



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8553rd meeting
 Tuesday, 18 June 2019, 3.30 p.m.
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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Yao Shaojun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
	Peru	Mr. Velásquez
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	South Africa	Ms. Goolab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce/Mr. Power
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and 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: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding and Political Affairs, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: Since I last briefed the Security Council a month ago (see S/PV.8527), violence in north-west Syria has continued unabated as parties on the ground try to advance militarily. Our unflinching efforts to mediate a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people cannot move forward in an environment of open conflict. Our efforts will stall if Russia and Turkey cannot uphold their ceasefire agreement. Our efforts will suffer if members of the Security Council, as well as the Astana group and the small group on Syria — many of whom sit around this table today — cannot find a way to work together in common support of the Special Envoy's efforts to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

The United Nations understands very well the positions of the guarantors of the Idlib memorandum, an agreement which until a few months ago had delivered relative calm to the people of Idlib. For Russia, the presence of Security Council-designated terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in the de-escalation zone is not tolerable. For Turkey, time is required to effectively isolate and address Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's most hard-line fighters.

As the Secretary-General said a few hours ago, the situation in Idlib is especially dangerous and, yet again,

civilians are paying a horrific price. Air strikes continue. Barrel bomb use and cluster munitions and exchanges of mortar and artillery fire are ongoing, resulting in civilian casualties and massive displacement. Population centres and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, have been attacked, mostly inside the de-escalation zone. It is imperative that we address Hayat Tahrir al-Sham without triggering the humanitarian catastrophe that we see unfolding before our eyes, with hundreds of thousands on the move, being pushed closer to Turkey's border.

Despite all this violence, the front lines have hardly shifted, suggesting a stalemate. But if that is the case, it is plainly turning out to be a bloody and quite pointless stalemate with devastating humanitarian consequences that far outstrip any damage done to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Undoubtedly, the situation in Idlib is complex. But, as we have repeatedly said, counter-terrorism cannot overtake obligations under international law to protect civilians and the obligation to strictly observe the principles of distinction and proportionality. The problem posed by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham will need to be dealt with in a more effective and suitable way, one where civilians do not pay the price. That can begin only with the restoration of calm.

The Secretary-General, the Special Envoy and I have been pressing for the need for a solution in Idlib in all of our engagements at all levels. We welcome Russia and Turkey's continued efforts to contain the violence, most recently in their working group meeting on 16 and 17 June. However, if a solution is not found, then the consequences will be unimaginable — and not just in humanitarian terms. Let us remember the international players involved and the potential for escalation.

Over the weekend, Turkey announced that one of its observation posts had been shelled by Government forces intentionally and that it had retaliated with heavy weapons. That was the second such incident in less than a week that impacted a Turkish observation post — defensive positions meant to maintain the lines agreed in the September memorandum. Today Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moualem assured that Syria did not want to see an armed confrontation between its forces and Turkey. These close military exchanges underscore how Idlib is not just a humanitarian issue; it also poses a grave risk to regional security.

As we look to the upcoming Group of 20 meeting, where world leaders who can contain this conflict will

be present, we stress the need for diplomacy to produce an outcome in Idlib that can create the necessary conditions for the political process to advance. We call on international stakeholders — in particular the Russian Federation and Turkey, as guarantors of the September 2018 memorandum of understanding on Idlib — to exert the efforts needed to end the violence and restore calm. All that is required is political will. As the Secretary-General also stated today, there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. It was clear at the start and it remains clear more than eight years later: the solution is political.

The Syrian people have paid a high price for the failures of the international community to end this war. More than half the population is displaced and in need. More than 5 million refugees are uncertain of when it will be safe to return. Hundreds of thousands have paid with their lives. Tens of thousands are detained, missing, tortured. Are we really asking them to pay more? We must collectively work together to ensure the answer to that question is no.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Security Council members will all have heard what the Secretary-General said earlier today, which Rosemary DiCarlo also just referred to. Like Ms. DiCarlo, I briefed the Council one month ago on the worsening humanitarian situation in Idlib (see S/PV.8527). Ten days later, my deputy alerted the Council to further violence and destruction (see S/PV.8535). Violence, involving Syrian Government forces and their allies, armed opposition forces and the Security Council-listed terrorist organization Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, continued throughout the holy Eid al-Fitr period. It has still not stopped, despite the announcement of a truce on 12 June. The conduct of hostilities has resulted in more than 230 civilian deaths over the past six weeks, including 69 women and 81 children. Hundreds more have been injured. An estimated 330,000 people have been forced to flee their homes since 1 May and have moved northward towards the border with Turkey. That is almost double the number of newly displaced people since my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8527). A recently conducted rapid assessment found that many of them have moved multiple times since the start of the conflict, some as many as 10 times. That is a particular feature

of the Idlib area. People fled there initially from other parts of Syria, then moved again and again, constantly searching for safety.

Camps for the displaced are overcrowded, with many people forced to stay in the open. Those who remain in towns and villages close to the fighting live in constant fear of the next attack. Many are crowding into basements, seeking refuge from air strikes, volleys of shells and mortar rounds, and fighting that continues to threaten what is left of their homes. Hospitals, schools and markets have been hit. Power stations have been affected. Crops have been burned. Children have been forced out of their schools. We had reports this morning of another 19 people killed yesterday by air strikes and artillery shelling. And this past weekend civilians were killed by mortar and rocket attacks in the Al-Wadihi area, south of Aleppo. In short, we are facing a humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes. There is no denying the facts.

The United Nations and its partners have been responding with emergency food assistance through ready-to-eat rations, reaching more than 190,000 people in May. In addition, the United Nations and its partners have reached nearly 800,000 people with general food assistance. Water, health and sanitation supplies have been distributed to some 180,000 displaced people, and water trucking has been made available to people in some 342 camps and informal settlements. Incidentally, none of that would have been possible if the Council had not renewed resolution 2165 (2014). Cross-border assistance remains the only means of reaching people in and around Idlib. The United Nations and the brave humanitarian workers on the ground are doing all they can. They are risking their lives to help others. But the response is stretched, and a further increase in need brought on by additional fighting would risk seeing it overwhelmed.

To this day, we continue to receive reports of attacks impacting civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. Since April, according to reports, 37 schools have been affected. More than 250,000 children are out of school, some 400,000 students have had their exams cancelled, and 94 schools are currently being used as shelters. As a UNICEF representative said last week, no parent should fear sending their child to a school that may be bombed later that day.

I need to remind the Council again of the incidents affecting health facilities. Twenty-six incidents

affecting health-care facilities in north-western Syria have been confirmed by the World Health Organization since late April — eight more than when I last briefed the Council. Two of those facilities were located in an area controlled by the Government of Syria. Many other hospitals have closed out of fear of being attacked. Those attacks do not just claim innocent lives. They also deprive thousands of civilians of basic health services, even as fighting intensifies around them.

As the Council is aware, some of those hospitals had been deconflicted through the Organization's deconfliction mechanism. All parties have specific obligations under international humanitarian law to refrain from attacking protected sites, regardless of whether they have been deconflicted or not. It is appalling that those sites were hit in the first place, but hitting a facility whose coordinates were shared as part of the Organization's deconfliction system is simply intolerable.

A number of partners now feel that supplying geographical coordinates to be given to the warring parties effectively paints a target on their backs. Some have drawn the conclusion that hospital bombings are a deliberate tactic aimed at terrorizing people. This whole episode raises deep questions about the deconfliction system. We are discussing this internally, and I will tell the Council what our conclusions are at the regular monthly humanitarian briefing next week.

Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has a significant presence in Idlib, and it is responsible for its own share of the suffering there. Countering Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is plainly a major challenge. But counter-terrorism efforts cannot, in any way, absolve States of their obligations to uphold international humanitarian law. That is the bottom line. Just as the Secretary-General said earlier, international humanitarian law must be upheld and attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure need to stop — and they need to stop immediately.

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

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

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I deliver this statement on behalf of the three humanitarian co-penholders — Belgium, Kuwait and Germany. We would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-

Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for their briefings and updates.

