victims of grave housing, land and property-ownership violations. In many cases, in the very place he resides — his place of displacement — the victim has become an aggressor, especially if he belongs to an armed group. We therefore urge that the issues of forced displacement, housing, land and property-ownership be included in

the negotiations and deliberations of the Special Envoy with the various Syrian stakeholders. These issues have torn the Syrian social fabric and caused tragic confrontations that are exemplified in the city of Afrin and the so-called de-escalation zones.

The number of workers from international humanitarian organizations on the ground has decreased to less than a quarter of what it was, mostly for security reasons, and there is a lack of local alternatives throughout Syria. Bar Associations or even local human rights organizations cannot defend the victims because their members do not receive support or any local or international protection. They can easily be added to the long lists of arbitrarily detained persons as prisoners of conscience throughout Syria.

The harsh daily living conditions experienced by Syrians inside the country are the worst in the region, whether in terms of the monthly family income or accessibility of basic needs, such as water, electricity, food and medicine. Like a cancer, the war economy has flourished in all aspects of daily life. Unfortunately the mercenary business throughout the country has become the only employment opportunity for thousands of unemployed youths.

The number of Syrian refugees today is close to 6.5 million. Regrettably, the conditions for a safe and secure return are not available, neither in areas under the control of the Syrian Government nor in those under that of de facto governments.

Through a broad civilian network, we are trying to build bridges with Syrians in Europe to provide protection, connections and assistance for our people in Syria. There are hundreds of thousands of families inside Syria who lack any financial support that would enable them to survive, including from a refugee relative. Our people in Syria are full of hope, not only that refugees are living in safe and acceptable conditions but also that they would be able to help them and become a voice that conveys their suffering and pain to the entire world.

It is unfortunate that the policy of economic sanctions lacks what the United Nations once called “smart sanctions”. The most important Western economic companies have a phobia of Syrian territories. We acutely faced such problems during the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic. Our medical teams faced great difficulties in delivering vaccines and providing tests throughout Syria. Sometimes, Syrian

doctors worked 20 hours a day, owing to the lack of staff and equipment.

To this today, for instance, social networks have not agreed to establish a hotline to allow Syrian doctors in the diaspora to perform examinations remotely free of charge to Syrians in the country. The stated reason is that Syria is subject to sanctions that do not allow such a hotline.

The current sanctions cause severe harm to the Syrian people. Therefore, as a humanitarian priority, it is crucial to reconsider the unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria.

It is unfortunate that international institutions and human rights organizations do not pay sufficient attention to the issue of arbitrary arrests and missing persons. Many of them claim that it would be useless to take any action on the issue, while Syrian authorities deal with Syrian detainees as hostages or bargaining chips.

The situation in militia prisons is no better. They demand that huge sums of money be paid to security officers, such as those of the Saydnaya prison, or to the militias, such as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. There is no way to secure the release of detainees without a payment. Many prisoners have been executed because their families could not pay the money demanded.

We in the diaspora have actively participated, in cooperation with Syrian businesspeople, in the restoration of schools, mosques, hospitals and churches in the south of Syria, despite the various restrictions and harassment from the Government. It is necessary to discuss exempting the vital reconstruction of schools and hospitals from the economic sanctions imposed on Syria, given that postponing the consideration of this issue, or linking it to the reconstruction process overall, would mean sacrificing the education and health of an entire generation of our children.

It is well known that all our attempts to carry out work that is not under the supervision of the Syrian authorities are usually rejected. As a result, authorities have issued a number of decisions ordering the confiscation of movable and immovable assets of anybody who participates in that noble work.

We believe in the role of the Syrian diaspora to support our loved ones in Syria politically and financially. We are eager to support any initiative aimed at finding common ground among Syrians — men and women — living in the diaspora. We also support their

coming together so that they can play a significant political role in finding a political solution in Syria. In that regard, we draw the attention of Council members to the need to strengthen such initiatives and allow refugees to play an active role in bringing peace to the country.

In conclusion, the picture is not bright, but we refuse to surrender our right to hope. We hope that the Security Council and the United Nations will accord the Syrian issue attention commensurate with the scale of the tragedy being experienced by Syrians, in Syria and abroad. We also hope that regional and international organizations will put their pledges for Syria in the right and appropriate place.

Any disregard of the Syrian issue today will have severe consequences, not only for Syria but also for the regional and international security in general.

The President: I thank Ms. Albarouki for her briefing.

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

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and, especially, Ms. Albarouki for their input into our meeting today.

The United States deeply appreciates the tireless efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen and those of his team to convene the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee. However, we also share his frustration and assessment that the results were disappointing. This most recent round, which started with such promise, ended as one more missed opportunity by the regime to show its sincere commitment to the Committee's work. We will continue to urge all parties to participate in good faith in the Constitutional Committee process and to change their unproductive behaviour so that the Committee can open doors for other aspects of the political process.

The recent increase in violence across Syria, including the attacks in Damascus and in Ariha on 20 October, which we heard mentioned, only underscored the imperative for a nationwide ceasefire. That remains an essential element of resolution 2254 (2015). We urge the Special Envoy to continue to push for progress on all aspects of the resolution. We very much welcome the attention and focus he has given to achieving the release of the tens of thousands of

Syrians who are reportedly still arbitrarily detained inside Syria.

Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the only internationally agreed path to a peaceful solution to the conflict. As Secretary of State Blinken said on 13 October, the United States Government will neither normalize relations with the Al-Assad regime nor we will support efforts to do so until we see irreversible progress towards a political solution.

Let me address the issue of sanctions. United States sanctions are targeted at the Al-Assad regime and those who have perpetrated this conflict. The United States is committed to working with parties to ensure that sanctions do not impede humanitarian and early-recovery efforts.

On 18 October United States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen announced that the United States would continue to seek ways to tailor sanctions to mitigate unintended economic, humanitarian and political impacts on non-targeted populations abroad, including the civilian population of Syria.

We, too, are alarmed by the latest wave of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria. COVID-19 is spreading rapidly in the north-east, the north-west and in regime-held territories. Fuelling that problem is the fact that, as we heard, Syria's vaccine coverage is among the lowest in the world, with less than 2 per cent of all Syrians being fully vaccinated.

The United States has taken steps to help mitigate this latest COVID outbreak. On 25 September, United States Agency for International Development Administrator Power announced that the United States would be providing more than \$108 million in health assistance for Syria.

The COVID-19 situation also underscores the vital importance of the cross-border humanitarian mechanism through which COVID-19 vaccines and other life-saving supplies, including bottled oxygen, are able to reach the people of Idlib. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths has told us, the needs in Syria are rising, so we must seize every opportunity to help those affected. We support all modalities for aid delivery, and we encourage the Council to identify ways to expand aid access across the country.

We also want to take this opportunity to reiterate the United States' deep appreciation to all States that are hosting Syrian refugees, particularly Egypt, Iraq,

Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. While many Syrian refugees hold out hope that they will return to their country, no one should pressure them to risk their lives or those of their loved ones to do so.

That is precisely what is at stake. We are deeply disturbed by reports from Amnesty International and from Human Rights Watch documenting horrific abuses of individuals who have returned to Syria, including killings, torture, sexual violence and forced disappearances carried out by the Al-Assad regime and affiliated militias. Those reports are entirely consistent with information that the Council has received over the past years. It is therefore no surprise that voluntary returns of refugees to Syria are at their lowest level since at least 2016, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In surveys, refugees continue to emphasize that the conditions in Syria are not suitable for safe and dignified returns and that the Syrian regime's policies — the arbitrary detentions, the torture, the forced disappearances, the mandatory conscriptions, the seizure and destruction of private property, the tolerance of militias — all of that constitutes major barriers to return.

The United States urges all Member States to continue to protect Syrian refugees. We see all efforts to press their return at this point as being premature. We pledge to maintain our support to those Member States in meeting the needs of refugees and host communities.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Geir Pedersen and Martin Griffiths for their briefings, and we listened attentively to Ms. Albarouki. We highly value and support the mediation efforts of the Special Envoy on the political track. We welcome the completion of the sixth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee, held in Geneva. Its work has not been easy.

