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Seventy-fourth year

8645th meeting

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Matjila	(South Africa)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Moriko
	Dominican Republic	Ms. Morrison González
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Barkin

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018) and 2449 (2018) (S/2019/820)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018) and 2449 (2018) (S/2019/820)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of 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. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific; and Ms. Agnès Marcaillou, Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service in the Department of Peace Operations.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/820, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018) and 2449 (2018).

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: The humanitarian situation in Syria has seen some significant changes since I briefed the Council in September (see S/PV.8622). My briefing today will focus on three operational areas: first, the deeply concerning and rapidly unfolding situation in north-eastern Syria; secondly, the continuing crisis in north-western Syria; and thirdly, an update on Rukban. I will also give an outlook for the coming weeks.

The Secretary-General has expressed his grave concerns about the escalation of the conflict in the north-east and emphasized that any military operation must fully respect international law, including the Charter of

the United Nations and international humanitarian law. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected. Safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access must be allowed so that United Nations and other humanitarian organizations can carry out their critical work.

Since the beginning of military operations by the Turkish armed forces and allied non-State armed groups in north-eastern Syria earlier this month, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has received concerning reports of civilian casualties and damage to critical civilian infrastructure. The military operation has severely impacted the humanitarian situation. The United Nations has received assurances from the Government of Turkey that every effort is being made to ensure the protection of civilians and the infrastructure on which they rely.

The hostilities have triggered large-scale population movements. In the past two weeks, almost 180,000 people, including nearly 80,000 children, have fled south from the border areas between Turkey and Syria. People must be allowed to seek safety and move freely. Most are sheltering with friends and family, while others are in displacement camps or collective shelters. Given the fact that fighting has subsided in some areas in recent days, some of those displaced have started to return. More than 10,000 people have fled to Iraq since the start of the military operations in the north-east. The United Nations remains deeply concerned about the prospects of further hostilities along the Turkish-Syrian border and the impact on civilians, including further displacements.

The latest surge in hostilities in north-eastern Syria compounds an already dire humanitarian situation. Of the 3 million people in the north-east, 1.8 million were already in need of some form of humanitarian assistance even before the recent developments. About 710,000 people have been displaced. Prior to the escalation, the United Nations and its partners were reaching 1.25 million people on average every month with lifesaving assistance such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene and health care.

Humanitarian actors continue to deliver, despite facing serious challenges on the ground, including hostilities and an unpredictable security environment. Many organizations work cross-border from Iraq. They have had to evacuate or relocate international staff. Some have had to temporarily limit or suspend operations

due to the deteriorating security situation and concerns about access because of new parties gaining control of the areas where they operate. Organizations operating cross-border from Iraq nevertheless continue to provide humanitarian assistance, including trauma care, support to health services and sustaining water supplies. While national staff continue to work tirelessly to assist those in need, their capacity is stretched.

To meet immediate needs, the United Nations has, since 9 October, provided food to more than 286,000 people across Hasakah and Raqqa governorates as well as 10 tons of medicine to Qamishli national hospital. Winter supplies are being provided to the most vulnerable.

Safe water, sanitation and hygiene efforts continue and the polio campaign is ongoing, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, together with the International Organization for Migration, is supporting people arriving in Iraq with shelter, core relief items and protection services. There have also been efforts to ensure that stocks are in place to scale up as needed. The World Food Programme is ensuring that there is food on hand for approximately 500,000 people for one month. In Qamishli, the World Health Organization is pre-positioned 314,000 medical treatments, including trauma kits that will be distributed to medical facilities in the area.

Following the United Nations engagement with the Government of Turkey, a technical team comprising Syrian Arab Red Crescent and local water and electricity department technicians was able to access the Allouk water station, which provides water to over 400,000 people across Hasakah, and to temporarily restore the water flow after it was put out of service in the hostilities. They also restored electricity in Ras Al-Ayn. These are significant achievements but no substitute for sustained services, which can be ensured only if the parties take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm and ultimately put an end to the hostilities. Continued access to the facilities will be necessary to keep them functioning in the coming days and weeks. Hundreds of thousands of civilians depend on them.

As the situation evolves, a critical challenge facing humanitarian actors is the need to scale operations from within Syria. To achieve this, we will need all parties to facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access via land and air routes to transport humanitarian

supplies along with an expansion of humanitarian capacity in the north-east. United Nations leadership on the ground is working with all relevant parties to achieve this. The Syria Humanitarian Fund, supported by 16 donors, is planning a \$15-million allocation for the north-east. Replenishing the Fund will be critical.

Keeping our focus on north-eastern Syria, I should like to say a few words about Al-Hol camp. We have provided regular updates on the situation in the camp, where approximately 68,600 people reside, 94 per cent of them women and children, and 55 per cent of the children are under 12 years of age. Their situation is desperate. As the Secretary-General has noted, Member States bear primary responsibility for their own nationals, and policies and actions that lead to statelessness should be avoided.

Humanitarian organizations are monitoring how the evolving situation throughout the north-east might impact the civilian population in the camp. Despite a reduced presence, humanitarian actors continue to provide critical humanitarian services. However, more support is needed to ensure that adequate protection and humanitarian assistance can be provided over the coming weeks and months.

I should now like to turn to the situation in the north-west. Approximately 3 million people live in extremely difficult conditions in the Idlib de-escalation area in north-western Syria. We must also ensure that the situation there receives the attention and priority it deserves. Approximately 2.1 million people depend on humanitarian aid and 1.6 million are displaced, many having been forced to move multiple times in search of safety.

The hostilities in the north-west have subsided following the announcement of a ceasefire on 30 August, but worrying signs of insecurity remain. There have, however, been recent reports of an uptick in hostilities. Between 18 and 20 October, the highest number of attacks since the start of the ceasefire agreement was reported, mostly affecting the southern parts of Idlib. We remain extremely concerned about the impact a further escalation of fighting might have on civilians, including further mass displacement for those forced to flee and the communities receiving them.

More than 400,000 people were already displaced between May and September and are now sheltering in camps and informal sites in Idlib and Aleppo governorates. Most are in densely populated areas in

the north, close to the Turkish border. Some people are still in the open air, without adequate shelter, and many will struggle to survive in colder temperatures. Although the academic year began in September, many school-age children are deprived of education because of overcrowded learning facilities in the receiving communities, the heavy damage sustained by schools, the use of schools to house displaced people, and the lack of learning supplies and materials.

Humanitarian organizations have scaled up cross-border operations from Turkey to meet rising needs in Idlib. Recent months have seen the highest number of trucks passing through the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic cross-border operations in Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam since their inception in 2014. Food aid has nearly doubled in 2019, from reaching 560,000 civilians in the month of January to reaching 1.1 million in September through this cross-border operation. Tens of thousands more have received other services and support, such as winter clothing, household items, clean water, shelter, emergency nutrition and protection services.

The Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator visited the border region between Turkey and Syria earlier this month to assess the relief operation. He noted that the human cost of failing to renew the Security Council's decision to authorize United Nations and partner cross-border operations would be immense. If United Nations cross-border deliveries were to be halted, civilian suffering would increase, potentially leading to greater displacement, including to neighbouring countries. The United Nations does not have an alternative method of delivery that could match the timeliness or reach, and it therefore remains critical that resolution 2165 (2014) be extended for another year.

I would now like to speak about Rukban. The situation for people in this camp on the Syrian-Jordanian border remains critical. Following the mission that delivered aid to 15,000 people in early September, a second joint mission by the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in late September provided additional aid and supported the voluntary departure of 329 people to collective shelters in Homs. Another mission to provide transport to those who want to leave is planned to depart shortly, pending security guarantees by all parties.

Meanwhile, the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent strive to continue assisting those most in need inside the camp. One woman and her 7-year-old child who required urgent surgery were evacuated to Homs on 22 October to ensure that they received care. As the cold months approach, many in Rukban continue to request support to leave. Since late March, some 18,300 people have left Rukban, but thousands remain in the area and need support until alternatives are found.

In the face of these difficult operational challenges, the United Nations and its partners continue to deliver aid to millions across Syria. Through the first half of this year, the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations reached about 6.3 million people in need on average each month. In the past two months, humanitarian agencies have provided assistance, including food, to more than 4 million people in need. More than 1.3 million health and medical treatments were provided to people throughout the country during the same period.

Despite these efforts and after months of intensified needs, stocks are running low and gaps have emerged and remain to be addressed. People in north-western and north-eastern Syria are dependent on aid organizations to meet their basic needs. Without further funding, the availability of aid will be reduced. The 2019 humanitarian response plan for Syria is funded at 45 per cent, or \$1.48 billion, 10 months into the year. Donors have been generous, but more support is urgently needed; without it, partners will not be able to scale up their operations and respond to new and existing needs.

While millions of people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, their primary need is to be spared hostilities and to have political solutions that end the violence, allowing people to begin to rebuild their lives in safety and in dignity.

I will conclude this briefing by reiterating our three key points: protect civilians and civilian infrastructure; ensure safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to all civilians in need, including across borders; and cease hostilities and de-escalate the situation in north-eastern and north-western Syria.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: As we have heard it said many times before at the United Nations, the security situation in Syria remains extremely volatile. Nevertheless, over the past weeks we have seen an encouraging surge of diplomatic activity on the north-east, though some uncertainties remain.

On 17 October, Turkey and the United States announced an agreement on a 120-hour pause in Turkey's operations in order to "allow the withdrawal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from the safe zone". On Tuesday 22 October, the Presidents of Turkey and the Russian Federation reiterated their "commitment to the preservation of the political unity and territorial integrity of Syria and the protection of the national security of Turkey". They decided to preserve the status quo in the current Operation Peace Spring area, covering Tel Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn with a depth of 32 kilometres. They also decided that Russian military police and Syrian border guards would enter areas east and west of Tel Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn in order to facilitate the removal of YPG elements and their weapons to the depth of 30 kilometres from the Turkish-Syrian border.

The United Nations takes note of these agreements and welcomes any effort to de-escalate the situation, in line with the Charter of the United Nations, and to protect civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law. The United Nations also takes note of Turkey's announcement that, at this stage, there is no further need to conduct a new operation outside the present operation area. The memorandum of understanding of 22 October between Turkey and Russia also indicates that joint efforts will be launched to facilitate the return of refugees in a safe and voluntary manner. The President of Turkey has previously stated that the main aim of Turkey's operation is to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees. He has emphasized that up to 2 million refugees could be resettled in the area.

I would like to reiterate our concern about the humanitarian impact of military operations in northern Syria since Turkey and allied Syrian opposition groups began Operation Peace Spring on 9 October. While violence has subsided since 20 October, when the Syrian Democratic Forces withdrew from Ras Al-Ayn, the situation remains in flux. Civilians in north-eastern Syria continue to express concerns amid continued uncertainty as to what may lie ahead. Many are reminded of what occurred previously in Afrin and fear further displacement from major cities and towns and

the disruption of humanitarian access. Many civilians also fear the potential consequences of a possible return of Government forces. This includes fear of arbitrary detention, violent political retribution and imposed conscription. We cannot stress enough that civilians, including captured fighters, must be protected under international human rights and international humanitarian law. It is crucial that the Security Council and all Member States represented in this Chamber do everything in their power to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, ensure food and unimpeded humanitarian access and help the parties resolve their security concerns through peaceful means.

We recognize the generosity of Turkey and other neighbouring countries in hosting so many refugees fleeing Syria's devastating conflict. We urge the international community to provide strengthened support to Syria's neighbouring countries in shouldering this burden. It is also important to stress that the return of refugees must be voluntary, safe, dignified and well-informed.

Ms. Ursula Mueller of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs made reference to the approximately 70,000 civilians currently sheltering in the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps. Most have been exposed to violence and trauma under the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. They are now living in extremely difficult conditions, where they face a range of challenges and an uncertain and disconcerting fate. This includes the risk of being denied repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration or a fair trial. All children, including those suspected of being associated with armed groups, are entitled to special care and protection under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They must be treated first and foremost as victims. Solutions for foreign nationals need to be urgently found. We call on all Member States to take all measures necessary to ensure that their nationals are repatriated for the purposes of prosecution, rehabilitation and/or reintegration, as appropriate and in line with international law and standards.

I would also like to briefly update the Council on the situation in the greater Idlib area. Following the announcement of a ceasefire in late August, there was a marked reduction in air strikes, although heavy, ground-based artillery shelling continued to be reported. Unfortunately, air strikes are reported to have increased again since 12 October. There have

also been reports of helicopter attacks and the use of barrel bombs. We count on all parties, especially Turkey and the Russian Federation as guarantors of the de-escalation agreement, to press all parties to the full implementation of the September 2018 memorandum of understanding. As the Secretary-General has said many times, any large-scale military offensive in Idlib would come at an unacceptable cost in terms of loss of human lives and suffering.

We appreciate the Council's full support in helping us continue to chart a political path forward regarding the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The launch of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee will be facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva later this month.

Resolution 2254 (2015) calls for a nation-wide ceasefire, reaffirms the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and stresses that the only sustainable solution to the current conflict in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The need to implement resolution 2254 (2015) has been reaffirmed by the Council repeatedly, most recently in its presidential statement S/PRST/2019/12 of 8 October. What is now most urgently needed is decisive action for a consolidation of the ceasefires in north-east and north-west Syria, the protection of civilians throughout the country and full support to ensure that the political track remains on course.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Marcaillou.