The situation in north-western Syria remains deeply unsettling. We reiterate our deep concern about the continuing violence in recent weeks in north-western Syria, including indiscriminate aerial bombardments and heavy shelling. As a result, we have witnessed more civilian casualties and displaced people. The number of internally displaced persons since April has surpassed 300,000. We see people, including many children, living without any shelter. We also condemn the loss of innocent lives as a result of this escalation.

We are highly alarmed by the persistent attacks on civilian infrastructure, including 26 health-care facilities and 37 schools. This is appalling. It seems as if we are losing the very essence of humanity.

The indiscriminate use of weapons, especially in densely populated areas, is unacceptable. Such attacks show complete disregard for human life and follow a strategy of collective punishment.

In addition, the reported intentional use of incendiary weapons to destroy farmland and agricultural equipment adds a new horrific dimension to the conflict and runs counter to resolution 2417 (2018). Farmers are already struggling to access their land and harvest their crops.

We, the co-penholders, remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law, based on the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols, including the humanitarian principles to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. We once again recall the obligations under resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2427 (2018). Those who have committed violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law must be held accountable. We stand firm in our commitment to fight impunity.

We welcome all sustained efforts and ongoing dialogue to reinstate the ceasefire arrangements of the Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding signed in September 2018. We call on all parties to fully implement it in order to de-escalate the situation and protect the lives of 3 million people, including 1 million children.

We echo the clear and repeated assessment of the United Nations that any wide-scale military offensive

would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe for Syria and the region. The co-penholders are unified in their condemnation of any attack by members of United Nations-designated terrorist groups, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. However, the fight against terrorism can never justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Counter-terrorism operations do not override the responsibility and obligations of parties to protect civilians. Nor should they impede impartial humanitarian action.

On the contrary, all parties to conflict must allow and facilitate principled humanitarian action. Humanitarian access must be provided in an unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained manner. The United Nations and its partners must be in a position to assess needs properly and to deliver humanitarian assistance without obstacles, including through the cross-border mechanism in accordance with resolution 2449 (2018), which remains the crucial lifeline to millions in north-western Syria. We sincerely thank the whole humanitarian community for its efforts to continue to bring life-saving assistance to people in need.

Last but not least, we reiterate our full support to Special Envoy Pederson in his efforts to reach an inclusive and credible political solution in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2021/522, annex).

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings today.

The United States position on the humanitarian situation in Idlib is simple: we need to see a full and immediate de-escalation of violence by all sides, and in particular the Al-Assad regime forces and the Russian Federation in and around Idlib province. The regime's military escalation is unacceptable and poses a reckless and irresponsible threat to the security and stability of the region.

We were hopeful that the Russian Federation's announcement on 13 June of a ceasefire between Turkey and the Russian Federation would bring a reprieve to the civilians of Idlib. However, as we just heard from the United Nations, this latest ceasefire appears already to have broken down, and the Syrian regime is showing no signs of stopping its offensive push into Idlib, in clear violation of the 2018 Sochi agreement reached between Turkey and Russia.

Reports of Al-Assad regime forces shelling Turkish positions in the Idlib demilitarized zone resulting in the injuries of Turkish soldiers are alarming. The United States is gravely concerned about the threat that this offensive poses to Turkey and Turkish military forces. Such acts are increasing tensions and the threat of a wider escalation of the conflict, which would ultimately put millions of Syrian civilians at risk inside Syria.

The United States stands with our NATO ally Turkey in calling for the preservation of the 2018 Sochi agreement ceasefire as agreed by Russia and Turkey last September and confirmed at the Istanbul Summit in October. Furthermore, the United States strongly supports Turkey's efforts to de-escalate the violence. It is essential that the parties restore the September Sochi ceasefire line.

Over the past four years, the Russian Federation has announced at least 10 ceasefire agreements that it has gone on to violate or disregard despite the risk to civilian lives and humanitarian conditions on the ground. The Al-Assad regime and its allies have used those ceasefires to seek a tactical military advantage — to acquire ammunition, reposition forces and send in reinforcements — while it has ultimately, every time, resumed its brutal offensives against civilian populations and moderate opposition groups, which have resulted in mass displacement, civilian casualties and restricted humanitarian access.

The United States is gravely concerned that, absent an immediate and full return by all parties to the 2018 Sochi agreement ceasefire line and the immediate restoration of the de-escalation agreements, the humanitarian conditions in Idlib and north-west Syria could soon surpass the international community's ability to conduct a robust humanitarian response.

Reconstituting the 2018 Sochi agreement ceasefire is also essential for the safety of medical workers and humanitarians, and the continuation of the United Nations ability to freely implement cross-border aid deliveries throughout all agreed border crossings, and in accordance with resolution 2449 (2018).

The United States and our partners are steadfast in our position that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict: not to the conflict in Idlib any more than to the conflict in Syria more broadly. The United States is determined to see a lasting and immediate return to the Sochi agreement ceasefire in order to protect civilian lives and preserve the current ceasefire

lines while the United Nations pushes ahead to implement the political transition outlined in resolution 2254 (2015).

The United States therefore reiterates its calls on all parties, including Russia and the Syrian regime, to abide by their commitments outlined in the September 2018 Sochi memorandum of understanding to end the violence, avoid a large-scale military offensive, return to a de-escalation of violence in the area and allow for unhindered humanitarian access to address this humanitarian disaster. The Security Council and the Syrian people cannot accept anything less.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): I wish to thank Kuwait, Belgium and Germany for having called for the convening of this very timely and important meeting. I should like also to thank our briefers, Under-Secretaries-General DiCarlo and Lowcock.

It goes without saying that we are very much concerned about the dangerous developments in Syria, particularly the deadly escalation of violence in north-western Syria over recent weeks. As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock rightly pointed out, a humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding there right now.

The conflict in Syria has already brought about enormous suffering for the Syrian people, with more than 10 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance. Yet again, we have observed with great concern an increase in air strikes over Idlib governorate and in northern Hama over the past weeks and days. Everyone has underlined that it is essential to avoid a full-scale battle in Idlib. Otherwise, we might face the worst humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century. Despite all those warnings, our worst fears are now coming true. It is no longer a risk of a dangerous escalation in Idlib; that escalation is happening as we speak. Sadly, it is the civilian population who will pay the highest price for this.

Attacks on densely populated areas, homes, medical facilities and settlements for internally displaced persons are unacceptable and must stop. All parties must, as their top priority, protect civilians in Idlib. I should like to reiterate once again that all parties are obliged to comply with international humanitarian law: it is not a matter of choice; it is simply a legal obligation. In that context, all counter-terrorism activities must be conducted fully within international humanitarian and human rights law.

I should like once again to underline the significance of the agreement between Russia and Turkey on the Idlib de-escalation zone as a crucial move towards avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe. All parties to the conflict should ensure the full implementation of that agreement. We call on all parties to return to the ceasefire line as set out in Sochi agreement.

Ongoing fighting is resulting in the further displacement of over 300,000 persons. Our utmost concern is, first of all, that those people should be safe, and, secondly, that the United Nations should have full access to them. Unconditional access must be provided as a matter of principle. In that connection, let me also salute the heroic work of humanitarian workers in these particularly difficult circumstances. The United Nations and its partners continue to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance based on humanitarian principles, including through cross-border assistance, in accordance with resolution 2449 (2018), which is a lifeline to millions of people in north-western Syria.

Let me conclude by underlining that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. A political agreement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) remains the only way towards achieving peace.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Germany, Belgium and Kuwait, co-penholders on the humanitarian track of the Security Council's work on the situation in Syria. I also thank Rosemary DiCarlo and Mark Lowcock for their very informative presentations, the conclusions of which are indisputable, namely, that we are witnessing another humanitarian catastrophe in the north-western part of the country, adding further to the long list of tragic events that Syria has experienced for more than eight years. This dark chapter in Syria's history has yet to conclude.

The number one priority today is to prevent Idlib from becoming another Aleppo. We must spare no effort to shield the lives of more than 3 million civilians, including 1 million children. In order to help those who are most vulnerable, in the coming days France will release €5 million for the Syria Humanitarian Fund of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), based in Gaziantep.

Humanitarian aid is crucial for the millions of people in the north-west, but remains an inadequate means for sustainably alleviating the suffering of the

people. We therefore must also focus our efforts on three priorities: the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, unconditional respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances, including in the fight against terrorism, and the need for a lasting political solution.