What is most important is that an effective political process has been resumed in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi. It is very important that the sides have finally been able to meet after a nine-month hiatus and to continue with direct, constructive dialogue. I want to note the contribution of the States guarantors of the Astana process in ensuring that work.

Unfortunately, at the height of the Committee's session, a terrorist attack took place in Damascus that claimed the lives of 14 people. We believe that the perpetrators, who do not wish to see the Committee successfully complete its work, are trying to thwart it.

In the upcoming phase, it is very important to ensure that the work of the Constitutional Committee remains led and implemented by the Syrian people themselves, without any external interference or the imposition of artificial time frames.

There is no alternative to impartial work with the Syrian sides in order to help them find mutually acceptable solutions. However, we must be patient and pragmatic, without excessive expectations of immediate results, especially in dealing with such a fundamental issue for any State as a constitution. We are convinced that the intra-Syrian dialogue should not be held hostage to technical modalities.

For our part, we intend to continue to work actively with all interested parties in order to make progress on the constitutional track. However, much will depend on Mr. Pedersen's diplomatic skills. A United Nations Special Envoy must be in constant contact with the Syrian people to try to resolve mutual mistrust and find mutually acceptable solutions and compromises. We hope to be able to count on more active efforts on his part in working with all Syrian sides.

In spite of the overall stabilization of the military and political situation in Syria, the threat of an escalation of tensions remains, especially on territories not under Government control, in Idlib, the Euphrates area and Al-Tanf.

We note with concern the reports on continuing illegal Israeli air strikes against Syria. In the north-east of the country, members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are free to roam, exploiting the absence of legitimate authorities, and we are seeing internecine armed clashes there.

In that connection, we would like to once again stress the importance of assisting the inter-Syrian dialogue in order to restore the unity, territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Syria.

I should now like to move on to the contents of the report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in Syrian for the period from August through September (S/2021/890). We note a significant difference compared with previous reports with respect

to the statistics on authorizations issued to the United Nations for humanitarian operations. The number of regular programmatic movements with programme or blanket approvals increased by 7 per cent. As of the time of publication of the report, Damascus had already approved 83 per cent of the 218 requested approvals for missions requiring approval from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; 17 per cent remain under consideration, so that is not a refusal. It appears, then, that almost all requests made by the United Nations have been granted.

It turns out that access to 97 per cent of those in need in Syria is generally not a problem. The only serious obstacles to the movement of humanitarian workers are mines and unexploded ordnance, but even that did not prevent the United Nations from increasing its presence on the ground in the north-east of the country, where humanitarian convoys of the World Health Organization are regularly sent, and in Deir ez-Zor governorate.

Of course, there is no need to comment here. It is clear that Damascus is fully complying with its obligations and is open to continuing to cooperate with the United Nations. We hope that all colleagues in the Council will take note of that fact.

Against that backdrop, the situation with respect to cross-line humanitarian deliveries to Idlib looks a lot less rosy. We have to note that as we feared, there was euphoria from the one-time August convoy of the United Nations World Food Programme. Over the next two months, there were no further achievements. Food continues to be stored in Sarmada.

The modalities for the UNICEF humanitarian operation mentioned in the report of the Secretary General require further explanation. Under what criteria is it considered a cross-line delivery? As we understand it, no lines were crossed and no cross-line deliveries were made. We would also like to ask Martin Griffiths for clarification as to what steps are being taken to increase efforts on early reconstruction projects. The figures cited in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/890) are encouraging, but real progress has been minimal. It is not clear to us why efforts to create jobs fall into the same category. How can the undoubtedly important task of improving people's socioeconomic situation concretely affect living conditions in a country with a shattered infrastructure? To be frank, we see only a very indirect connection.

Following his recent visit to Syria, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi clearly articulated the need to create adequate conditions for returning Syrian refugees.

Against the backdrop of the global economic crisis, Syria's neighbours in the region openly acknowledge the limit of their capacity to continue hosting Syrian refugees, a growing number of whom no longer want to tolerate life in tents, without access to medicine and education, and seek to return home in search of stability. Every month, there are hundreds such Syrians — mostly women and children. The Syrian Government has set up reception and hosting centres in 413 locations for 1.5 million people to provide them with the necessary assistance. Government programmes are under way in the governorates of Aleppo, Damascus and Hama to reclaim areas liberated from the militants. Those efforts by the Syrian Government, squeezed by the vice grip of Western sanctions, deserve support.

Nevertheless, with a determination that would be better used elsewhere, Western colleagues are doing their best to distort reality, politicize this purely humanitarian issue, intimidate potential returnees and spread fake news in the process. A good example of that was the statement delivered today by my American colleague. The sooner our colleagues shift to a normal constructive approach, the better it will be for ordinary Syrians and their neighbours in the region.

At the same time, we read reports from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs about the increase in extreme poverty in terrorist-controlled Idlib, even among the working population. Not surprisingly, street protests have started in the enclave among the rapidly growing number of starving civilians, who are still effectively held hostage by the remnants of die-hard insurgents. One recent example of the absolutely slaveowner-like behaviour of the Idlib bandits is the refusal to release a group of 50 teenagers who had expressed a desire to attend universities in Aleppo and Damascus. We hope that colleagues at the Security Council who have been fighting for children's rights and education will make their position known on this matter.

Despite all that, we must note the stabilization of Dara'a. Over 70 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their homes, schools have reopened, and humanitarian aid workers have resumed regular operations. Against that backdrop, it

is of course disconcerting to see what is happening in Al-Hol and Rukban camps. We call on our colleagues to exert influence on their clients. We are also concerned about the situation in northern Syria with regard to the numerous violations of international humanitarian law and the rights of IDPs in the areas of Ras Al-Ayn and Tel Abyad.

In conclusion, I would like to urge everyone to remember that very soon we will have to decide on the future of cross-border deliveries. We will have to decide whether to renew the cross-border mechanism in an impartial manner, based on facts and achievements, in line with the provisions of resolution 2585 (2021). There are still serious questions about its implementation, and time is running out. So-called “successes” that are just a sham will not be taken into account in that decision. I hope that our colleagues and the Secretariat understand that.

Mr. Kelly (Ireland): I make this statement today on behalf of the co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file — Norway and Ireland.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for his briefing. He has set before us in stark terms the enormity of the humanitarian needs facing the people of Syria — a grim reality to which our briefer, Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki, also gave expression today, and we also thank her for her briefing.

I must begin by deploring the recent uptick in hostilities in Syria, in particular in the north-west, which have resulted in more than 100 civilian deaths since June. This flagrant disregard for the lives of Syrians is frankly unacceptable. We urge all parties to the conflict to fully respect and implement their international humanitarian law obligations, including by ensuring the protection of civilians. We also call on all States with direct influence over the parties to the conflict to take any possible proactive steps that may lead to increased protection for the civilian population in Syria.

Syrians are facing yet another bitter winter. With resilience levels at record lows after 10 years of conflict, Syrians are now worse off than at any time since the conflict began. In the north-west, many of the 2.8 million displaced persons find themselves living in overcrowded flimsy tents, in valleys that flood or on rocky hillsides exposed to harsh weather. Recent winters in Syria have seen many killed or injured as fires have ripped through crowded camps, storms

have wreaked havoc and flooding has washed away thousands of tents and destroyed temporary homes.

The onset of these harsh winter conditions is coinciding with increasing fuel prices and food scarcity. Tragically, lives will once again be lost this winter, and we recognize the disproportionate impact that those severe conditions and the ongoing conflict and violence have on both women and children. The extreme fragility of the situation underlines the imperative of ensuring that help can reach those most in need through the continued provision of humanitarian access and adequate funding for the winterization response. Furthermore, we must not lose sight of the need for a broader humanitarian response — including water, sanitation, health, education, shelter and early-recovery projects — geared towards providing for the immediate needs of Syrians.