Ms. Marcaillou (*spoke in French*): I am honoured and pleased to be present among members to brief the Security Council today on an unusual angle for the Council on the situation in Syria. Allow me to thank the Council for the opportunity to share information that the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) can contribute to its deliberations.

(*spoke in English*)

I want to begin by affirming the full commitment of the United Nations Mine Action Service to alleviating the suffering of the people of Syria, where a humanitarian crisis is further exacerbated by the contamination of explosive ordnance. In Syria, mine action is considered by all stakeholders to be an immediate and essential

requirement to respond adequately to humanitarian needs in the country. While the full scale of contamination is not known, preliminary findings for the *2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview* indicate that 2,563 communities are contaminated with explosive ordnance, affecting some 11.5 million people.

That is a dramatic increase from the 2019 figures, when 10.2 million people were estimated to be at risk in 1,980 communities. So far, the year 2019 recorded an average of 184 explosive incidents a day. The impact of explosive hazards on communities is immediate and devastating and the extensive use of improvised explosive devices further compounds the complexity of the threat. Most times, explosive hazard incidents result in serious injury and/or death, leading to long-term physical and psychological trauma for survivors and their families.

Based on available data, for each known explosive accident, an average of 1.5 people are killed and two people are physically injured, with approximately one in three survivors suffering the amputation of at least one limb. The number of casualties from explosive hazards is increasingly putting pressure on an already weakened and struggling health sector.

In addition, we must not forget the overwhelming number of civilians suffering from eight years of psychotrauma inflicted by explosions and the consequences that that kind of trauma will have, for instance, on children's learning ability as well as on individuals' behaviour, including community as well as gender-based violence.

The explosive ordnance contamination affects agricultural land, roads, homes and critical civilian infrastructure, such as schools and health centres, but also water and electricity plants in need of repair. The contamination severely impacts the lives and livelihoods of the population and further amplifies the social and economic crisis.

Internally displaced persons fleeing violence are among the most vulnerable, as are those who are farming, herding and removing rubble — activities reported to be among the most risk-prone activities in Syria. Available reports show that about 50 per cent of accidents take place in rural areas and one out of every four accidents occurs in the immediate vicinity of residential buildings.

By way of information, the truffle season is just starting in the Aleppo governorate. That provides one of the main incomes of communities in need. It is extremely difficult to prevent people looking for an income and a way of surviving from accessing rural areas although they are contaminated. That is the reality that we the United Nations see nearly every day when we are operating in the country.

While men and boys are considered to be more exposed to the direct immediate threat of explosive incidents, women and girls are also affected by the indirect impact linked to limitations in freedom of movement and the exacerbation of underlying vulnerabilities. Moreover, the death and injuries of men and boys now compel women to increasingly take on their husbands' former activities, thereby increasing their exposure to the threat of explosives.

During my mission to Syria earlier this month, all members of the Damascus-based humanitarian country team and the mine action sub-sector affirmed that humanitarian access is impeded by the contamination of a wide variety of explosive ordnance.

During my visit to Aleppo, I personally witnessed the level of destruction and contamination of areas where people come back to live when, together with my colleagues from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF, based in Aleppo, we also visited damaged and destroyed schools, where children had been recently killed and wounded by explosive ordnance when they had just run back to school to play.

UNMAS has been supporting the humanitarian mine action sector in Syria since 2016 at the request of the Resident Humanitarian Coordinator at the time and in line with resolution 2165 (2014). In October 2018, UNMAS opened its Damascus office, and in January 2019, we were ready with Syria-specific material and gender and age-tailored curricula to complement the explosive-hazard-risk education of UNICEF.

Since then, UNMAS has been working towards the expansion of humanitarian mine action activities across Syria. The objective of UNMAS is to reduce the impact of explosive hazards on the civilian population, including by providing overall coordination of the humanitarian mine action sector to address the most urgent needs more safely and more effectively.

Since January 2019, UNMAS in Damascus has trained 70 risk-education facilitators, who have since been deployed to rural Damascus. To date, they have reached out to some 18,000 people in 60 communities; current plans are to conduct outreach in southern governorates before December. That number is insignificant compared to the 11.5 million people in need, but it is a start, and we intend to use all means and tools at our disposal to reach a greater number of Syrians throughout the country. In addition, this month UNMAS has also started its risk-education activities in Hama governorate, where an estimated 46 communities severely affected by explosive hazards will be reached by the end of the year. Training trainers and national staff working in United Nations local outposts will also contribute to expanding our outreach.

In support to the United Nations country team, UNMAS has provided train-the-trainers sessions for 32 agency staff in 2019, enabling them to deliver explosive hazards-risk awareness briefings to their colleagues working to provide humanitarian aid and relief in locations where explosive hazards impact their safety. The United Nations staff who were trained are based in different regional sub-offices, including in north-eastern Syria.

Earlier this year, UNMAS launched a one-month awareness campaign on social media and through text messaging, reaching all subscribers of the two Syrian telecommunication companies. That allowed us to reach out to over 55 million people with brief messages on risk-education awareness.

The launch of the Mine Action subsector on 9 October in Damascus, during my visit, was well attended by the humanitarian sector, comprising humanitarian civil society operators and United Nations entities. Their statements at that meeting evidenced the sector's interest and need to benefit from the platform in order to enhance coordination, exchange information and support the prioritization of tasks.

Pursuant to resolution 2449 (2018), 365 communities in Aleppo, Idlib and northern Hama governorates were surveyed and more than 370 hazardous items were identified and marked through collective efforts by the Mine Action subcluster between January and July. In addition, some 677,000 people received direct risk education in 73 subdistricts ranked from highly severe to catastrophic in accordance with the protection severity scale. Risk-education materials have been distributed

to over 280,000 at-risk individuals and more than 100 schools. Approximately 3,800 survivors of explosive hazards have received victim assistance services, varying from physical rehabilitation, continued medical support and psychological support.

In the absence of an UNMAS presence in north-eastern Syria, UNMAS has made available standardized risk-awareness materials to be distributed to affected populations as part of the ongoing emergency humanitarian response. UNMAS continues to stand ready to support United Nations inter-agency missions, including assessment missions. With the evacuation by international mine action non-governmental organizations earlier this month, owing to recent military developments in the country, there are currently no humanitarian mine action operations in north-eastern Syria. On behalf of the humanitarian mine action sector, I would like to stress the importance of continuity and of the resumption of humanitarian mine action in that area of the country.

UNMAS works closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in Syria and in neighbouring countries that host Syrian refugees on the integration of mine action into national returnee response plans. The aim is to achieve consistent and coherent messaging on explosive hazard-risk education from the area of departure to the area of resettlement when the conditions are met for voluntary, dignified and safe return.