First, the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure must be an absolute priority for all. Despite the positive words uttered by both sides, the offensive against Idlib is leading to renewed civilian casualties every day, in flagrant violation of every underlying principle of international humanitarian law. The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as civilian infrastructure, is an obligation that all must uphold. It is not negotiable. It is unacceptable that health-care infrastructure, including that which has been deconflicted, and schools continue to be the targeted. A letter signed by 60 doctors and prepared by the non-governmental organization Syria Campaign, which France recently asked to be circulated as a Security Council document, is an irrevocable appeal to that end. I recall once again that attacks on hospitals and health-care workers, which France condemns in the strongest possible terms, constitute war crimes.

In that regard, we call on the signatories of the ceasefire agreement to fulfil their commitments and ensure an effective ceasefire in the north-western part of the country with a view to freezing the fronts and a nationwide ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Russia in particular must exert all the necessary pressure on the regime. We urgently call on that country to do so. Discussions between Turkey and Russia must also be pursued in order to allow for an immediate de-escalation of the situation. Iran must also join that effort. Furthermore, I reiterate here and now that France will stand extremely firm in the event of the renewed use of chemical weapons and ready to respond.

Secondly, the fight against terrorism must be carried out under international humanitarian law. The influence that the terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has gained in most of the region covered by the ceasefire agreement is of course a cause of great concern to all of us, but we must be clear on three points.

First, the offensive under way is not part of the fight against terrorism, as was demonstrated by the attacks on densely populated areas and civilian infrastructure. It is impossible to see such attacks as having any other

purpose than to terrorize populations and depopulate the localities concerned in order to retake control of those areas. Furthermore, such an offensive in no way serves our goal of beating back terrorism. On the contrary, it contributes only to increasing and spreading the threat, while running the risk of dispersing the terrorist fighters present in the region. The offensive calls into question Turkey's efforts to reduce the influence of terrorist groups — efforts we fully support. Finally, combating terrorism, which is a priority for us all, cannot be invoked in every instance as a justification for violating international humanitarian law, as the Secretary-General has recalled on more than one occasion.

Lastly, the current escalation risks undermining all efforts under way to reach a political solution when such efforts are more urgently needed than ever.

While a compromise on the constitutional committee, which was accepted by most international actors, seemed to be coming to fruition and would have finally allowed for substantive discussions, the Syrian regime chose to adopt a strategy of systematic obstruction, thereby preventing the establishment of that body so as to hold those discussions hostage. We have every confidence that Special Envoy Geir Pedersen will keep us up to date on the obstacles he encounters and will hopefully inform us when a satisfactory balance for all has been found. But we cannot stop there. Every one of us understands that the political process would be meaningless if it were limited to the issue of the constitutional committee. It is therefore imperative that the Council unequivocally support the Special Envoy in order to move forward, as of now, with regard to all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

In particular, I am alluding to the issue of elections. The Syrians themselves must be able to freely choose the future they want for their country, and we must ensure that they have the means to do so. That is the condition necessary for providing a satisfactory and lasting response to the tragedy that Syria had undergone. In accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), we must therefore begin to consider the conditions necessary for avoiding a scripted outcome, as was the case in the past, so that the elections will be free and fair, that all Syrians, including refugees, will have a free voice in the process and that the United Nations will be involved in overseeing the process. I also take this opportunity to reiterate that, in the absence of significant and irrevocable progress in the political arena, the positions of France and the European Union

on sanctions, reconstruction and normalization will remain unchanged.

It would be a serious error of judgement as well as a grave political misstep to consider that the Syrian tragedy is behind us. In view of the recent tragic events in Idlib that are following a well-worn script, no one will be able to say that they were taken by surprise. We therefore call on every member of the Security Council to assume its responsibilities to end this recent tragedy and allow for the establishment of a credible political process under the supervision of the United Nations allow that country to move forward on the path towards stability and peace

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank both Under-Secretaries-General for their respective briefings. Through them, I should also like to pay tribute to and thank all United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers on the ground in Syria and neighbouring countries who are risking their lives to try and make the situation better for the ordinary people of Idlib and Syria.

I agree very much with a lot of what my colleagues said today. I therefore will not repeat it. I thank the representatives of Germany and Belgium for insisting on this meeting, which is much needed. I will not go into the political process, as the French Ambassador has said everything I would have said. On this occasion he therefore speaks for the United Kingdom as well.

I want to start with the situation involving the attack on the Turkish observation post personnel in Idlib. They have been targeted by Syrian regime shelling. I look forward to what our Turkish colleague can tell us about that later. However, I want to recall that Turkey has been one of the countries trying to help resolve the situation in Idlib, and the reward that it gets for that is to have its personnel fired upon.

That is not just a sad commentary on the state of affairs in Syria, it is an absolute inversion of Member States' responsibility to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. As the Under-Secretary-General said, the damage that is being done to Idlib and its civilians far outstrips any degradation or necessity in respect of terrorist forces, like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, and I think that she referred to a pointless stalemate.

That is exactly what it is. People are being killed, but no advantage is being gained at all militarily. Other

speakers have drawn attention to the fact that there is no military solution, and I agree very much with my American colleague on that. Along with the Polish representative, I want to call that out as a clear violation of the Sochi agreement and call for all parties to respect that agreement and go back to that ceasefire.

In fact, I have to say that I find it incredible that President Putin agreed to the Sochi agreement with President Erdoğan. Why the Russian Federation cannot persuade the Syrian authorities to follow it is therefore a mystery to all of us. But, again, it is an inversion of what ought to be happening. I hope that when Special Envoy Lavrentiev and Deputy Foreign Minister Vershinin go to Syria this week that they will be able to press the Syrian authorities on that and that they will be able to have success.

Like other speakers, I would like to turn also to the situation against international humanitarian law and the situation of the bombing of the hospitals. That is a situation that is accelerating, and it is exponential. I look forward to what the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs can tell us next week, after its briefing.

But in the meantime, I would like to hear some answers from the Russian and the Syrian representatives here today. I keep asking these questions, and I keep not getting answers; but I am going to carry on asking them because they are absolutely critical. If people believe, as we will hear later today from both representatives, that they want to resolve this conflict, then they need to begin to address these questions.

My first question is, are the attacks on hospitals deliberate? If they are deliberate, then I would be grateful for an explanation as to how such attacks meet the international humanitarian law core principles of distinction, necessity and proportionality. I would also be grateful to know why no warning was given to the hospitals, because under article 19 of the Fourth Geneva Convention the protection to which civilian hospitals are entitled shall not cease unless they are used to commit acts harmful to the enemy. But the critical clause is that protection may, however, cease only after due warning has been given, naming a reasonable time limit.

I would therefore like to know if those warnings were given and if time limits were set. If not, then why not? If, on the other hand, the attacks on the hospitals are not deliberate, what steps are being taken by the Syrian and Russian authorities to avoid such attacks in

future? What are the weaknesses in their deconfliction systems that are allowing the attacks to happen? I have one last question: which units from both the Syrian military and the Russian military are involved in those attacks? I think that would be a very helpful piece of transparency for the Council to have.

For the United Kingdom's part, we will continue to provide significant humanitarian assistance to help keep people alive. But there is no doubt that restoring a ceasefire and ensuring that all parties respect it is actually the critical thing that needs to happen. That is the thing, not humanitarian assistance, that will make the biggest difference to the people in Idlib.

I have two points on looking ahead. I very much share what the French representative said about reconstruction and elections. We provide humanitarian assistance. We will not provide reconstruction assistance. We will not be able to contribute to the eventual rehabilitation of Syria into the world community of nations without a viable, meaningful and sustainable political process.

Lastly, again like the representative of France, I would like to reiterate that if chemical weapons are used again against civilians in Syria, we will join our colleagues in responding swiftly and appropriately.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the convening of this briefing on the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria, at the request of Belgium, Kuwait and Germany, whom I thank.

I commend Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on their briefings, which orient the Security Council on the magnitude of the current humanitarian challenges and the need to act for a peaceful resolution to the Syrian conflict.