The harsh winter conditions will create fresh operational difficulties for the complex humanitarian access landscape in Syria. We note the increase this year in cross-line access to the north-east. We welcome the news of a potential inter-agency cross-line convoy to the north-west, which will build upon the first World Food Programme cross-line mission, which took place in August. We also welcome the continued efforts at the large cross-border operation at Bab Al-Hawa. Thanks to the principled decision of the Council in July, that cross-border operation is continuing to provide a lifeline to 3.4 million people in need, who are now facing another winter against the backdrop of an intensification of hostilities, a deepening economic crisis, an unprecedented spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and a severe funding crisis.

We are concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Al-Hol camp, as reported by the Secretary-General this month. The daily reality for those vulnerable people is a continuing struggle to access food, medical care, clean water, protection and other basic services, not to mention their exposure to the spread of COVID-19. It is critical that the security provided at the camp be done in a manner that neither endangers residents nor restricts humanitarian access.

The past two months have seen a sharp increase in the number of COVID-19 infections in Syria. For instance, in the north-west it has been described as an uncontrolled outbreak, with the positivity rate reported to have doubled in the past month, resulting in widespread illness and death. That has put enormous

pressure on an already fragile health system and added to the urgency of protecting access to water and sanitation. All parties must facilitate humanitarian access and uphold ceasefires in order to enable medical humanitarian teams to undertake their vital functions, including safely delivering COVID-19 vaccinations to those who need it most.

In conclusion, I would like to underline our commitment to supporting the people of Syria in the face of this grave humanitarian crisis. As co-penholders, our approach continues to be informed by the words of the Secretary-General, who tells us that communities are determined to restart their lives, yet desperately need an end to the conflict, life-saving aid, early-recovery support and respect for fundamental human rights in order to do so. Our collective efforts on the Council must surely be dedicated to ensuring that Syrians who have suffered through this terrible conflict can live with dignity and hope for a better future.

I would now like to deliver some remarks on the political situation in my national capacity.

I thank Mr. Pedersen very much for his efforts to provide new momentum to the Constitutional Committee. We share his disappointment at the lack of progress. As civil society briefer Rouba Mhaissen eloquently told us last month (see S/PV.8866), in order for any political settlement to be successful, it must focus on building local resilience and supporting Syrians, especially the voice and agency of Syrian women. Their meaningful participation in the political process is crucial to achieving sustainable peace after so many desperate years of conflict.

As set out in resolution 2254 (2015), the new constitution is an essential building block for a political solution and national reconciliation, which the Syrian people need and deserve. It is long past time for meaningful engagement and tangible progress on that vital task. Tragically, the vision of a peaceful future remains elusive, and the Syrian people continue to endure the horror of events such as last week's lethal attacks in Damascus and Idlib, the victims of which included three boys and one girl killed while on their way to school. Ireland condemns those attacks, which serve to underline the importance of a nationwide ceasefire across all of Syria.

Earlier this month an event took place on the margins of the General Assembly on the plight of the disappeared in Syria. Family members spoke of

the terrible circumstances in which their loved ones went missing. The Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates that at least 149,000 people remain detained or missing. That is an appalling situation for those individuals and their families left in limbo as they await news of their loved ones. We call on the Syrian authorities and other parties to release detainees and abductees, and we thank Mr. Pedersen for his work on that important issue.

We listened with interest to Mr. Pedersen's ideas on step-for-step approaches by the Syrian parties and international actors. Ireland looks forward to hearing more about what he has in mind and is willing to be helpful in whatever way it can. As always, he has our full support in the vital work of seeking a political solution to the Syrian conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings. I commend their efforts to advance the political process in Syria and ease the plight of the Syrian people. I also listened closely to the briefing by Ms. Albarouki.

China welcomed the convening of the sixth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee according to schedule and noted that it did not achieve the results hoped for. While Syria continues to suffer from foreign occupation, unilateral sanctions and terrorism; while there is a grave lack of mutual political trust among all parties in Syria; and while the future and destiny of the country are not entirely in the hands of the Syrian people, it comes as no surprise that the Constitutional Committee has encountered difficulties and delays in its work. Following the Committee's session, the Special Envoy said to the press that all parties in Syria needed to reach an understanding on how to advance drafting the constitution.

We call on all parties to remain constructively engaged with the Special Envoy in that regard. All parties in Syria and those who have influence over it should take practical measures to effectively implement a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process based on areas of consensus such as counter-terrorism, actively cooperate, gradually build mutual trust to create the conditions necessary for the political process, substantively support the work of the Special Envoy

and jointly promote the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Last week saw a terrorist attack in Damascus that led to casualties. China strongly condemns the attack and extends its condolences to the families of the victims and its sympathy to those who were injured. China opposes terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and supports the Syrian Government's counter-terrorism efforts. Terrorism is a scourge for humankind. The Security Council should send a consistent and clear message to the terrorist forces in Syria and reject double standards.

The humanitarian situation in Syria described by Under-Secretary-General Griffiths is of deep concern. The economic crisis has affected Syrian society in every aspect. Food and oil prices have soared, while people's income has continued to fall sharply. The coronavirus disease pandemic remains a serious issue, while vaccines are in short supply. Water levels in the Euphrates River have dropped, while operations at the Allouk water station have been frequently disrupted, making it difficult to sustain water and power supplies and agricultural irrigation.

Since Turkey illegally invaded north-east Syria, it has repeatedly cut off the water supply from the Allouk water station, affecting hundreds of thousands of civilians and creating enormous difficulties for the United Nations humanitarian relief work in the area. China urges Turkey to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law, protect civilians, maintain infrastructure operations and guarantee humanitarian access for the United Nations.

Syria's humanitarian needs will increase further as winter approaches. The international community must pay equal attention to humanitarian assistance and economic reconstruction and use a multi-pronged approach to help the Syrian people cope with multiple challenges. China appreciates the large-scale humanitarian relief operations carried out by the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other agencies throughout Syria. On 31 August, WFP delivered cross-line humanitarian assistance from Aleppo to Idlib for the first time. That was a major breakthrough.

We hope that all the parties concerned will work together to develop a plan for inter-agency cross-line operations in the north-west. China welcomes the fact that the United Nations Development Programme, the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other agencies have actively carried out early-recovery and livelihood projects in Syria, repaired infrastructure, cleaned up debris and provided training and job opportunities for the Syrian people.

Syria recently cooperated with Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon with regard to natural gas. We encourage the countries of the region to step up interaction and mutual assistance to jointly improve the regional economic and humanitarian situation. It must be pointed out that unilateral sanctions have exacerbated the economic and humanitarian crises in Syria and run contrary to the efforts of the international community. They must therefore be lifted immediately.

Ms. Prince (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I also thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Ms. Albarouki for their briefings.

We remain extremely concerned about the security situation in Syria. The latest reports of hostilities are alarming, and they continue to compound an already-dire humanitarian crisis. We firmly condemn all acts of violence, in particular recent attacks in Damascus and Idlib. We implore the parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint and fully commit to a nationwide ceasefire.

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is paramount. We remind parties of their obligation to fully comply with the principles enshrined in international law, including throughout the conduct of all military and counter-terrorism operations. Failure to do so constitutes a gross violation for which impunity should never be tolerated. The protection of civilians extends to those residing in displacement camps such as Al-Hol, where insecurity persists. We reiterate that camp residents and humanitarian workers must be afforded safety and access to basic services.

The economic and water crises confine the Syrian people to a very perilous position, as they have compounded food insecurity and shortages of other commodities and generated potential long-term humanitarian consequences. Record-low water levels in the Euphrates River, precipitated by the existential threat of climate change, in combination with other troubling factors, such as the reduced operations of the Allouk water station, therefore demand immediate and sustained attention. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the adverse impact of unilateral coercive measures

on the civilian population, the work of humanitarian actors and the country's coronavirus disease response. We echo our unyielding appeal for the lifting of those measures for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Practical steps must be taken to assist Syria and Syrians in need. Vulnerabilities are high. Early recovery projects and activities, including the rehabilitation and reconstruction of civilian infrastructure, are critical and must be tangibly supported by the international community and other partners. That is necessary to enhance the resilience of the Syrian people and to bolster the country's own national efforts to achieve its long-term development goals. We ought to be reminded that those projects are also an essential factor that will encourage the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

Millions continue to be dependent on life-saving aid in Syria, with needs are growing rapidly and daily. Timely, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, facilitated by the cross-border mechanism, remains critical to the response. However, the mechanism in isolation cannot effectively and adequately meet the needs of all Syrians. The cross-line modality is therefore required to complement the mechanism and must be optimized and scaled up to enable greater access. We therefore urge parties to continue to work together to expand that modality.