Since 2016, the humanitarian response plan for Syria has increasingly prioritized mine action, risk education, victim assistance and explosive hazard survey and clearance. As clearance of explosive hazards is the only means of definitively removing the threat, plans for the identification of explosive contamination and surveys, as well marking, fencing off and removal, are currently under discussion. The Government of Syria has agreed that UNMAS should now consider reinforcing the implementation of its activities with the assistance of international mine action operators. The registration of the operators will be done by the Government of Syria. In the absence of national humanitarian mine action capacity, the Government has also agreed that UNMAS will undertake to accredit, coordinate and assess the work of such operators. The humanitarian response plan for Syria, the humanitarian needs overview and strict adherence to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence and humanity will continue to frame UNMAS activities.

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

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

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait): I will deliver this statement on behalf of the Syria humanitarian co-penholders: Belgium, Germany and Kuwait.

At the outset, we would like to express our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for her comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Our thanks also go to Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Khaled Khiari and Mine Action Service Director Agnès Marcaillou for their briefings. We also reiterate our appreciation and support to the humanitarian workers for their efforts to alleviate the human suffering in Syria during these challenging times.

We have all been following the developments in north-eastern Syria over the past two weeks. The effects of the Turkish military operation are deeply concerning. The operation is having a destabilizing impact on the region and poses a risk to the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It has led to the deterioration of an already dire humanitarian situation. Since military operations began in the north-east, there have been reports of civilian casualties and more than 180,000 civilians, including 80,000 children, have been displaced. Civilian infrastructure has also been impacted. For many of those fleeing, this is not the first time that they have been displaced. Many have been traumatized by previous displacement and by living under ISIL rule. We underscore that civilians and civilian infrastructure must always be protected. We echo the Secretary-General's statement that any military operation must fully respect international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. We urge maximum restraint and call on all parties to resolve their concerns through peaceful and diplomatic means.

The north-west, specifically Idlib governorate, has seen a decrease in airstrikes. Nevertheless, civilian casualties continue and have seen an uptick in recent days. We once again call for de-escalation and remind all parties of their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, in accordance with international humanitarian law. We stress that counter-terrorism operations do not absolve

parties of their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

Following the recent violence in the northern part of Syria, we cannot but condemn the attacks that are impacting civilians and civilian infrastructure. We are also concerned by the threat posed to the civilian population by unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines. Any humanitarian mine clearance activities must be based on an independent needs assessment in the field. Humanitarian demining should be aimed at avoiding the suffering of civilians. We reaffirm the need for all parties to abide by the principles of proportionality, precaution and distinction. The violence must stop.

There has been an increase in humanitarian needs in Syria as a result of military operations in the north-west and north-east of the country in recent weeks and months. We underscore the need for humanitarian assistance to be delivered in a timely, safe, sustained and unfettered manner to all those in need, and for the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to be allowed to continue to carry out their crucial work in northern Syria. To that end, the cross-border operations that were renewed under resolution 2449 (2018) have been a lifeline for millions of people in Syria, specifically in the north-west of the country. The cross-border modality contributes almost 40 per cent of all humanitarian assistance in Syria. In his latest report (S/2019/820), the Secretary-General writes with regard to the cross-border operation:

“Without this operation, we would see increased numbers of civilian deaths, greater prevalence of disease and even greater suffering being inflicted on a population who cannot be reached at this scale, in such a timely and direct manner, through any other means.” (S/2019/820, para. 44)

As a co-penholder on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we share the Secretary-General’s assessment that it is all the more critical to ensure that cross-border operations continue through a further renewal of the resolution on cross-border operations before the end of the year.

The situation also remains worrisome in other parts of Syria. There are still 68,000 residents in Al-Hol camp, 90 per cent of whom are women and children. Another staggering statistic is that 50 per cent of the children in the camp are under the age of 12. We call for continued and full humanitarian access to the camp and

specifically for protection measures to be addressed, especially for women and children. In Rukban, we welcome the recent joint United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent missions to deliver food and nutritional items. We continue to call for a durable and lasting solution there.

We are also concerned by the tensions and security situation in the south-west, as outlined in the Secretary-General’s report. We underscore the need for humanitarian assistance to be delivered throughout Syria in a timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded manner to all those in need and for humanitarian partners to be allowed access. We stress the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure throughout Syria.

We cannot fail to underscore the importance of accountability. The Syrian conflict has seen some of the most egregious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That is why we support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We also welcome the start of work of the board of inquiry established by the Secretary-General. It is important to carry out a quick and thorough investigation of all of the incidents that have taken place, in particular the attacks on facilities communicated under the deconfliction mechanism. With regard to the return of refugees, our position remains unchanged. All returns must be safe, voluntary, dignified and well-informed.

In conclusion, as we commemorate United Nations Day today to mark the entry into force of the Charter of the United Nations — a document that embodies the hopes, dreams and aspirations of we the peoples — let us not forget the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the people of Syria, who have suffered for far too long from this conflict. We hope that the Constitutional Committee, the establishment of which was recently agreed upon and the work of which will be launched at the end of the month, will be the first step towards realizing a comprehensive political process, in line with the resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Barkin (United States of America): We wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller, Assistant

Secretary-General Khiari and Ms. Marcaillou for their sobering briefings.

The United States welcomes yesterday's announcement that Turkey would halt its offensive actions in north-eastern Syria and agree to a permanent ceasefire. As a result, the sanctions imposed by the United States Treasury on 14 October have been lifted. Unfortunately, as noted in the briefings, the events of the past week have resulted in the displacement of as many as 180,000 people in a country in which more than 11 million people already depend on international aid. Nearly 10,000 have become refugees in northern Iraq.

The United States remains committed to ensuring the security and stability of Syria. That is precisely why last week, Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo travelled to Ankara, where, after intense deliberations, Turkey committed to a five-day pause of its operations in north-eastern Syria to enable the withdrawal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units from the Turkish border.

The joint statement made on 17 October paved the way for a permanent ceasefire. We are hopeful, based on assurances from the Turkish authorities and the Syrian Democratic Forces, that the permanent ceasefire will be honoured, civilian lives will be protected and the hard-fought territorial defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) will be preserved. That is a solution that will save lives and contribute to long-term stability in the region.

As President Trump has made clear, Turkey must protect civilians in north-eastern Syria. We also expect Turkey to abide by its commitments to preventing ISIS from regaining a foothold in Syria and to ensure the secure, humane detention of ISIS fighters. We remain deeply troubled by reports that Turkish-supported opposition forces have deliberately targeted civilians. If verified, those actions may constitute war crimes, and we urge our Turkish partners to immediately investigate those incidents and hold accountable any individuals or entities involved. Turkey is responsible for ensuring that its forces and any Turkish-supported entities act in accordance with the law of armed conflict.