My delegation is deeply concerned by the resumption of fighting in the governorate of Idlib since 29 April, which has further eroded an already crumbling humanitarian situation. That new military escalation reveals the unwillingness of the parties to the conflict to silence their guns in order to resolutely engage in a political process to end the crisis.

My delegation notes with regret the continuing fighting, as well as the resulting loss of life and the thousands of internally displaced persons.

Approximately 300,000 people have been forced to seek refuge outside Idlib governorate, causing a surge in humanitarian needs in the region. Similarly, the destruction of hospital and school infrastructure once again constitutes an urgent need for action to improve the protection of civilians. My country would like to remind the defence and security forces and armed groups that they have the primary responsibility of refraining from all forms of violence against civilians. The current state of fighting cannot exempt them from their obligations under international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In that regard, the parties to the conflict must be fully aware of their responsibility before the competent international courts for violations of conventions and treaties relating to the protection of civilians and international humanitarian law, if they are found guilty. Moreover, my delegation believes that, in addition to the protection of civilians, the actors in the Syrian conflict have an obligation to create the conditions for the safe and unhindered access to deliver humanitarian assistance to the affected populations.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its conviction that, despite the exacerbation of the conflict and the gravity of the humanitarian crisis it has caused, peace is possible in Syria through an inclusive and credible political process aimed at ending the crisis, which would allow all parties to engage in fruitful compromises. In that regard, we reaffirm our full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and encourage his efforts towards reaching a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

My country urges the Syrian parties to prioritize dialogue and comply with the provisions of the Russian-Turkish agreement on the demilitarized zone for a lasting ceasefire, with a view to giving the political process a chance to succeed. Côte d'Ivoire also calls on all stakeholders to work towards the establishment of the constitutional committee, in accordance with the relevant provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the delegations of Germany, Kuwait and Belgium for calling for the convening of this meeting, as well as Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their enlightening briefings.

Having listened to both of our briefers and given careful consideration of the daily reports we receive, it is an undeniable fact that we are witnessing a

humanitarian tragedy in Idlib that is worsening by the day. The inaction of the international community in response to the escalation of violence has caused not only the largest wave of displaced persons since the outbreak of the conflict — we are talking about more than 200,000 people — but also an increase in indiscriminate attacks targeting the civilian population, public infrastructures and health-care facilities.

Faced with this terrible situation, Equatorial Guinea wishes to underscore the need for a genuine international awakening in order to spur on joint efforts to stabilize the situation in north-western Syria, including effective measures to neutralize terrorist groups in the area. Moreover, in the framework of the Sochi and Astana agreements, we call upon the parties to reaffirm their commitments to avoid spoiler activities, guarantee the safety of civilians and restore the ceasefire. In order to ensure that these endeavours are successful, the Astana guarantors must remain united and coherent in their approach. Any hint of mutual pressure, provocation or hostilities between them will serve only to undermine coordination efforts to achieve peace, stability and a ceasefire in the region.

We wish to pay special tribute to Turkey and Lebanon, countries that are bearing the greatest financial burden caused by the influx of millions of refugees into their territories. In that connection, it continues to be necessary to bolster the work of humanitarian organizations and ensure the steady flow of financial aid earmarked for refugees, who are, in many cases, living in appalling conditions. In that context, it is essential that United Nations agencies and donor countries intervene immediately to address the humanitarian crisis caused by the current wave of bombings. It is the obligation of the Security Council to ensure the implementation of this vital work on an uninterrupted basis.

The conflict in Syria led to the collapse of norms of international humanitarian law. At the end of the twentieth century, the international community agreed on norms and principles of behaviour, such as the protection of the civilian population, a refusal to condone torture, the condemnation of the use of certain weapons and the desire to avoid, at all costs, the risk of humanitarian disasters. This compendium of prohibited activities was like a set of 10 commandments for the modern world and, although they were not implemented by all States, they did enjoy a certain degree of consensus. Another of our obligations as members of

the Council is to ensure that those norms are upheld in Syria.

In that regard, we reiterate our call for the parties to act with restraint and ensure full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We also reaffirm the need for Russian-Turkish cooperation to facilitate efforts to find the necessary means to reduce tensions in the de-escalation zone within the framework of existing agreements.

I wish to conclude my statement by underlining once again the importance of diplomacy in achieving a credible and lasting political solution to the conflict. My country's Government will therefore continue to support ongoing political negotiations aimed at making significant headway in the establishment of the constitutional committee, a country-wide ceasefire and the implementation of confidence-building measures to create a secure and neutral environment, as well as the organization of free, transparent and inclusive elections.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the presidency for convening this meeting, and Ms. DiCarlo and Mr. Lowcock for their briefings.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our country's admiration for all humanitarian actors, who, in the worst conditions of insecurity, continue to extend assistance to save the lives of more than 11 million vulnerable people in Syria.

With the majority of the population living in extreme poverty, it greatly concerns us that the existing humanitarian operation is on its knees, struggling to meet the increasingly acute and urgent needs of the Syrian people. In that sense, the suspension of operations by several humanitarian partners due to the woeful security situation constitutes an equally alarming factor. To add insult to injury, the humanitarian operation for the course of this year has reached only 20 per cent of its financing requirements.

Despite multiple reports by the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, testimonies by people directly affected by the conflict and ongoing words of concern expressed in this Chamber, the Security Council has been unable to make a unanimous demand for the cessation of hostilities in the north-west of the country. That has produced a disconcerting seeming indifference to the number of deaths, injuries and attacks on civilians and civil

infrastructure and areas. The figures that Mr. Lowcock has presented, on behalf of the United Nations and its partners on the ground, speak for themselves. Let us not deceive ourselves. Even now, air strikes endangering the lives of civilians continue unabated. The number of deaths currently stands at approximately 300, which includes more than 80 children.

The forced displacement of civilians has reached exorbitant levels. Many of those people flee on foot and, as their journeys continue, they end up selling the few belongings they possess in order to pay for some means of transportation. Others have no choice but to seek shelter under trees, without any form of protection whatsoever. Women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities continue to be the most vulnerable.

In the light of this awful situation, we must ask ourselves: what more needs to happen? What more needs to happen for the parties involved — and those with influence over them — to grant a respite to a people that have endured nine years of conflict? What more needs to happen for the Council, with a unified voice, to demand an immediate ceasefire to avoid military escalation and protect the civilian population? We must not forget that the Council, as the guarantor of the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), is accountable for ensuring that the conditions conducive to a revitalized and inclusive peace process — based on the will of the entire population, including the millions of refugees scattered beyond the borders of the country — are viable.

All of us here in the Chamber have expressed our support for the political process. Today more than ever before, we are compelled to shoulder our responsibility to match the efforts being undertaken by Ambassador Pedersen to benefit strategically from the opportunity that lies before us. Regrettably, the fragility of the political process as it stands today is inextricably linked to the situation developing in the north-west of Syria, something that is reflected in the position adopted by the Security Council in response.

That is why we continue to call upon the parties to move decisively towards concrete outcomes, while making an inclusive transition their guiding principle towards a future of hope and justice for all Syrians. It is our moral responsibility to help make that aspiration a reality. We cannot continue to fail those who need us.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): While of course thanking our briefers, here we are again in the Chamber listening

to yet more grim and alarming briefings by Under-Secretaries-General Lowcock and DiCarlo on the situation in north-west Syria. It is heartbreaking to learn that hundreds of innocent civilians have been the victims of the escalation, with more than 300,000 people displaced recently. Three million people in Idlib, including 1 million children, are trapped in the crossfire. And if the violence keeps escalating, what will happen to those people? Would the Council agree with me if I said that it would trigger additional waves of displacement? Would it agree with me if I said it would further complicate humanitarian operations? And would Council members also agree with me that a further escalation of violence would cause more casualties? I am very sure that no one would disagree with me, because I genuinely believe that we all want to avoid those worrisome scenarios. This is really the time for us to turn to each other, not on each other. The people in north-west Syria need us more than ever. In that context, my delegation wishes to highlight three pertinent points.