We note with concern and regret the outcome of the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee, despite the best efforts of the Special Envoy. The Constitutional Committee is unquestionably vital to the progress of the wider political process and an important component of resolution 2254 (2015). We strongly urge all parties to remain committed to working together and to engage constructively, in a spirit of mutual respect and compromise. Commonalties have been found before, and must be found again, to reach consensus and move forward.

We continue to support the Special Envoy as he works assiduously to facilitate the work of the Constitutional Committee and the wider political process, including through efforts on the unsettled issues of detainees and missing persons. Confidence-building measures must be prioritized in the process to foster goodwill and encourage national reconciliation.

Lasting peace and stability in Syria cannot be won through military means. A political resolution remains the only path to finally put an end to a decade

of conflict and suffering. Syria and its people require pragmatic support that is Syria-focused and not directed by geopolitical interests. That dictates constructive actions such as the withdrawal of all unauthorized foreign forces present on Syria's sovereign territory.

Ten years of conflict have stripped away dignity, protection and prosperity from the Syrian people. A decade has been lost to turmoil and anguish. It is past time for Syria to be supported with practical actions rather than with mere verbal expressions of solidarity. We have a duty to the Syrian people, and we must not fail to discharge it.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki for their briefings.

We also welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to today's meeting.

I will focus my statement on the following points — first, violence and the ceasefire; secondly, the constitutional process; thirdly, the rule of law, and, lastly, the humanitarian situation.

First, Mexico rejects all recent acts of violence that have been recorded. My country condemns the attack on a military vehicle in Damascus, which led to the deaths of 14 people. My delegation also condemns the bombing in the north-west, including in Ariha, Idlib and western Aleppo, which resulted in civilian deaths, including children. We extend our condolences and call for unconditional respect for international law and international humanitarian law. Those events remind us of the absolute need for a lasting national ceasefire. The human cost is unacceptable. According to the most recent estimates published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 350,000 people have died in 10 years of conflict.

Secondly, we welcome the recent holding of the sixth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee and highlight the agreement among the parties on working methods. We deplore the fact that, two years since the establishment of the Committee, progress on the drafting of the constitution has been limited. We call on the delegation appointed by the Government to demonstrate resolve and commitment as it participates in the constitutional process.

The Constitutional Committee is not the solution to the Syrian conflict but, undoubtedly, it will lay

the foundation for progress in the political transition and social reconciliation and, ultimately, in building lasting peace. In that regard, we applaud the ongoing contact between the Special Envoy and civil society. In particular, we welcome the recent meeting with the Women's Advisory Board. We underscore the importance of ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, young people and minorities at all stages of political discussions.

Despite the lack of progress in the drafting of the new constitution, we note common ground among delegations in areas such as the cessation of violence, the containment of the pandemic, the protection of civilians, the fight against terrorism, the strengthening of institutions and economic recovery, as well as the safeguarding of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Syria. Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the parameter for compliance.

With regard to the rule of law, we echo the Secretary-General's call. Mexico, too, calls for the release of detainees and for clarification with regard to forced disappearances, as soon as possible. We stress that, unless the demands of thousands of families on the issue are addressed, it will be impossible to mend Syria's social fabric or promote national reconciliation.

With respect to the humanitarian situation, my country is concerned about the increase in the number of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases, which exacerbates critical humanitarian needs, in particular in the north-west. To date, only 1.6 per cent of the population have received the vaccine. And the prognosis is a sombre one because, despite the planned vaccination roll-out, it will be possible to vaccinate only 15 per cent of the population. As we have underscored several times, COVID-19 vaccines should be considered a global public good. Access to them should be guaranteed to everyone.

My country, Mexico, welcomes the efforts towards the ongoing delivery of humanitarian aid across conflict lines. To that end, we call for the necessary permits to be issued. Humanitarian access — cross-border and cross-line — is particularly crucial as winter approaches. The displaced population in the north-east will require tents and fuel. Approximately 80 per cent of those living in camps for displaced persons are women and children.

In conclusion, Mexico reiterates that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. That is why we call for a nationwide ceasefire and the redoubling

of efforts in order to make progress towards a political solution that will make it possible to prioritize the urgent humanitarian needs of the country.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their informative briefings today. We welcome the participation of Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki and appreciate her insightful comments.

Estonia condemns, in the strongest terms, the acts of violence that took place last week across Syria. That includes the attack on a military bus in Damascus and missile attacks in Ariha on 20 October. At least 10 civilians, including four children, were killed in the town of Ariha, in Idlib governorate, on that day.

We reiterate our call for a nationwide ceasefire, which is a precondition for peaceful dialogue, based on resolution 2254 (2015). All parties must adhere to international law and provide safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all Syrian people.

The new wave of violence serves to highlight the fact that, unfortunately, the war is far from over. As noted by Ms. Albarouki today and by Ms. Mhaissen last month (see S/PV.8866), refugees do not intend to return to Syria under those circumstances. We reiterate that the return of refugees must be voluntary, safe and dignified.

Looking at the humanitarian situation, we commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for reaching an average of 5 million people in both August and September with humanitarian aid. As noted by Mr. Griffiths, cross-border aid deliveries remain essential in providing food and life-saving support to millions of internally displaced persons. That support is crucial as overall living standards continue to deteriorate due to widespread corruption and warlordism. Estonia expresses concern over recent reports of currency manipulation by the Syrian regime, which has forced international aid agencies to use a distorted exchange rate.

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his efforts, but after six rounds of Constitutional Committee talks, there have been no substantial discussions on the constitution, no regularity in meetings and no meaningful progress. The Constitutional Committee has failed the Syrian people. We are witnessing delaying tactics and empty promises. In that light, we encourage the Special Envoy

to explore other confidence-building measures to help mediate conflicting interests.

Finally, the topic of locating missing people, whether deceased or arbitrarily detained, remains a priority for Estonia. Investigative mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the General Assembly's 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 are important tools to reach that goal.

Ms. Farrey (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Emergency Relief Coordinator Griffiths for their briefings today. I would also like to thank Ms. Albarouki for her statement.

The past month has seen a worrisome increase in incidents of deadly violence in Syria. In particular, we note with concern the 20 October rocket attack on residential areas of Ariha city, in southern Idlib, by regime forces, which reportedly killed 13 people, including several schoolchildren, and wounded 30 others. The United Kingdom notes with concern the bomb attack on a military bus in Damascus on the same day, which reportedly led to the deaths of 14 people.

The United Kingdom condemns both of those attacks. We reiterate our condemnation of any and all acts of terrorism committed wherever, whenever and by whomever. We reaffirm our demand that all parties in Syria immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects, as well as any indiscriminate use of weapons. We express our condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims of those and other attacks and wish the injured a full and speedy recovery.

Against the backdrop of that apparent steady increase in the level and nature of violence in Syria, last month we expressed hope for substantive progress on the political processes set out in resolution 2254 (2015), particularly in the sixth round of Constitutional Committee talks (see S/PV.8866).

We thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his tireless work in facilitating the talks in Geneva. After two years of meetings, there were some signs of limited progress. But we share the disappointment that, despite Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts, the parties failed to reach consensus on next steps, including drafting a new

constitution or agreeing a date for the next round of talks. In that sense, the process fell short. We hope to see genuine preparation on the constitutional reform process soon.

A political solution pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) remains the only clear path out of the conflict in Syria. In the absence of substantive progress towards a sustainable end to the conflict, the United Kingdom reaffirms its position that we will not provide funding for reconstruction. In the meantime, the United Kingdom remains committed to doing what it can to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. That includes restricting the resources available to those seeking to perpetuate or profit from the conflict and to provide what assistance we can to Syrians facing one of the direst humanitarian situations in the world.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the United Kingdom has committed over \$5 billion in humanitarian aid to Syrians. In 2020-2021 alone, the United Kingdom has provided over \$2 million worth of food, clean water, medical consultations and education and over 200,000 vaccines. Helping those most vulnerable in Syria using every possible route remains a priority for the United Kingdom.