While much of our attention over the past week has been focused on north-eastern Syria, we cannot lose sight of the fact that we may be on the precipice of the largest individual humanitarian catastrophe since the conflict began — one that is being driven by the Al-Assad regime and its allies in north-western

Syria. The United States is closely monitoring reports of the recent uptick in air strikes and shelling in Idlib province, where more than 400,000 people have been displaced since April. Any military escalation in Idlib province is reckless and poses a grave threat to regional stability, 3 million civilian lives and the United Nations ability to deliver humanitarian assistance to a vulnerable population.

The United States once again calls on the Al-Assad regime and its allies to cease military operations in Idlib and uphold the Turkish-Russian ceasefire agreement of September 2018. The United States fully expects attacks on hospitals and other civilian infrastructure to cease. We fully expect all parties to support the board of inquiry's work, and we fully expect the Security Council's authorization of both life-saving cross-border aid and regular humanitarian aid to reach every single Syrian in need, regardless of their location in the country. In order to facilitate aid distribution, the United Nations and its implementing partners must have the freedom of movement required to implement cross-border aid deliveries through all agreed border crossings, in line with resolution 2449 (2018).

Our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable can be seen in the fact that the United States remains the largest donor of humanitarian aid in Syria. We will not waver in that commitment, but we must also stress that no single donor can address all of Syria's needs. We urge others to contribute additional funding to support stabilization programming and humanitarian assistance.

Looking to the future, the Council cannot forget that resolution 2254 (2015) demands that all parties immediately cease attacks against civilian targets, support efforts to achieve a ceasefire, provide unhindered humanitarian access and request that the United Nations convene the parties to engage in formal negotiations on the political process. We are now mere days from the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee. It is more vital than ever to ensure that this political process moves forward. The Council must spare no effort to support Special Envoy Pedersen's work to convene the Constitutional Committee so that the people of Syria may at last find peace within reach.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretaries-General Khaled Khiari and Ursula Mueller for their briefings. We are also grateful to Ms. Agnès Marcaillou, Director

of the United Nations Mine Action Service, for her report on the work that is under way in Syria in that area.

On 22 October, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding on the situation in north-eastern Syria. We and our Turkish colleagues have already circulated it, so its content is well known, but we would nevertheless like to highlight some key provisions in it that are designed to stabilize the situation. In drafting it, we assumed that in the interests of maintaining calm, Syrians and Turks, as neighbours, must work together and take each other's interests into account. We should point out that like the Syrians, our Iranian partners welcomed this agreement.

As we have said repeatedly, we understand Turkey's desire to take steps to ensure its national security. However, it is important to realize that the problems in north-eastern Syria did not emerge yesterday. The reason for the destabilization of the region east of the Euphrates is its illegal occupation and the dangerous experiment in demographic engineering that has been conducted there in an attempt to pit the Kurdish and Arab populations against each other.

The Russian-Turkish memorandum, which is of key significance for the stabilization of Syria — including on the humanitarian front, which is what we are discussing today — very clearly affirms respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and rejects all separatist tendencies on its territory. Arrangements have been made to end the active military phase of the Turkish operation and to deploy Syrian border guards to the border with Turkey. We have long stressed that it is impossible to address the aspirations of the Kurds, who are an integral part of Syria's multi-ethnic society, without restoring Syrian Government control throughout its national territory and borders. We are ready to continue to assist the Syrian authorities and the Kurds in establishing a broad dialogue on the most pressing issues. At the same time, pursuant to the memorandum and with the consent of Damascus, we will help to implement the Adana accord in the current circumstances and in the interests of resolving both Turkey and Syria's border security concerns. Russia's military police are already on the Syrian side of the border with Turkey. After the withdrawal of the Kurdish self-defence groups from the area in accordance with the established timetable, we and the Turkish units will begin patrolling the 10-kilometre zone together.

We assume that Syria will eventually be free from the illegal foreign military presence. I reiterate that robust and long-term stabilization and the overall resolution of the humanitarian problems in Syria can be achieved only in conditions that respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We share the concerns that have been expressed about the growing threats of terrorism. Another important element in the memorandum is ensuring that the fight against counter-terrorism continues and that the terrorists are prevented from taking advantage of the current situation to intensify their criminal attacks and facilitate the escape of those who are being held in prisons in north-eastern Syria. We urge those who have maintained and created those prisons not to shift onto others the responsibility of preventing jihadists of all stripes end from scattering throughout the region.

We also caution against dividing them into good and bad terrorists. Whatever these groups' names — the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, and so forth — they all preach the same ideology of terror, murder and violence. We once again warn against flirting with any jihadists for narrow individual ends, providing them with political cover, financial and material support or, worse, by portraying them as so-called moderate radicals. We are seeing such attempts in Idlib, for example, and we will stamp them out. Speaking of the Idlib de-escalation zone, we note that the situation there remains uneasy. The ceasefire instituted on 31 August is holding, but militants are still violating it regularly and firing on Syrian Government forces' positions. Civilians and civilian infrastructure are suffering and Syrian soldiers are dying, while civilians' grievances are mounting. They are protesting against the fighters' proliferating presence, forced recruitment, the deteriorating humanitarian situation and being threatened with being shot if they try to leave the de-escalation zone. The extremists are using violence to disperse peaceful demonstrations and opening fire on protesters. The situation inside Idlib will clearly only get worse and more intense as long as terrorists control the de-escalation zone.

As guarantor countries of the Astana process, Russia and Turkey reaffirmed their willingness to continue working together with Iran in the quest for a political settlement to the Syrian conflict. We will support the work of the Constitutional Committee, which the members of the Astana group have been

working diligently to set up in the past few weeks. Our view is that the situation on the ground should not be an obstacle to the long-awaited launch of the Committee, with the assistance of the United Nations, which should happen as soon as next week.

The Russian-Turkish memorandum also establishes the importance of resolving the problem of refugees. Together with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, Russia is taking measures to prepare for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have already returned home. We urge international organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian bodies to step up their efforts to provide shelter for returning refugees, activities that unfortunately have often been artificially delayed.

With the assistance of the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Government, together with the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, efforts are continuing to resettle people from the Rukban camp. We hope that the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons there will be resolved as soon as possible. As for the Al-Hol camp, the situation there continues to be disastrous, owing to the limited access to it for humanitarian agencies and the funding shortages, and it has all got even worse since a significant number of refugees have been moved there from other camps in the north-east. Half of the people there are women and children, and we know that there are jihadists there and they are disseminating jihadist ideology. It is high time to consider handing over all the illegally occupied territory to the Syrian authorities, which would help to resolve the IDP problem.