First, we appeal to all the relevant parties to end the violence and exercise maximum restraint. We appreciate Russia and Turkey's efforts to broker the ceasefire agreements. All parties need to respect those agreements, as well as uphold and fully implement the 2018 Russian and Turkish ceasefire agreements. A lasting ceasefire is of great importance.

Secondly, we must address urgently the immediate life-saving needs of affected people in Idlib and the surrounding areas, particularly internally displaced persons. There are more than 300,000 newly displaced individuals, and we need to ensure that their immediate needs for food and water are being addressed. That also applies to the health sector. With the services of many health facilities suspended, it is crucial to provide basic health support, especially for displaced people who are living under trees and are prone to infectious illnesses. In that context, Indonesia calls on all parties to ensure safe, unhindered and unimpeded humanitarian access and assistance to the people in need across north-west Syria. We commend all humanitarian actors on the ground who are working tirelessly to respond to the growing needs of the population in the area.

Thirdly, my delegation wishes to once again urge all parties to redouble their efforts and focus more on dialogue in order to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict. Everybody seems to agree that a comprehensive political solution in Syria is key, based

on the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015). However, we must not forget that continued engagement and negotiation to enhance trust and confidence are also crucial to advance the Syrian political process.

Many Council members have mentioned that this humanitarian emergency cannot be resolved if there is no political solution to the conflict, and we agree with that position entirely. As the escalation of violence continues in north-west Syria, the Council's action is increasingly needed. Now is the time for the Council to give the right answer when asked: if the violence keeps escalating, what will happen to the people in north-west Syria?

Ms. Goolab (South Africa): I would also like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their briefings on the situation in Syria.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in parts of Syria. The shelling and airstrikes that have resulted in the death and injury of civilians is unacceptable. We appeal to all parties to stop the bombings of civilian infrastructure and ensure that the civilians in the area are not used by non-State actors as human shields. We call on all parties to observe their commitments to cease hostilities and uphold their obligations to international humanitarian law.

We call on all parties to refrain from any attacks on education and health facilities. Those establishments should be places of refuge and safety, and their special status under international humanitarian law must be protected. Tens of thousands of children, the most vulnerable members of society, are unable to sit their final exams due to the destruction of schools, the escalation of violence and the resulting displacement.

The increase in violence has severely impacted the already fragile humanitarian situation. The large number of people fleeing from one region to another further strains limited humanitarian resources. As we have heard before, Syria, the region and the international community cannot afford a full-scale military incursion, as it could result in a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe.

The suspension of some humanitarian operations in the area also negatively impacts the humanitarian response, particularly for those who need it most. Humanitarian agencies are doing extraordinary work in trying to assist all those who need it. We, too, must do all we can to assist both the humanitarian agencies

and those who most urgently require their support. It is essential that the access to, and delivery of, aid to all those who so desperately need it be guaranteed by all parties. In that regard, we urge the full implementation of all the relevant agreements, including the September 2018 ceasefire memorandum and the recent ceasefire brokered between Russia and Turkey, which we hope will lower tensions and de-escalate the violence. South Africa calls on all parties to adhere to the provisions set out in the ceasefire agreements.

South Africa urges all parties to fully engage in the political processes currently under way, as the situation in Syria cannot be solved through military means. An inclusive, negotiated, political settlement is the only way to achieve long-lasting peace and security for all Syrians. My delegation supports the Secretary-General in his statement that the solution for Syria must be political.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the presence of any foreign military forces operating in the country without the permission of the Government of Syria undermines and violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. As mentioned previously, the presence of unauthorized external forces serves only to further destabilize the situation.

Mr. Velásquez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our appreciation for the convening of this meeting. We thank the briefers for their comprehensive briefings, which paint a bleak scenario and urge the Security Council to take action.

Peru notes with deep concern the continuing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and its grave humanitarian repercussions. We regret in particular the recurrence and magnitude of violence in the north-western part of the country, which is due to terrorist-organization control of the area and military responses that tend not to distinguish between combatants and civilians. We are alarmed that this situation will further exacerbate the extreme vulnerability of the population in the area, while at the same time increasing tensions in the region, particularly after the attacks on Turkish observation posts in the vicinity of Idlib.

Given that delicate panorama, we stress that the duty of the international community is to prevent north-western Syria from becoming the site of a new humanitarian tragedy. We therefore urge the Syrian Government and all the actors in the conflict to prevent a further deterioration of the situation, which essentially

means preserving the ceasefire agreed by Turkey and Russia last September.

We reaffirm our strongest condemnation of all terrorist acts and their perpetrators. But we underscore that under no circumstances can the fight against terrorism be used as an excuse to violate human rights and international humanitarian law, especially when, as in the case of Idlib, the lives of millions of children are at stake. We also encourage the United Nations and other humanitarian actors to continue to provide relief and hope to the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons — 270,000 in May alone — who are in very precarious conditions in areas near the border with Turkey.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming Peru's full commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Syria. In that sense, any détente or other arrangements, as well as the presence of foreign forces, should always be of a temporary nature and should not lead to a de facto partition of the country.

Mr. Yao Shaojun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretaries-General DiCarlo and Lowcock for their briefings this morning.

China follows the humanitarian situation in Syria and supports the United Nations and the parties concerned in their tireless efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. Last September, Russia and Turkey signed the Sochi memorandum on de-escalation in Idlib, affirming their determination to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and to maintain stability in north-western Syria. China supports Russia and Turkey in continuing to implement the memorandum. The international community should keep in mind the overall need for combating terrorism in Syria and for working to ensure its territorial integrity and its future, with a view to finding a comprehensive and long-term solution to the issue of terrorism and the humanitarian situation in north-western Syria.

China supports the United Nations and the other parties involved in providing humanitarian relief to displaced civilians in north-western Syria and improving their living conditions. In discussing the humanitarian situation there, we cannot ignore the problem of combating terrorism. Terrorist groups have been trying to expand their areas of influence in recent months by launching frequent attacks that have resulted in civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure and have jeopardized humanitarian relief

efforts and undermined the security situation in the region. China supports maintaining uniform criteria and retaliating against terrorist groups' atrocities, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international law.

China is equally concerned about the humanitarian issues that people in other regions of Syria and in camps for internally displaced persons are dealing with. We urge that efforts be made to tailor solutions to the situation on the ground. The population in the Al-Hol camp has exceeded its capacity, and it will be essential to increase humanitarian relief for the camp and find an appropriate solution to the problem of resettling its residents. The international community should also strengthen its dialogue and communication with regard to the issue of the Rukban camp and reach a consensus-based solution that will enable more Syrians to return home as soon as possible.

In areas where the security situation is relatively stable, the international community should support the Syrian Government in its efforts for reconstruction and improving its people's livelihoods. China is concerned about the negative impact of economic sanctions on the livelihoods of the Syrian people. The humanitarian relief operations in Syria should show full respect for its sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and adhere strictly to the relevant Security Council resolutions, the United Nations Guiding Principles on the right to humanitarian assistance and the relevant norms of international law. The coordination of communications with the Syrian Government should be strengthened.

If we are to genuinely alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria, we must continue to advance the political settlement process. In the quest for a settlement that responds to the concerns of all sides, China supports the United Nations in its role as the main channel for mediation and Special Envoy Pedersen in encouraging the parties in Syria to follow resolution 2254 (2015) and the principle that the peace process should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned. We call on all parties in Syria to work to overcome their differences through dialogue and consultation in order to resolve specific issues in the political process.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We listened carefully to the briefings by Under-Secretaries-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Mark Lowcock. However, we would like to thank

you, Mr. President, and the humanitarian troika for convening today's Council meeting on the situation in north-western Syria. To be frank, we were also planning to organize a meeting on the subject, since a conversation about the developments in the situation in Syria, including in the Idlib de-escalation zone, is long overdue. Some of our partners continue to send messages to the international community that either have nothing to do with the real situation in Syria or distort the situation on the ground.

We are frankly baffled that no one has even once proposed that we discuss the situation in Baghouz and Hajin when Western forces, operating illegally on Syrian territory, wiped out these towns, with considerable losses of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, as well as civilian deaths. Is there really any difference between civilians in Idlib and Deir ez-Zor governorates? Why were the dead in Hajin not considered worthy of discussion in the Council? When Raqqa and the other towns beyond the Euphrates were being razed to the ground, why did no one, including our humanitarian activists, even bother to mention the hospitals and schools or ask the kinds of searching questions that we heard today?