Recent cross-line missions have demonstrated the challenges of securing consistent and safe cross-line aid access into north-west Syria. Cross-border aid delivery remains the most effective and safest means of delivery. We welcome the development of a six-month plan for cross-line assistance to explore in more detail the potential for increased cross-line access. We extend thanks to partners, including Turkey, without the collaboration of whom cross-line pilot missions could not have taken place.

In addition to providing direct life-saving assistance, the United Kingdom recognizes the importance of humanitarian assistance and providing sustainable solutions to meet people's needs by strengthening resilience, restoring capacity and catalysing recovery from a crisis — otherwise known as early recovery. To date, among other things, the United Kingdom's early-recovery work in Syria has included cash assistance to vulnerable households, imports for agriculture and livestock production and basic housing repair support. In north-east Syria, the United Kingdom has supported over 5,500 people with cash-for-work interventions and over 53,000 people through business development interventions.

In conclusion, we regret that, until the Syrian regime puts the Syrian people ahead of its own survival and genuinely commits to making progress on the political process endorsed by the Council in resolution 2254 (2015), that kind of support will never be enough. We once again urge the Syrian regime to work in good faith with the United Nations and the Special Envoy to create a truly sustainable and peaceful future for Syria and Syrians.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Martin Griffiths for their briefings, as well as Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki for her testimony.

The war in Syria remains a daily reality. We condemn the resurgence of violence as seen in the bombing attacks in Damascus on 20 October and the indiscriminate bombings by the regime and its supporters on Idlib, which led to the deaths of at least a dozen civilians, including four children. No effort must be spared in order to bring about a general cessation of hostilities under the supervision of the United Nations and in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

France welcomes the efforts of the Special Envoy to convene the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee last week in Geneva. We take note of the discussions held during the week, which focused on issues that are extremely important for the future of the Syrian people. We regret that the delegation appointed by the regime did not demonstrate a willingness to pave the way for a common text. We also regret that no date for the next session has been agreed upon.

We must face reality: it has been two years since the process was put in place, while no tangible results have been achieved. We have already called, on numerous occasions, for a sincere commitment from the regime and the mobilization of its supporters in that regard.

The Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). It remains the common road map for Council members to achieve a political solution to the conflict. Until resolution 2254 (2015) is fully implemented, there will be no lasting peace in Syria, as the events of 20 October show. It is precisely in the name of that lasting peace that we keep repeating that, in the absence of a concrete political solution, our positions on the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction will remain unchanged. Without a

political solution, there can be no voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees and displaced persons.

The humanitarian situation remains dire, and the Syrian population is about to face the rigours of a new winter of war. International humanitarian law continues to be flouted. At least 126 civilians lost their lives during the months of August and September alone. Serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights will not go unpunished. France will ensure that. Without justice, there will be no lasting peace in Syria.

The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, must remain an absolute priority. Every effort must also be made to ensure full humanitarian access and to accelerate vaccination campaigns against coronavirus disease, as has been reiterated on many occasions, particularly in the north-west, where the pandemic is spreading in a very worrisome way.

As the Secretary-General noted in his most recent report (S/2021/890), the first cross-line convoy to the north-west is a step forward. However, we know that cross-line assistance is no substitute for cross-border operations. We therefore encourage the United Nations to step up cross-border convoys to meet people's needs as winter approaches.

After 10 years of war, it is time for all Council members to understand that no one will win the Syrian crisis with weapons. There is an urgent need for everyone to show a spirit of compromise to bring this tragedy to an end.

Mr. Ben Lagha (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki, General Coordinator of the Syrian National Conference, for their briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in this meeting.

At the outset, Tunisia expresses its concern about the widespread increase in violence, tensions and terrorism in Syria in the past weeks. We are also concerned about the signs of increasing armed clashes in some parts of the country, which could undermine stabilization efforts and exacerbate the security and humanitarian

challenges, especially amid the consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

In that regard, we reiterate our firm position that there can be no military solution to the crisis. The solution will instead require a political settlement led and owned by Syria and facilitated by the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), in order to put an end to external interference and the presence of terrorist groups, preserve Syria's unity and sovereignty and restore its security and stability.

We also reiterate the importance of restoring stability in Syria through efforts to de-escalate the situation and restore calm. All parties should respect international humanitarian law, international human rights law and protect civilians at all times, especially children and other vulnerable groups.

The terrorist bombing that targeted a military bus in Damascus on 20 October reminds us once again of the need to address terrorist-designated organizations while respecting international law and maintaining unity in the international community. Civilians should be protected from all forms of violence and aggression regardless of their origin. We also note an increase in fighting between various factions and terrorist groups in Syria recently. We therefore once again recall that the understandings and arrangements in force in Syria, despite their importance, remain short-term solutions to a ceasefire as long as they do not address in a practical and effective way the issue of neutralizing terrorist organizations, thereby ending the safe haven that such groups have found in some parts of the country. A long-term political solution is required in Syria in order to restore security and stability in both the country and the region.

We also took note of the holding of the sixth session of the Syrian Constitutional Committee and its small body in Geneva last week. While we welcome the re-launching of the constitutional reform process among Syrians and the in-person meeting of the two co-Chairs with the Special Envoy in Geneva, we urge the Syrian parties to make more efforts to seek out common ground and find the necessary compromises, as well as strengthening confidence-building measures, based on the principle of their full ownership of the settlement process and the overriding interests of the brotherly Syrian people.

Tunisia also welcomes the adherence of the Syrian parties during the negotiations to the principle of the

unity of Syria despite the failure to achieve the desired progress in terms of drafting a constitution. We value the role of the Special Envoy and once again express our full support for his efforts.

As described in the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/890), the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to be a cause of concern, especially in the light of the worsening living, health and education conditions and the exacerbation of the situation regarding the delivery and interruption of basic materials and services. In that context, we note the importance of taking proactive measures as winter approaches by strengthening resilience and early-recovery projects in Syria, which still lack sufficient funds, in order to ensure an effective and timely humanitarian response.

We reaffirm the importance of ensuring sustainable access by Syrians to basic needs and services and respect by all parties of their obligations to protect civilians, civilian and medical facilities and medical and humanitarian personnel in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We also stress the importance of delivering humanitarian assistance to those in need wherever they may be in Syria, while ensuring its use in an effective and transparent manner. In that context, we call for the strengthening of cross-line humanitarian operations in Syria and the completion of the cross-line delivery of humanitarian aid to Sarmada.

In conclusion, we welcome the constructive engagement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with the Syrian Government on the issues of forced displacement of Syrians and cooperation to remove obstacles preventing the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. We support what the High Commissioner has said regarding the fact that finding solutions for displaced persons requires concerted efforts by the Syrian State, host countries and donors.

Mr. Aougi (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen, Mr. Griffiths and Ms. Albarouki for their briefings. We welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to this meeting.

My delegation is concerned about the continuing violence that has escalated in recent weeks. We deplore the bomb attacks in Damascus on 20 October, as well as the air strikes that have resulted in deaths and injuries. The Niger urges the parties to refrain from any action that could further aggravate tensions and calls on the

parties for a general ceasefire to create the conditions for a political process.

We will not stop saying that the resolution of the Syrian crisis cannot come from the force of arms alone, but, rather, through dialogue and negotiations and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We are disappointed that the Constitutional Committee is struggling to make real progress and find a common pathway towards drafting a constitution. It is high time for the parties to pull together and show a modicum of compromise to break this impasse in order to truly put the political process on the right track. My delegation calls on the parties to make gestures to build mutual confidence by undertaking a unilateral mass release of detainees and providing clarifications to the families of missing persons.

On the humanitarian front, the Niger remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria. We call on the Syrian Government to continue its cooperation with the United Nations and its partners to improve and strengthen the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as the sharing of information.