As Ms. Marcaillou pointed out, mine clearance continues to be a pressing issue. We welcome the start of work on it by the United Nations Mine Action Service in Syria. Russia is involved in the demining efforts in Syria both in a national capacity and through its contribution to the Service. In that connection, we urge all countries that are genuinely concerned about Syria's humanitarian welfare to join these and other humanitarian efforts, and to deliver humanitarian assistance to all Syrians without discrimination, politicization or preconditions. That includes not only post-conflict reconstruction projects in the country, but also, importantly, the lifting of unilateral sanctions in the interests of normalizing Syrians' lives.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Mueller, Mr. Khiari and Ms. Marcaillou for their briefings.

The situation in north-eastern Syria is a major concern. A few days ago, the Council expressed its deep concern about the growing terrorist threat and the deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the north-east. For France, those concerns remain valid. The European Union has clearly expressed its condemnation of Turkey's unilateral military action, as what is happening in north-eastern Syria is serious. The gains made after several years of effective fighting against Da'esh, carried out together with the Syrian Democratic Forces, are in jeopardy. The threats posed by the spread of terrorists and the strengthening of underground Da'esh cells is real. Responding to them is our priority. That is why France has called for the holding of a ministerial meeting of the members of the Coalition against Da'esh in the near future.

The impact of the offensive on the humanitarian situation is significant. France will do everything possible in its power to maintain its assistance. The President of the Republic has decided to allocate €10 million in emergency aid to meet needs. France also underscores the decisive role being played by non-governmental organizations that are already present in the north-east.

The European Union will withhold funding for stabilization and development efforts if the necessary conditions for the return of refugees are not met. In that regard, we take note of the memorandum of understanding reached by Turkey and Russia on Tuesday. Our priority is that the truce be extended and that a solution to the crisis be found through diplomatic means. To that end, the President of France has expressed his willingness to engage in a frank and exacting discussion with Turkey, in cooperation with his European partners.

No matter what, the truce must be supported by progress in three areas: pursuing the struggle against terrorism, the protection of civilians and the rapid resumption of the political process. All must respect international humanitarian law. It is non-negotiable. The protection of civilians must be a top priority. We condemn attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, in particular humanitarian and medical infrastructure.

The intensification of fighting in the north-west in recent days is unacceptable. Every effort must be

made to ensure that the ceasefire in Idlib is respected. The fight against terrorism is a crucial issue, which no one disputes. It cannot be cited, however, to justify violations of international humanitarian law. Those who commit terrorist acts will have to face justice. We call on all parties to cooperate with the various mechanisms established by the United Nations to combat impunity.

We must spare no effort to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syria. I reiterate the vital and irreplaceable need for cross-border humanitarian aid. We call on the Council to show unity and to shoulder its responsibility in preserving that critical gain through the renewal of resolution 2165 (2014). There is no alternative to providing assistance to the millions of people in need of it.

In this difficult situation, we must remain ready to act in support of the Syrian political process, which remains the only path to peace. Resolution 2254 (2015) remains our road map. All of its provisions must be implemented. The Council welcomed the announcement of the agreement on the Constitutional Committee. It must meet in Geneva to begin its work as soon as possible. We support the efforts of Geir Pedersen. This is the first step towards a genuine inter-Syrian process.

The launch of the Constitutional Committee is a starting point, but progress must be made in parallel on the other aspects of the political process, which means creating a safe and neutral environment and silencing the weapons throughout Syria. It also requires confidence-building measures, in particular the release of detained and abducted persons. Light must be shed on forced disappearances.

Such an environment is imperative to holding of free elections, monitored by the United Nations, in which all Syrians, including those who had to flee because of the war, must be able to participate. All those factors are key to achieving a credible political transition. Until that transition is definitively under way, France, like its European Union partners, will not contribute to financing the reconstruction. The situation in Syria is serious. There are many challenges, but France is more determined than ever to work with its partners to build peace in Syria.

Ms. Morrison González (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for today's briefings and, as always, we shall begin by thanking the humanitarian actors on the ground, in particular the Syrian humanitarian organizations, for continuing

to provide assistance in an increasingly complex and uncertain environment.

Today, as we consider the various and unthinkable humanitarian challenges in the Syrian Arab Republic, we are filled with a deep sense of concern. It has often been stated here that the highest price of the conflict has been paid by Syrian civilians. As other speakers said earlier, it is the men, women, children and young people whose protection is becoming increasingly difficult; who carry the weight of a deeply despondent country; and whose futures sometimes seem to slip from their hands owing to the growing threats posed to their well-being and development.

Throughout Syria, stories of human suffering and adversity are piling up. In that regard, we ask ourselves whether any kind of hope remains for the Syrian people, so many of whom have been denied the possibility of building their own future through education and the enjoyment of a normal life. Our answer is "yes" and that, despite their many trials, the people will persevere in their resilience and that the country will be reborn.

As long as the uncertainty and insecurity that unceasingly lead to massive internal displacement continue, they will not be able to do so. They will not be able to do so without the conditions necessary for moving the political process forward. And they will definitely not be able to do so under crossfire. The resurgence of terrorism also poses an enormous threat to the future not only of Syria, but that of the entire region and beyond.

Military solutions leave only material destruction, human displacement and physical and emotional damage in their wake. Inclusive dialogue and broad political agreement, therefore, are the only viable and sustainable option. That is where Security Council must focus its attention more than ever before. We reiterate the need for a cessation of hostilities at the national level that will bring respite to the population, build confidence and energize a broad political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015), while emphasizing the work of the Constitutional Committee as a starting point for other major transitions.

Secondly, we call for comprehensive and robust humanitarian action contributing to the protection of millions of vulnerable people, including internally displaced persons and refugees. To that end, we call for safe and unhindered access throughout Syria, the protection of humanitarian actors and the respect of all

parties for the provisions of international law, including international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, I note the situation in the north-eastern part of the Syrian Arab Republic and the plans to create a so-called safe zone, entailing the subsequent relocation of refugees. In that regard, we urge the parties to safeguard, above all, the dignity and security of all persons. If such an arrangement becomes a reality, it must under no circumstances violate the rights and freedoms of the civilian population or undermine the provision of humanitarian assistance.

We are steadfastly determined to use all diplomatic means possible to ensure that every return is voluntary, safe and dignified. Non-compliance with those internationally accepted principles would remain an indelible stain on the history not only of all the parties involved, but of the entire international community, including all of us here today.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Agnès Marcaillou, Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

The Syrian process has dragged on for many years. The humanitarian dimension is interlinked with the quest for a political settlement and the exigencies of counter-terrorism, so a holistic approach is necessary. Resolving the Syrian issue through the political track is the most effective means of easing the humanitarian situation in the country, and rooting out terrorist forces is a precondition for restoring peace and bringing order to the lives of the Syrian people. Turkey recently mounted a unilateral military operation that exacerbated the complexity and fragility of the situation in north-east Syria, leading to greater challenges in the fight against terrorism and worsening the country's humanitarian situation, all of which could negatively impact the reaching of a political settlement.