We believe that what is at issue is not the humanitarian disaster that would inevitably result if a major military campaign began in the Idlib de-escalation zone. We have frequently heard the same thing regarding the pacification of other parts of Syria. The issue is the desire to keep territories out of Damascus's control for as long as possible, whoever is ruling them. It could even be the terrorists of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, who are actively trying to look as if they could be a so-called political force. Regrettably, despite public protestations, the anti-regime attitude has not disappeared, and neither has the aim of creating isolation and regime change in Damascus.

Today we once again heard talk about the need to re-establish the ceasefire and reaffirm our commitment to the Sochi memorandum of 17 September 2018. I want to emphasize that the memorandum is being fully implemented. Any military activity is dictated exclusively by the need to respond to terrorist provocations. I want to point out once again that the Russian-Turkish memorandum does not prohibit the fight against terrorism, it encourages it.

The Syrian Government has frequently announced pauses in military action that the terrorists intentionally

undermine. On 12 June, we and our Turkish colleagues agreed on measures to extend the ceasefire regime across the entire de-escalation zone. However, the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorists, who control 99 per cent of Idlib, once again continued shelling Syrian territory. Since the beginning of May they have continued to attack Syrian Government forces' positions, the Russian airbase in Khmeimim, and towns and villages bordering the de-escalation zone, using multiple launch rocket systems, mortars and combat drones. In the past few days alone they have attacked 12 villages in Latakia and Hama. On 6 June, jihadists launched a rocket attack on a hospital in Muhradah, seriously damaging its operating and emergency rooms and in-patient centre. In the same town on 16 June, several people were injured in a rocket attack and serious damage was done to civilian infrastructure. Yesterday fighters fired mortars on the village of Al Wadihi in Aleppo governorate, leaving 11 people dead and 15 injured, with children among the casualties. Mr. Lowcock mentioned that incident today but forgot to mention at whose hands those people died.

The towns of Al-Suqaylabiyah and Muhradah, whose populations are predominantly Christian, are also being regularly attacked with mortars and rockets, and civilians, including women and children, are suffering as a result, while considerable damage is being done to civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. We heard not a word about that today either from our Western colleagues or the United Nations representatives. Do they really not know that terrorists are carrying out those attacks? There are many more examples we could give. More detailed information can be found in the information bulletins of Russia's Ministry of Defence on the de-escalation zones, which we regularly distribute to Council members.

Despite the militias' provocations and aggressive incursions, Russia remains committed to its agreements with Turkey on stabilizing Idlib. Our military is in constant contact with the Turkish military and coordinates their efforts to prevent the escalation of violence and destabilization. However, neither Russia nor Turkey will turn a blind eye to the dangerous provocations of the terrorists who are threatening Turkish territory, the Russian airbase in Khmeimim and Syrian military personnel and civilians. And there should be no attempts to pit the Astana process participants against one another, as has been implicitly suggested here. The Astana format remains one of

the viable mechanisms — if not the only one — for stabilizing the situation in Syria.

We want to emphasize once again that the Syrian armed forces and the Russian Aerospace Forces direct strikes only at facilities confirmed as terrorist by intelligence. We are getting a feeling of déjà vu today. There has been more breast-beating about the destruction of hospitals, including those whose coordinates were known. As I have said — and I mean in our previous discussions and our discussions last year in this Chamber, not just today — if we believed the statistics we are presented with, the total number of hospitals that have now been destroyed in Syria is larger than the actual number that existed there before the conflict started. But it is no secret to anyone that militants use civilian infrastructure, hospitals and schools for military purposes, and people as human shields. We firmly reject any accusations of indiscriminate strikes. We are not attacking civilians.

We ask that all of our colleagues, including the Secretariat and the specialized United Nations agencies, use only verified information in their assessments. We have had major questions for a long time about some information sources, including those used by various United Nations entities, among them the World Health Organization. I would like that request to be conveyed to Mr. Lowcock and Ms. DiCarlo, who are no longer present here, since they themselves have never visited the areas where the alleged strikes on hospitals have occurred. It appears that most of their information is actually derived from telephone conversations with so-called reliable sources whom no one has verified and whose identity they have refused to disclose.

Today there was also talk about chemical weapons. I would like to point out that the White Helmets who are working with the Al-Nusra Front, and whom some members are so fond of, are preparing acts of provocation using chemicals. We urge the international community to take seriously the possibility that there will be new fake stagings of the use of chemical weapons, of which we have given repeated warnings. According to information received, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham has even formed a separate entity for those purposes, and yet the warnings from the Syrian Government about terrorists' preparations for chemical attacks have essentially been ignored by the relevant international agencies.

Against the backdrop of the revival of alarmist announcements about Idlib, the Security Council

should not lose sight of the worrying and unstable situation on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, which is not controlled by the Syrian Government. Tension is rising in that part of Syria. The local population is resisting the demographic engineering that is being imposed on it with the support of the Western coalition. The potential for protests is growing and could boil over into armed confrontation. We believe it will be possible to avoid a major escalation and create a sustainable national reconciliation process only when the illegal international occupation led by the United States ends and a dialogue between representatives of local ethnic groups and the Syrian authorities is established.

There should be serious attention paid to the situations in Raqqa, Hajin, Baghouz and all the towns in north-eastern Syria that are still in ruins and close to uninhabitable for civilians. The Council should pay special attention to the Al-Hol camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), which in an area in Hasaka governorate that is not controlled by the Syrian authorities and where the situation is verging on disaster. The camp is overcrowded, with more than 74,000 inhabitants, of whom more than 47,000 are minors. The adult population of the camp consists of radical fighters, so radical that even humanitarian personnel are not safe there. There is an acute shortage of food and water, medical personnel, medicines and medical equipment, and infectious diseases are spreading. For our part, we are continuing our efforts in coordination with the Syrian authorities to evacuate Syrians from the Rukban camp in the illegal American occupation zone. Its residents' active departure from the camp to areas controlled by the Syrian Government has resumed in the past few days, despite the obstacles created by the illegal armed groups who have taken refuge in that part of the country. So far about 14,000 people have left the camp. The situations in Rukban and Al-Hol lead one to conclude that there is a certain pattern to the Syrian conflict. The fact is that the problematic refugee and IDP camps are only in areas illegally occupied by foreign forces, and it is there that we are seeing flagrant violations of human rights.

To go back to the situation in Idlib, we should point out that like other territories of the Syrian Arab Republic, it will ultimately have to return to Syrian Government control, and the terrorist hotbeds there will have to be eliminated. It will be crucial not to let the terrorists in Idlib expand from Idlib into other parts of Syria and further into the region. Militias who

fought in the Syrian Arab Republic have already begun moving to Afghanistan and Libya and may very well also return to their countries of origin in Europe or Asia. It is much more important to fight the spread of that threat than to artificially incite problems and escalation in the Persian Gulf. Russia will continue its efforts to combat terrorism in Syria and establish a sustainable political process there in its national capacity, as an Astana format participant and a permanent member of the Security Council. We are ready to cooperate with all constructively minded Member States that are genuinely interested in restoring peace in Syria.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): This is a timely meeting, as it has given us and a number of other countries an opportunity to inform the Security Council about the attacks that armed terrorist groups from Idlib are carrying out on neighbouring cities and towns in the suburbs of Aleppo, northern Hama and northern Latakia. The most recent was two days ago in the village of Al-Wadihi in the southern suburbs of Aleppo, where those groups committed a massacre in which 12 civilians died and more than 16 others were injured as they were celebrating a wedding in the village. Those villagers are now living in an indescribable state of terror after leading a safe and normal life. Terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front, supported by Erdoğan's Turkish regime, fired rockets, leaving the bodies of the martyrs and the wounded, mostly women and children, scattered across the village, and also significantly damaging houses and other private and public property, including a health centre and the village mosque.

That barbaric crime was part of a series committed by terrorist groups led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is the Al-Nusra Front of Al-Qaida in Syria, a terrorist group on the Security Council's list of terrorist groups and entities, and the Security Council should condemn those crimes unequivocally.