The Niger calls for the easing or suspending unilateral economic sanctions, which are weighing heavily on Syria's ability to cope with the pandemic and the current economic crisis. For my delegation, all those who need this aid should receive it, no matter who or where they are.

In conclusion, the Niger recalls that any real, tangible progress in the situation requires giving up all foreign interference, including support for armed groups. Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity must be respected.

Mr. Ragutthalli (India): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing today. I thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for his update on the humanitarian situation. I also thank the civil society briefer, Ms. Albarouki, for her insights.

Special Envoy Pedersen has just briefed us in detail on the developments in Geneva with regard to the sixth round of Constitutional Committee talks and deliberations. It is encouraging that the Constitutional Committee met last week in Geneva. While the meetings led to no major outcome, the fact that parties presented their proposals is a positive development. We hope these efforts will further energize the political track and help

the Special Envoy in the coming weeks in his mediation endeavours towards full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We reiterate that the Constitutional Committee process has to remain Syrian-led and Syrian-driven and facilitated by the United Nations. In this regard, we continue to call on all external actors to desist from adversely influencing the parties concerned.

There have been some important high-level regional engagements with Syria as well. We take note of Syria's recent engagement with Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. The opening of the border between Jordan and Syria will help in the movement of people and essential goods.

On the security front, we remain concerned with the overall situation in Syria, including the recent ceasefire violations in the north-west of the country. We condemn in the strongest terms the recent terrorist attack in Damascus, which resulted in the killing of 14 people and injuries to many. India has always believed that terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. The international community must unequivocally condemn any acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, irrespective of the place, time or the background of the perpetrators.

We have been referring to the involvement of external actors in Syria and its impact on the growth of terrorism in both Syria and the region. Such United Nations-designated terrorist groups as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, as mentioned in recent reports of the Secretary-General, have continued to gain in strength in Syria. ISIL has continued to launch attacks in areas across Deir ez-Zor, Hasakah and eastern rural Homs.

We believe that a nationwide comprehensive ceasefire is paramount in serving the interests of the Syrian people and will help to ensure that positive developments such as the first cross-line humanitarian aid operation from Aleppo to Idlib in August can take firm root and not remain a one-off occurrence. In this regard, we take note of the inter-agency cross-line operations proposal that the Under-Secretary-General referred to earlier.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has not seen much improvement in recent months. More than 12 million people across Syria remain in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The dire food insecurity

situation, as documented by the World Food Programme, has been further aggravated by the compounding water crisis. The drought conditions and reduced water levels in the Euphrates River has further added to problem. While the number of active cases of coronavirus disease is rising every day, particularly in north-west Syria, the vaccination levels continue to remain low. It is clear that the current level of humanitarian assistance remains insufficient, and there is therefore an urgent need to scale it up.

We note the efforts aimed at easing unilateral coercive measures. We remain confident that such developments would also encourage progress in early recovery projects being carried out by the United Nations agencies and others in Syria.

India has continued to extend development assistance and human-resource-development support to Syria through grants and lines of credit for several projects, including capacity-building programmes. Just last week, through our grant assistance, we set up a state-of-the-art centre of excellence in information technology in Damascus.

Since the beginning of the conflict, India has always had diplomatic engagement with Syria. We intend to stay the course and reiterate our steadfast commitment to continuing to render all possible support and assistance to the people of Syria.

Mr. Pham (Viet Nam): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Ms. Albarouki for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in today's meeting.

Sustainable peace and development continue to elude the Syrian people. These can only be achieved once a comprehensive political solution has been reached. Viet Nam reiterates its full support for the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political solution, which is in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and in full adherence to international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

My delegation is pleased to see last week's resumption of talks within the framework of the Constitutional Committee, although, as pointed out by the Special Envoy, the desired outcomes have not been achieved. In this regard, we encourage the parties concerned to engage constructively in dialogue and

negotiation with a view to realizing the Syrian people's aspirations for peace.

To facilitate this process, trust and confidence among the Syrian interlocutors and international actors need to be rebuilt and constantly consolidated. We will continue to support the efforts of relevant parties and the United Nations Special Envoy and his team towards this end.

While the search for a political settlement is under way, it is concerning to hear about the dire predicaments of the Syrian people. Even though there has been no major outbreak of violence since March 2020, the security situation is still extremely volatile. We condemn the attack in Damascus on 20 October. At the same time, protection concerns remain prominent, and civilians continue to bear the brunt of hostilities and insecurity, especially in the north-west, as a result of the intensified violence. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint to maintain the security situation, which is an important condition for facilitating the ongoing dialogues. Efforts to combat terrorist groups designated as such by the Security Council must continue. Meanwhile, it is important to enhance coordination so as to best ensure respect for international law, including humanitarian law, and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The hardships endured by the Syrian people have also been intensified by the accelerating economic meltdown, food insecurity, the water crisis and the pandemic, among other things. We call for the enhancement of the humanitarian response in order to save lives. To do so, humanitarian access needs to be ensured in a safe, unimpeded and sustained manner.

In that spirit, we welcome the fact that humanitarian assistance has continued throughout Syria and that there has been an increase in cross-line deliveries to the north-east. We also commend the efforts to enhance the recovery capability and resilience of the Syrian people. We encourage further cooperation among the parties to agree on distribution modalities, with a view to establishing sustained cross-line assistance to the north-west, especially in the light of the anticipated increased needs of 3.4 million people during the winter ahead.

While the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has already been extremely painful, it is particularly worrisome to see the dramatic surge in COVID-19 cases. The 170 per cent increase in a single month shows how severe the situation is. Therefore,

particular focus should be placed on the distribution of vaccines throughout the country.

We also support the appeal for the waiving of sanctions that hinder the humanitarian response in Syria, which was also called for earlier by Ms. Albarouki.

Let me conclude by calling for further assistance to the Syrian people in order to alleviate their difficulties. It is undoubtedly of utmost importance to ensure the unity of the international community in assisting them through the current multilayered crises.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I make this statement in a national capacity on the political situation in Syria.

I wish to thank Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki for her valuable inputs in our discussions today as well as Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for their detailed briefings.

Let me start by commending the Special Envoy and his team for their persistent work in preparing for the meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva last week and for their efforts to bring the Syrian parties back to the table. We welcome the fact that there were good and open discussions in Geneva and that the parties presented texts. That was a step forward. We had, however, like others, hoped for more concrete results and a more optimistic conclusion. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy to identify possible next steps for the Constitutional Committee, and we urge all sides, in particular the Syrian Government, to make the efforts needed to bring the constitutional process forward.

Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the framework for a political solution in Syria — one agreed by consensus by the Council. It outlines a new constitution with elections following.

While the Constitutional Committee is only one part of a larger puzzle, it is a very important one. It has so far been the only ongoing process and arena where the parties meet. We reiterate the importance of consulting with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room in those efforts.

Let me also highlight the importance of seeing progress on other parts of resolution 2254 (2015), not least the release of arbitrarily detained persons, which remains such an important issue for the Syrian people.

The ongoing violence in several places in Syria lately — in the north but also in Damascus — is a reminder

of the urgent need for all to agree on a nationwide ceasefire. We encourage de-escalation. Failing that, there is a significant risk of further violence and additional civilian casualties. I remind all parties of their obligation to protect civilians.

There is an urgent need for progress towards a political solution, and we continue to support the Special Envoy's efforts to implement a step-by-step approach.

Finally, Syria is still being used as a base for terrorist activities. The continued fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant remains important, as stability in Syria is crucial for the region and for the broader international community.

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

I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. I want to give special thanks to Ms. Mounerfah Albarouki for the work that she does and for allowing us to see beyond the reports and to get a glimpse of the experience of the Syrian people; this file is of the highest priority for Kenya. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey at this meeting.

My statement will focus first on political, security and humanitarian issues.

We are pleased that the sixth Session of the Constitutional Committee meeting convened this month and held substantive discussions on the text for the proposed constitutional principles. We call on all members of the Committee to remain focused and dedicated to the process. We also encourage the convening of further rounds of Constitutional Committee meetings to maintain momentum in the discussions and to expedite the political resolution of the conflict.