Going forward, I wish to propose the following.

First, there is a need to resolve the issue by political and diplomatic means, so that peace and stability can soon prevail throughout the entire territory of Syria. China has consistently been against the use of force in international relations. Any effort by any country to address its concerns must be in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms governing international relations.

It is imperative to respect in good faith Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and to consider seriously and take on board the views and positions of the Syrian Government. On 22 October, the Russian Federation and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding on the issue of north-east Syria, which we hope will help facilitate a negotiated solution through dialogue between the parties.

There is no viable alternative to a political solution to bring Syria out of the crisis. The Syrian Constitutional Committee will hold its first meeting in Geneva towards the end of October. We hope that it will get off to a good start and produce positive results. China supports the United Nations and in particular Special Envoy Pedersen in continuing with their good offices, upholding the principle that this be a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process and implementing resolution 2254 (2015) to help bring about a political solution that addresses the concerns of all parties.

Secondly, there is a need to ramp up humanitarian assistance to the entire Syrian territory, lift the economic sanctions imposed on the country and facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons. The underfunding of the humanitarian response plan for Syria is worrying. The economic sanctions have led to a deterioration in the Syrian people's living conditions. The presence of numerous Syrian refugees places economic and social pressures on neighbouring countries and constitutes a destabilizing factor for the region.

As a consequence of the military operation that began on 9 October, close to 180,000 people have been displaced in the north-east. The international community should provide United Nations and other relevant agencies with sufficient resources so that they can provide humanitarian supplies for people in need throughout Syria, including food, drinking water and medical services for those in the north-east.

The parties concerned should help to improve Syria's economics situation and facilitate the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees. China commends UNMAS for working actively and conducting risk-education and awareness-raising programmes recently through bilateral channels. China provided Syria with 100 buses and assisted in the repairing of two schools. We will continue to do everything we can to help.

Thirdly, it is necessary to consolidate the gains made in the fight against terrorism and to continue to

combat terrorism by applying uniform standards in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions and international law. Counter-terrorism is pivotal to peace and security for Syria, the Middle East and the world as a whole. All parties must attach the importance to this matter. It is necessary to refrain from taking any action that jeopardizes the gains of counter-terrorism, to address jointly the risk of spillover or relocation of terrorists, to remain vigilant, guard against an opportunistic resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant forces, and effectively manage the resettlement of foreign terrorists fighters and their families. The Secretariat should keep a close watch on developments on the counter-terrorism front and the relocation of terrorists, report to the Council on same in a timely manner and study in earnest the issue of bringing terrorists to justice.

Terrorist forces remain entrenched in most parts of Idlib, and the international community should be committed to the quest for a holistic solution to the counter-terrorism process and humanitarian issues in Idlib.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and thank the eminent briefers for their presentations.

Peru continues to follow with deep concern the continuing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation there. Women and children, as is often the case in savage conflicts such as the one that brings us together this afternoon, are the most affected. The north-eastern part of the country remains the focus of attention. According to United Nations estimates, in just a few days 180,000 cases of displacement were recorded, in addition to the civilian deaths and injuries reported.

We commend the efforts under way by the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to assist these people, who are experiencing conditions of extreme vulnerability. We also appreciate the efforts made at the highest levels of Government by the United States and the Russian Federation along with the authorities of Turkey aimed at preventing any further deterioration and to establish a ceasefire that we hope will prove to be permanent.

The principle of the peaceful resolution of disputes, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, is, in this context, particular apt and relevant. At the same time, we note that any reduction of tensions or other

arrangements, as well as the presence of foreign forces, should always be temporary in nature and should not trigger a de facto partition of the country.

We believe also that any initiative aimed at ensuring the return to Syria of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons should be carried out under internationally accepted parameters that would guarantee, as has been said, that they take place in a dignified, secure and voluntary manner. The oversight work of the United Nations is therefore of critical importance.

The emphasis placed on unfolding events in the northeast part of Syria should not detract in any way from the urgent need to tackle the humanitarian crises looming in other parts of Syrian territory, and, as noted by the Assistant Secretary-General, we deem it imperative to continue pursuing efforts to ensure that we can provide, without interruption, basic necessities for the 68,000 internally displaced persons who have taken shelter at the Al-Hol centre and for the approximately 12,000 persons who are still languishing in Rukban camp.

The presence here of the Director of UNMAS also impels us to stress once again the importance of continuing to mobilize the international community's support for humanitarian demining and the clearing of improvised explosive devices in Syria, which continue to wreak havoc among the population and hamper the delivery of aid and assistance.

Faced with the intensification of violence in recent weeks and the devastating consequences for the population, we cannot but recall the urgent need to make headway towards a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We therefore look forward to the holding of the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee, which we hope will help lead to Syrian reconciliation.

The Council must, inter alia, keep a close eye on events on the ground with a view to maintaining the ceasefire in Idlib and in the north-east of the country. Any effort to bring about lasting peace will depend to a large extent on preventing all these situations from deteriorating into fresh human tragedies.

Mr. Moriko (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the holding of this meeting and congratulates Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Mr. Mohamed

Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific; and Ms. Agnès Marcaillou, Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service, Department of Peace Operations, for their detailed briefings on recent developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The escalation of hostilities on 29 April in Idlib governorate and the Turkish military offensive launched on 9 October in north-east Syria are real sources of concern for Côte d'Ivoire in terms of their humanitarian consequences. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/820), more than 1,000 civilians have been killed since the escalation of hostilities in Idlib governorate began, while 400,000 people have been forced to flee to the Turkish border. Once a place of refuge for thousands of Syrians fleeing the fighting in their country, the Turkish-Syrian border has become, since the outbreak of the Turkish military offensive, a high-risk area that has reignited the concern of the international community about the already very worrisome humanitarian situation in the country. According to estimates by the United Nations Children's fund, to date nearly 165,000 people, including 80,000 children, are being affected by the military escalation in north-east Syria, not to mention the impact of the clashes on sanitation infrastructure, including a water treatment station that serves the drinking-water needs of approximately 400,000 people in the area of Hasakah.