I would like to provide the Council with a few examples of the crimes that have resulted in the death of dozens of martyrs and injuries to hundreds of innocent civilians, including many women and children — and I am citing only civilian victims, not military casualties. On 25 May, the city of Al-Suqaylabiyah and the town of Ein Al-Krum and village of Bilhsein were targeted with dozens of missiles. On 26 May, the cities of Silhib

and Al-Suqaylabiyah were targeted with more than 30 rockets. On 29 and 31 May the town of Qamhani was targeted with a number of rockets, and scores of missiles and rockets were aimed at the towns of Qalaat Al-Madiq, Karakat and Shat-ha in the northern and north-western suburbs of Hama, along with many areas in Aleppo and its suburbs, while the city of Jablah was targeted with several rockets. The city of Mhardeh has also been repeatedly targeted by scores of rockets, most recently earlier today. The positions of the Syrian Arab Army and the locations of allied Russian forces, in particular Hmeimim airport, are continuously targeted with rockets and explosive drones.

As some Council members would like to ask questions, I wish to ask a good one: Who provides those terrorists with all their weapons? Where do they get their weapons? By parachute? From another planet? Or from Council members and other Member States? Who provides those terrorists with rockets, tanks, missiles and mines? Where do the terrorists and their arsenals come from? Some 100,000 foreign terrorists have entered Syria through our borders with Turkey. We have repeated that fact inside and outside the Council, and a Security Council sub-committee has confirmed that 101 Member States have exported foreign terrorist fighters to Syria.

The statements that we have heard in this Chamber today indicate that there is a shared understanding of the fact that we must address the problem in Idlib. That is what we have understood from the statements of Council members. I refer to the city of Idlib in Syria and not an Idlib in Florida, Britain or Germany. I am talking about the Syrian city of Idlib. On 17 May (see S/PV.8527), I explained to the Council in detail that this problem stems from the Turkish regime and its allies, which continue to provide various forms of support to terrorist groups.

The Turkish regime has disregarded its commitments under the de-escalation agreement and the Astana and Sochi agreements. That has allowed the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorist group, which includes tens of thousands of foreign terrorists, including 15,000 Europeans, to take almost complete control of the city of Idlib and some of the adjacent areas in north-western Syria and to create a terrorist outpost for blackmailing the Syrian State. It has allowed them to use hundreds of thousands of civilians as human shields and commit the most heinous crimes against them, spread terror, death and destruction and destroy civilian infrastructure,

including hospitals and schools, turning them into military barracks, detention and torture centres while killing anyone who dares to reject their takfiri and pre-Islamic ideologies.

Some members, as well as regrettably Mr. Lowcock and Ms. DiCarlo, have stated that 27 hospitals have been targeted in Idlib. I am unsure of the sources on which they relied for that information. I wish to inform the Council that Damascus, home to 8 million people, has only eight public hospitals, with a further nine in its suburbs, amount to 17 in total. I repeat that Damascus, our capital and home to 8 million people, has only 17 public hospitals, with a further 10 private hospitals. The total number of hospitals is therefore less than 30. That is in Damascus, Syria's capital. Aleppo has 11 public hospitals and 10 private hospitals, which is 21 hospitals in total. Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria, is home to 5 million people. As for Idlib, there are only four public hospitals and four private hospitals, which are eight in total. How can members in this Chamber therefore state that 27 hospitals have been targeted in Idlib? I would like to know their sources. I wish to state on the record that the misleading information that has been provided is based on lies. Those sources are lying. There are not 27 hospitals in Idlib.

With regard to what was said by our colleague the British representative, if the White Helmets are using some sort of basement from which to launch attacks, then that cannot be called a hospital; rather, it is a makeshift medical facility. That is a mere lie; it is simply a basement that is used to launch attacks on and shell civilians and the Syrian Arab Army.

I also wish to refer to another scandal. We have had sanctions, or so-called non-Council unilateral coercive measures, imposed on us for eight years. To this day, the United States and the European Union still prohibit the exportation of medical devices, such as MRI and CT scanning equipment, to Syria, as well as medical threads used in surgical procedures in the country. I do not understand how Council members can talk of the humanitarian situation in Syria and express concern, while banning the export of medical equipment to the country. Shame on them. I would go so far as to say that that constitutes a crime, to which the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms DiCarlo and the humanitarian penholders are seemingly blind. The Syrian Government and its allies do not target hospitals or schools, as those are our hospitals and schools.

The implementation of the principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Council's resolutions on counter-terrorism also require support for the efforts of the Syrian Government and its allies in combating terrorism. Partnerships must be built with the Syrian Government, as it is the only party concerned about ending the presence of terrorists in Syria and improving the humanitarian situation in general. That should be done instead of convening meetings to show off, spread misleading information and falsely accuse my country and its allies in order to support terrorist groups while blocking all legal measures taken by the Syrian Government to protect its citizens and liberate them from the terrorist groups that use them as human shields.

There must be no further attempts to undermine the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic or to exploit the crisis to serve the destructive agendas of certain countries and their agents. We must put an end to selective policies and systematic biased approaches. That is unequivocally reflected in the fact that certain members overlook the crimes committed by terrorist groups and the role of certain Governments that are widely known to support terrorism, as well as the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the international coalition in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Hajin and Baghouz — thankfully referred to by my Russian colleague — also overlook the detention of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians by American troops in Rukban camp. I would highlight the fact that Rukban camp is on Syrian territory and is occupied by United States troops, which are sponsoring a terrorist group in the area known as Maghawir Al-Thawra. That terrorist group demands 100,000 Syrian pounds for every Syrian civilian who wants to leave the camp, with the knowledge of the Americans, which means that a family of seven must pay 700,000 Syrian pounds in order to merely leave the camp.

Ending the suffering of Syrians in Idlib and other parts of Syria will require the following actions.

First, the root causes of the suffering of Syrians must be addressed, including the policies of terrorist-sponsoring Governments, the practices of their armed terrorist groups and the continued crimes committed by the so-called international coalition and its militias, including the deliberate burning of crops, such as wheat and barley.

With regard to the burning of agricultural crops, two or three days ago an announcement was made in Turkey in Arabic, addressing Syrian farmers. According to the announcement, the Turkish Government is willing to buy their crops with Turkish pounds. The crops that are not burned will therefore be sold to Turkey for a quarter of their price. Certain countries accuse us of making false allegations about the Turkish regime. The Turkish regime has absolutely no regard for good-neighbourliness. If it did, it would think about the future in the context of international law and good-neighbourliness agreements between Syria and Turkey.

The Turkish Government must look to the future. We and Turkey are in a region bound by geography and history. The Erdoğan regime should not open its borders with Syria to hundreds of thousands of foreign terrorists and the smuggling into Syria of all kinds of weapons, including chemical weapons that are brought from Benghazi through Istanbul, then to Aleppo and eventually to Khan Al-Assal with the help of a Syrian terrorist by the name of Haitham Kassar, who worked for Turkish intelligence. I have sent the Council 800 official letters detailing that information, but some do not wish to read them.

Secondly, the illegal presence of United States and Turkish forces on Syrian territories and the suffering of millions of civilians in the areas controlled at the hands of those forces must end.

Thirdly, the illegal unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people, which constitute economic terrorism and a collective punishment of the Syrian people, must be immediately and unconditionally lifted.

Fourthly, the deliberate and systematic politicization of the humanitarian issue and attempts by some States to exploit it in a manner that is completely inconsistent with the principles of humanitarian law must come to an end.

Fifthly, the reconstruction efforts of the Syrian State in areas destroyed by terrorism must be supported. The United States, Britain, France and other countries oppose the reconstruction of areas destroyed by terrorism in Syria. It is up to Council members to interpret the meaning of that. The Syrian State must be supported in its efforts to facilitate the safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees, and donor pledges should be directed to that end.

In conclusion, the Council has adopted more than 46 resolutions on counter-terrorism, and nine years have passed since the beginning of the terrorist war waged against my country, Syria. The dimensions of that war and the role played by certain Governments in fuelling and prolonging it have now become clear. However, some Council members and other Member States continue to invest in terrorism as a way to target the Syrian State, instead of building a partnership with it against terrorism. Council members may draw their own conclusion from that.