We cannot overemphasize the imperative for the voices of the widest spectrum of Syrians, including civil society, the diverse group of women represented by the Women's Advisory Board, the youth and minority groups, to be heard to ensure a meaningful political transformation.

The unresolved issue of the plight of detainees and missing persons also needs to be addressed as a confidence- and trust-building measure, which is vital

to the success of the political process. In addition, of course, the plight of those detainees and missing persons requires justice.

The persistent insecurity characterized by aerial air strikes, indiscriminate shelling and improvised-explosive-device attacks across Syria continues to be of great concern. Kenya condemns in particular the recent heinous attacks in Damascus and Ariha, Idlib, which claimed many innocent lives. Those concerned must understand that there is no military or violent solution to the situation and that it is their responsibility to the Syrian people to de-escalate hostilities and uphold the nationwide ceasefire.

The Council must renew its efforts to combat Security Council-listed terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, including holding accountable those responsible for heinous crimes.

Turning to humanitarian issues, Kenya is concerned that even as coronavirus disease cases continue to rise, only 1.6 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated. This, again, exposes the glaring weaknesses of the multilateral system. The international community must do much more to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines to all people across Syria.

Kenya commends the United Nations humanitarian response through the early recovery and livelihoods activities, which represents a promise of hope for recovery towards normalcy. We encourage the expansion of such activities, especially those aimed at restoring schools and hospitals.

We further continue to encourage the use of the cross-border aid mechanism, which remains a crucial avenue for humanitarian assistance, while supporting continued cross-line deliveries and encouraging further agreements with partners to ensure consistent deliveries to the north-west.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm Kenya's solidarity with the people of Syria in their quest for lasting peace through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue. We continue to deplore the fact that this process in the Security Council has not shown sufficient unity within the Council, which is all at the expense of the Syrian people. Kenya will always try to give a voice to the Syrian people as they continue to suffer from the fight for power between multiple parties.

We urge all members of the Council to unite behind the interests, safety and security of the Syrian people.

I now resume my functions as the representative of Kenya.

I give the floor to the representative of Syria.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We listened closely to the briefings provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Martin Griffiths. I should like to make the following remarks.

The meetings of the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee, held last week in Geneva, illustrated serious engagement on the part of the national team, which exhibited a spirit of cooperation and a positive attitude. They sought to put forward constitutional principles that responded to the aspirations, rights and ambitions of the Syrian people to safeguard national sovereignty, independence, security, stability and socioeconomic well-being.

Against that backdrop, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its commitment to a political solution based on a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led intra-Syrian national dialogue, to the Constitution, which is a Syrian national sovereign affair, and to the Constitutional Committee, which is itself sovereign. Syria stresses that outside parties must refrain from interfering in, or hampering the work of, the Committee by imposing artificial time frames or predetermined conclusions, in line with respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, as affirmed by all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The cowardly terrorist attack in the heart of the Syrian capital, Damascus, on the morning of 20 October, which targeted a bus with two explosive devices, coincided with the meetings of the Constitutional Committee. That was a clear indication of attempts by terrorist organizations and their foreign sponsors to foil efforts at reaching a political solution and to hinder the work of the Syrian Government to restore security and stability throughout Syria. That terrorist attack, which left 14 civilians dead and many injured passers-by, was clearly aimed at raising the morale of the terrorists sponsored by the American and Turkish occupying forces in Idlib, Al-Tanf and other parts of northern Syria as they fall before the Syrian Arab Army and its allies' achievements.

It is regrettable and reprehensible that some Western countries blocked the adoption by the Security Council

of a draft press release submitted by the delegation of the Russian Federation to condemn that terrorist attack. That Western approach reflects the double standards and hostile attitude of those countries.

We also condemn the fact that Israeli occupying forces escalated their hysterical aggression against Syria — whether by bombing southern areas two days ago following the reconciliation in Dara'a and the restoration of security and stability there, its ongoing aerial aggression against Al-Tanf, which is controlled by American forces, or its assassination of freedom fighter and former member of the Syrian Parliament Medhat Al-Saleh, using snipers who fired bullets originating from the occupied Syrian Golan. That once again proves Israel's involvement in undermining security and stability in Syria.

The Syrian Arab Republic underscores its commitment to continuing its efforts to liberate its occupied territories and combating terrorism in tandem with its political efforts. Such terrorists attacks and terrorist acts will not deter Syria from continuing its efforts to restore security and stability and rid our people of all terrorist groups, irrespective of what they are called.

Syria calls upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and stop Israeli acts of aggression, which threaten peace and stability in the region, and to compel the Governments known to be sponsors of terrorism to halt their violations of international law and comply fully with the Council's resolutions on counter-terrorism.

Yesterday, on behalf of my Government, I sent two identical letters to the Council and to the Secretary-General conveying the position of the Syrian Government on the report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation (S/2021/890). Given the limited time available here, I invite the members of the Council to read those two letters and take note of our detailed observations on the report, especially after we exposed errors in the statistics and responses provided by United Nations agencies and the misinformation therein. We call for an investigation of the matter, the correction of the errors and the restoration of the reputation of the Syrian Government, as well as for ensuring that this does not happen again.

It has been over three and a half months since the Council adopted resolution 2585 (2021). However, the Turkish occupying forces and the proxies of their

terrorist organizations continue to hinder humanitarian access from inside Syria. They continue to refuse access for the Al-Atarib convoy to the north-west of the country — a convoy which the Syrian Government approved in April 2020. Moreover, they continue to weaponize water against civilians.

There is also deliberate intent on the part of Western Governments to not respect the provisions of operative paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the resolution, for they continue to hamper any effort aimed at making progress on humanitarian access from within Syria and at promoting humanitarian activities in the areas of early recovery and strengthening resilience, as provided for in the resolution, which is also part of the humanitarian response plan.

In addition to that, those same Governments have again blocked the adoption of the strategic framework for cooperation between the United Nations and the Syrian Government, which would enable United Nations agencies to relaunch development programmes and projects in Syria and support efforts to achieve sustainable development.

That raises the question of how one could contemplate extending the provisions of the resolution later this year. What will the Secretary-General say in his substantive report to be issued pursuant to the resolution? Is it possible that the percentage of funding allocated to early-recovery projects does not exceed 5 per cent of the total pledges?

The United States Administration and the European Union continue to use coercive measures to stifle Syrians inhumanely and deprive them of their basic needs — food, medicine, health care, electricity and fuel — in particular as winter approaches, as well as to undermine our efforts to counter the coronavirus disease pandemic. All of that contradicts their alleged humanitarian concern and reveals their false slogans regarding their respect for the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as all United Nations resolutions, which time and again have affirmed the illegality of those measures and their violation of human rights. They have also deliberately disregarded the appeals of the Secretary-General and his representatives. Any claim that such measures have no impact on the lives of Syrians is a mere fabrication to cover up the facts.

In conclusion, Syria reiterates its demand for an end to the illegal presence of the United States and

Turkish forces on our territories and for stopping their aggressive practices and looting of the country's economic resources and wealth. We also call for the immediate and unconditional lifting of unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people. We stress that improving the humanitarian situation requires support for the efforts of the Syrian State to meet the humanitarian needs and provide basic services to all Syrians, as well as achieving the development goals and creating conditions conducive to the dignified, safe and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees.

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

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their timely and informative briefings. I would also like to thank Ms. Albarouki for her briefing.

After 10 years of atrocities, Syria remains the world's largest protection crisis. Twelve million people are living in food insecurity. That fact was brought to our attention on World Food Day; however, it must be kept foremost in our minds every day. Every day more than 60 per cent of the population is unable to secure access to safe and adequate food. Every day an additional 1.8 million Syrians teeter on the brink of hunger. Every day we talk of the importance of protecting the Syrian people, but we must take action.

Malnourished children are more exposed to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and are dying due to virus-related illnesses. The COVID-19 situation is rapidly deteriorating, especially in the north-west, where a second wave of COVID-19 cases threatens the lives of Syrian civilians. The latest estimates indicate that hospitals and health-care facilities are at 93 per cent occupancy levels and lack the critical supplies required. Despite calls here at Headquarters for vaccines for all, only 1.8 per cent of the population in the north-west has received one dose of the vaccine. Indeed, a mere 0.8 per cent of the population has received the requisite second dose.

It is clear that the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point and the United Nations cross-border mechanism constitute an essential and life-saving channel for millions of Syrians. Vaccines and humanitarian assistance are needed now more than ever, as needs are expected to increase during the upcoming winter season. We therefore call for cross-border assistance to be expanded.

Turkey is ready to do whatever is necessary to support that vital work. We will also continue to support the needs of 9 million Syrians under our protection. Let me remind the Council that our tremendous efforts for development for those people have been widely recognized by the entire international community. We do not need a lecture from those who violate international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In that context, let me also set the record straight regarding the Allouk water station. The reasons behind the problem are well known and are reflected in the reports of the Secretary-General. It is clear that both the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) and the Syrian regime have used this situation repeatedly for their ill-minded agendas.

Following the completion of the first cross-line mission into Sarmada city, Idlib governorate, by the World Food Programme, we expect the distribution of food items in the north-west without delay. The Security Council should be aware that that life-saving mission was conducted in the face of stark security risks, as repeated attacks by the Al-Assad regime in Sarmada continued, resulting in tragic civilian losses.

That is of course part of the regime's political calculations to hinder progress on cross-line access, which is in direct violation of resolution 2585 (2021). It is most regrettable that the goodwill shown in that process has been tainted by attacks perpetrated by the regime.

On the political track, we will continue to push for a lasting and credible political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Special Envoy Pedersen has our unwavering support in his efforts to ensure that the Constitutional Committee yields concrete results.

As the sole mechanism within the political process, we believe that all sides should unite in order to advance the Committee's work. As summarized by the Special Envoy, the sixth round of consultations of the Constitutional Committee was finally held in Geneva last week after a long delay. Although the Syrian regime adopted a relatively constructive approach at the beginning of the session, the subsequent regression to its uncompromising stance of the past was disappointing, to say the least.

Unfortunately, the sixth round did not feature any serious deliberations on constitutional reform. Furthermore, due to the regime's intransigence, not

even the dates for the following sessions could be agreed upon. After 10 years of conflict, we cannot let the regime squander this opportunity. It is high time for the Constitutional Committee to produce concrete results on its core mandate. It is imperative that the regime stop undermining the Committee's work. This is not a zero-sum game. It is in the best interests of all concerned, including the Syrian regime, to engage in a constructive and results-oriented manner.

Tragically, while the sixth round of consultations of the Constitutional Committee was under way, the regime targeted civilian areas in the Ariha district of Idlib on 20 October. That brutal attack resulted in the death of 13 people, including four children. We condemn all attacks, in particular those intended to derail the political process. Children and teachers were targeted in Ariha. I repeat — children and their teachers.

It is abundantly clear that the regime does not seek to counter terrorism. All that the regime has ever sought is to oppress Syrian civilians into submission. Ceasefire violations by the regime and its backers must stop. Civilians must be protected. No one should feel forced to flee their home. We need to take all necessary steps to secure the political process and underpin conflict resolution efforts.

In addition to the ceasefire violations, the PKK/YPG remains a major destabilizing factor on the ground. That terrorist organization and its offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, do not relent in targeting civilians and attacking Turkey. Only two weeks ago, six Syrian civilians died as a result of the car-bomb attack carried out in Afrin. That terrorist group wreaks havoc in the region and prevents Syrian Yazidis in Iraq and Syrian Kurds from returning to their homes in Syria.

Their crimes are not limited to attacks on Syrians. The terrorist attacks carried out by the PKK/YPG on 7 and 10 October claimed the lives of three members of the Turkish security forces. Moreover, on 11 October, Karkamış, a district of Gaziantep, was shelled by mortars from areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces. That attack follows the rockets fired at civilian areas in Kilis, Turkey, last March.

There is no doubt that this terrorist organization is using its presence in Syria to target my country. No Member State can tolerate deliberate attacks targeting its citizens or its territory, and my country is no exception. Turkey will not remain silent in the

face of those cross-border attacks. We are determined to neutralize this terrorist threat and will continue our resolute fight against the PKK/YPG wherever needed.

Last month, the United Nations published the first official death toll since 2014. Therein, the United Nations identified 350,209 individuals killed in Syria. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michele Bachelet, maintained that this is a conservative estimate indicating the minimum verifiable number of deceased. However, these Syrians were identified by their full names, their dates of death and their location in Syria. It is only right that we recognize the unjust and unwarranted deaths of innocent Syrian civilians and restore to them their dignity.

The onus is upon us in the Council Chamber to hold the regime to account. As we have discussed over the past decade, countless war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed by the Al-Assad regime. The international community failed these Syrians. We cannot now fail in our quest for accountability. We must take urgent action to end impunity and to save the resilient Syrians who survived the most egregious of horrors and who look to us to safeguard their future.

With regard to the statement made by the representative of the Syrian regime, I will repeat: his presence in this Chamber is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the Al-Assad regime. I will therefore not honour his delusional remarks with a response.

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

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for his efforts, particularly in the course of the preparation of and during the sixth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee.

We welcome the first face-to-face meeting of the Committee's Chairs to directly discuss the Committee's modalities and programme of work. That, in itself, shows considerable and encouraging progress. The same is true for the consultations with the Committee members on certain substantive proposals on the elements of a draft constitution, which also took place for the first time.

As has been stressed at the recent meeting of the representatives of the Astana format with Mr. Pedersen in Geneva, we will continue to encourage the Committee's Chairs to engage constructively and work in a spirit of flexibility and compromise. We emphasize again that the Committee must continue its work without any external interference or pressure. Setting any artificial deadline for its conclusion or any other conditions of such nature will negatively affect the Committee's work, which must therefore be avoided. Ultimately, it must be ensured that it is a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process.

To complement the Committee's work, serious efforts must also be made in other areas. Occupation of parts of Syria by foreign forces must come to an end. Accordingly, all occupying and uninvited foreign forces must leave the country without any precondition or further delay. In this context, the Security Council must live up to its responsibility and compel the Israeli regime to end the occupation of the Syrian Golan and immediately stop its aggressions against Syria. Aggression and destabilizing measures of the Israeli regime constitute flagrant violations of international law and continue to threaten regional and international peace and security.

The assassination inside Syria of Medhat Al-Saleh, a Syrian citizen, by Israeli snipers from the occupied Golan on 16 October 2021, is among the latest of such adventurist practices. We condemn in the strongest terms this criminal act as well as all violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria by the Israeli regime, and we reaffirm Syria's inherent right to defend itself and respond at a time and place of its choosing.

We also condemn the 20 October terrorist attack in Damascus, which claimed the lives of 14 innocent people and injured several others. Such a terrorist act underscores once again that the fight against all terrorist groups must continue unabated.

We also reject separatist activities or illegitimate self-rule initiatives in Syria and condemn any efforts to support them.

Recalling the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, further efforts must be made to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people in need, including through depoliticizing humanitarian aid and supporting Syria's reconstruction. We also hope that the recent positive approach taken by some countries will help expedite Syria's reconstruction and the return of more refugees and displaced persons. In that context, we call for the full and effective implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), through which the Security Council, in paragraph 3 of the resolution, called upon all Member States "to respond with practical steps to address the urgent needs of the Syrian people".

One such practical step can indeed be the removal of unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria. Unilateral sanctions are used only for the collective punishment of an entire population and, by any measure, are unlawful and inhumane. They must be removed against all targeted countries, including Syria, where sanctions not only increase the suffering of the Syrian people but also adversely affect the activities of the United Nations as well as those of the national and international humanitarian agencies in that country.

We also call for the allocation of more humanitarian aid to the cross-line mechanism and for enhancing the transparency of the cross-border mechanism and ensuring that aid that enters Syria through that mechanism reaches the actual beneficiaries and does not fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

We reiterate our principled position that the Syrian crisis must be settled peacefully and in accordance with principles of international law, particularly respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, non-intervention and non-interference in their internal or external affairs, and the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to support the people and the Government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.