I again reiterate that the Syrian Government will not succumb to the terrorist war imposed on it and will not allow its citizens to be endangered. The Syrian Government will continue to exercise its sovereign and constitutional rights and implement the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law to defend its land and citizens, combat terrorism and end the illegitimate foreign presence on all territories of the Syrian Arab Republic. My country's Government is also committed to a political solution that will allow Syrians to determine their own future and choices through a Syrian-Syrian dialogue led by Syria, without foreign interference and in a manner that will guarantee the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

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

Mr. Sinirlioglu (Turkey): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this timely meeting. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings depicting the grave situation in Idlib.

Unfortunately, ceasefire violations are still on the rise. The consequences of the attacks by the regime against civilians are dire. So far, they have caused hundreds of casualties, the displacement of over 300,000 people and severe damage to health facilities and schools. We are particularly alarmed by attacks on medical facilities, the locations of which have been notified under the United Nations deconfliction mechanism. That seriously undermines the very purpose of those notifications, which is to allow for humanitarian access while increasing the security of humanitarian actors in the field. The continued targeting of health facilities will only generate more displacement, instability and suffering for the 3.5 million Syrians living in the Idlib area. The deconfliction mechanism should be fully

implemented and the ceasefire must be respected without delay.

Turkey is fully committed to the Sochi memorandum and has clearly demonstrated that with concrete action on the ground, at the risk of putting our soldiers' lives in grave danger. The regime's attacks undermine our efforts to implement the memorandum. They must stop. Over the past weeks, our observation posts in the Idlib de-escalation area have been repeatedly targeted by the regime. Most recently, observation post 10 was seriously hit twice by mortar fire from regime-controlled areas on 4 May and 13 June. Five Turkish soldiers were wounded during those attacks. A recent aggression over the weekend on observation post 9, with mortar fire and shelling, also caused damage.

Those attacks are unacceptable and in clear violation of, *inter alia*, the Sochi memorandum. We must take precautions to protect the lives of our military servicemen on the ground. We will not hesitate to take decisive action to that end. We will keep our observation posts operational, despite threats. We will also continue to coordinate our efforts with Russia at all levels in order to put an end to the regime's violations and preserve the status of Idlib as a de-escalation area. As a matter of fact, yesterday, the Defence Ministers of Turkey and Russia discussed the situation in Idlib and agreed to uphold their commitments under the Sochi memorandum.

It is clear that combating terrorism does not absolve any party from its obligations arising from international law to prevent attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Fighting terrorism can in no way justify those indiscriminate attacks. The use of barrel bombs indicates a complete disregard for human life. As a country with a long history of fighting terrorism, we strongly condemn terrorism and extremism in all their forms and manifestations. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham is an acute problem, aggravated by the presence of foreign terrorist fighters. However, the problem of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham cannot be overcome by targeting civilians. We need to address the problem of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham with a more sophisticated and comprehensive long-term strategy, targeting its ideology and structure. Progress in the political process will be one of the key elements to this end, and establishing the constitutional committee will be the first step in that direction.

We are at a critical stage in the approach to finalizing the formation of the constitutional committee. The

convening of the committee will be the first essential step in the international community's efforts to achieve a democratic Syria. All sides should assume their responsibilities and support efforts to convene the first meeting of the committee. We want to see a stable, peaceful and democratic Syria that can maintain its political unity and territorial integrity, a Syria that is governed according to the legitimate aspirations of its people. We can achieve that only through a political solution on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). There can be no lasting humanitarian solution without a credible political process. If the Idlib de-escalation area cannot hold, the prospects for a viable political solution will diminish considerably. The ongoing attacks by the regime are clearly aimed at the collapse of the political process.

We must be clear that the responsibility to prevent a major catastrophe in Idlib lies not only with the parties to the Sochi memorandum but with the Council as well. What we are seeing in Idlib cannot be allowed to continue. This latest chapter in the Syrian conflict is an affront to all humankind. Enough blood has been shed. All efforts should now prioritize the needs of the millions of Syrians who have suffered tremendously and are putting their faith in us.

Lastly, with regard to the hallucinatory statement by the representative of the Syrian regime, I repeat that I do not consider him to be my legitimate counterpart, because that would be an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of that regime. I will therefore not dignify his delusional accusations with a response.

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

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you for organizing this meeting, Mr. President.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is continuing its consultations with the other guarantors of the Astana format on a range of issues, including Idlib's de-escalation area, which we consider extremely important. In line with international law, Iran supports the inherent right of the Syrian Government to fight terrorists designated as such by the Security Council. While international humanitarian law must be fully observed by all without exception, that cannot and should not be used as a pretext to call for an end to the fight against terrorism.

Fighting the most dangerous terrorist groups, which have taken a large number of civilians hostage, is a must. It is in fact the protection of civilians, practically speaking, and should result in the release of all civilians trapped in terrorist-held areas. It is also obvious that those internationally designated terrorist groups cannot and should not be allowed to maintain their control over a large part of a sovereign State's territory. Otherwise, Idlib will certainly turn into a safe haven from which the worst terrorists will continue conducting their operations and killing more civilians both inside and outside Idlib. We must not forget that the Idlib de-escalation area was created to protect civilians from terrorists, not to provide a safe zone for terrorists. It was on the basis of that principle that the importance of the continued fight against terrorists was also stressed when the de-escalation area was established. The Syrian Government has an inherent right to restore its control over the whole of its territory and a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all of its citizens from terrorists.

The current situation in Idlib, which is enabling terrorists to conduct their operations and use more than 2 million civilians as human shields, cannot and must not continue indefinitely. Among other things, it will prevent the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, delay the country's reconstruction and hamper the efforts to reach a political solution. I must also stress how important it is that all concerned fully respect international humanitarian law, as well as Syria's sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity.

In conclusion, I should underline that the Islamic Republic of Iran is continuing its consultations with the other guarantors of the Astana format to work with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Pedersen, in finding a political solution to the current crisis in Syria. The right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to the Syrians themselves. We must genuinely support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Power (United Kingdom): My Ambassador has apologized for the fact that she had to leave the meeting and has asked me just to make a couple of final points on the substance of the issue at hand today, as opposed

to some of the extraneous points that have been brought up by some speakers. My points refer back to the strikes on the hospitals.

The Russian Ambassador asked a question about the difference between hospitals that were attacked in Syrian Government-controlled territory and those attacked in rebel-held territory. The difference is that in the rebel-held territory in Idlib, the Russians were supplied with information about those medical facilities through the de-confliction mechanism we have been discussing today. So the question that my Ambassador asked, as to how it came about that those hospitals and medical facilities found themselves under attack, remains a legitimate one.

We further find it slightly astonishing that the Russian Ambassador was surprised that the number of hospitals had increased during the civil war. We think that this is a natural consequence of the attacks that have been taking place on civilians and was the reason why the mechanism was created in the first place. To reiterate the point, we will answer the questions posed to us, but will they answer questions posed to them?

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): So I now see that I have only just understood the real point of the question and the answer. It turns out that hospitals whose coordinates are known must not be bombed, but carpet bombing that wipes hospitals off the face of the earth is all right. That is how I understood my British colleague's statement.

In answer to his question, I have already said that we have serious doubts about the statistics that have been provided about the medical facilities that have been destroyed. We have raised that question not just in the Chamber but also in dialogue with our United Nations colleagues, and we have not had a clear or trustworthy answer. How reliable are the statistics provided? We were told that the statistics confirming the destruction of hospitals in various areas that had been bombed are based on the testimony of certain trustworthy individuals with links to the World Health Organization (WHO), who provide the WHO with data that has not been confirmed by anyone else but which forms the basis for the statistics that have been presented to us here. We are not convinced by that. That is my answer to the question, and we will continue to

try to obtain information concerning the basis for the statistics that officials of the United Nations — and they are high-ranking officials — are using as evidence that we have heard about today and as the basis for the accusations that some Member States have made.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Power (United Kingdom): For the record, then, the answer is that we should trust the information from Russian intelligence about strikes on rebel-held territory, but when the information is provided by independent experts of the United Nations, we should not trust it.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.