My delegation resolutely condemns the attacks on civilian populations and infrastructure and reminds those leading the offensive that conducting military operations does not exempt them from their obligations under international humanitarian law, which include the protection of civilians and educational and health infrastructure, as well as the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the unilateral truce decreed by the Russian Federation and Government forces in Idlib governorate on 31 August. We also welcome the fact that United States and Russian mediation efforts led to Turkey's decision to suspend its offensive against Kurdish forces in north-east Syria. My country encourages the continuation of dialogue with both Turkey and Kurdish forces and urges all actors in the Syrian crisis to take further action to de-escalate. We also urge all actors to establish a permanent ceasefire, which is essential to meeting the humanitarian challenges in the region and increasing

the likelihood of achieving a successful outcome at the meeting scheduled for 30 October in Geneva with a view to setting in motion the Constitutional Committee.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the continued provision of cross-border humanitarian assistance, which has helped to relieve thousands of people affected by the conflict and, in turn, reduce the risk of a humanitarian disaster. In that regard, we would like to remind the belligerents of the urgent need to ensure safe, prompt, unhindered and sustainable humanitarian access for people in distress. In that connection, my delegation sincerely hopes that the upcoming negotiations among the members of the Council will lead to the renewal for a one-year period of the mandate of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism, which ensures the provision of cross-border humanitarian aid and is set to expire on 10 January 2020.

Côte d'Ivoire also notes with regret the low level of funding for the humanitarian response plan for Syria, of which, as of the end of September, only 35 per cent of the needs outlined therein had been provided. We therefore call on States and organizations that have committed themselves to supporting Syria and the region to honour their promises in order to allow for the continued provision of aid to people.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire once again urges the international community to maintain its humanitarian assistance efforts in Syria and reiterates its support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in his efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis. We hope that the talks scheduled to take place among the Syrian parties in Geneva on 30 October will build the broad political perspective that is necessary to that end so as to bring peace, stability and development back to the entire region.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): My delegation thanks Assistant Secretary-General Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General Khiari and Director Marcaillou for their briefings.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains alarming. I believe that everyone in the Chamber is fully aware of that. Humanitarian concerns are continuing to grow as nearly 180,000 people have been displaced and civilian casualties have been reported since the escalation of hostilities began in north-east Syria. Humanitarian concerns are also continuing to grow because thousands of civilians have been killed since the escalation of hostilities began in late April in north-

west Syria. And humanitarian concerns are continuing to grow as camps are overcrowded and humanitarian assistance is overstretched. Those concerns are real and need to be addressed immediately. Indonesia appreciates all efforts from the relevant parties to assist with the situation on the ground and ease the suffering of civilians. My delegation also appreciates the relevant agreements that have been reached with the aim to de-escalate conflict and cease military operations. We sincerely hope that those agreements can be respected and fully implemented. In that context, I would like to focus on three elements.

First, the hostilities must end permanently. It is essential to take all appropriate steps to protect the civilian population, including those people that are in internally displaced persons camps. All parties need to ensure that their activities are based on respect for international law and international humanitarian law. All parties need to ensure that the ceasefire agreements will not only be on paper but also, and most important, truly felt by the people on the ground. In addition, protecting civilian infrastructure remains crucial. We note in that regard that the United Nations Headquarters board of inquiry commenced its work on 30 September, with the mandate to investigate a number of specific incidents in which there was destruction of, or damage to, facilities on the United Nations deconfliction list and United Nations-supported facilities in north-west Syria since the signing of the Idlib memorandum. With regard to the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), we note that, for its part, UNMAS has played an important role to protect civilians and limit the threat of mines, explosive remnants and improvised explosive devices in Syria.

Secondly, we cannot overemphasize the need for all parties to facilitate immediate, safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to the areas requested, and in particular to populations in need. During this challenging moment, humanitarian access is indeed crucial. We commend the United Nations and its humanitarian workers who are working tirelessly to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, my delegation wishes to stress that the hostilities must not disrupt the progress on the political process. Indonesia is pleased to note that the launching of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee is still on schedule. The launching and the process that will follow need to remain on track. The international community needs to redouble its efforts

in supporting the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen.

As reported by the Secretary-General, Syria remains one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time, and we have the obligation to ensure that this crisis comes to an end. It is not going to be an easy process, but it is indeed doable.

As we celebrate United Nations Day today, it is my delegation's fervent hope that we will spare no effort in strengthening our collective work to support the peace process in Syria based on the spirit of the 74-year-old Charter of the United Nations — the Charter that continues to be valid and that will continue to be our collective guiding principle, in particular in saving succeeding generations and uniting our strength to maintain peace and security.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): You have just reminded me, Mr. President, that the representative of Kuwait already spoke on behalf of the three co-penholders on the humanitarian situation in Syria. I promise to keep my remarks very brief, but I would like to add a couple of points.

We are of course extremely worried about the humanitarian situation. I also want to add — since others have mentioned it — that Germany is the second-largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syria.

The first of the two points that I want to mention has to do with the worrisome reports we just read about the war crimes that have been committed during the Turkish offensive. Civilians have been targeted, and I can only subscribe to what has been said before about the culprits being brought to justice. Perhaps our Turkish friend can say something about what Turkey is planning in that respect.

I also want to pick up on Idlib. I heard the report from Assistant Secretary-General Mohamed Khaled Khiari with regard to the increased air strikes and barrel bombs reported in Idlib. That is extremely worrisome. Members will remember that last month the three co-penholders tried to get the Security Council's agreement on a draft resolution (S/2019/756) again linking and counter-terrorism measures to international humanitarian law. Members will remember that we were not successful because Russia and China vetoed that draft resolution (see S/PV.8623). In their statements today, to which I listened very carefully, there was a lot about counter-terrorism but nothing explicitly addressing respect for

international humanitarian law. Quite to the contrary, we are receiving very well documented reports about targeted strikes against hospitals and civilian infrastructure. Germany participated in a Russian-organized meeting over lunch on the humanitarian situation with an expert from Russia. We asked about matters including the report in *The New York Times* on 13 October. He did not know anything about it, so we brought a copy of that article and handed it over to Ambassador Nebenzia to study.

We have all said that there is no alternative to a political solution. We all agree on that. But what do we need for a political solution? The Council just returned from a trip to South Sudan. We all listened to what civil society had to say: they said that, for reconciliation to happen and peace to be achieved in South Sudan, there needs to be accountability. There needs to be the installation of a court in South Sudan, which has in fact been agreed upon by the by the Council. Similar measures are also needed in Syria.

In another side event a few weeks ago here, we heard from a witness who succeeded in escaping from an Al-Assad prison about the torture that he had to endure — 200,000 people remain in such prisons. There will be no reconciliation and no future for that country if there is no accountability for the crimes that have been committed. Therefore, again, I would appeal for support in that regard. Since our Russian friends are so interested in the reconstruction of the country, I urge them to support the efforts in the Fifth Committee to give the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 the means that it needs to work on accountability and finally restore peace to Syria.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): Let me thank all our briefers — Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General Mohamed Khaled Khari and Director Agnès Marcaillou. First of all, in the context of recent developments, let me reiterate that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria, and any sustainable solution to the conflict will requires a genuine political transition. Allow me also to echo Ms. Mueller's words in stressing that the Syrian people deserves and expects a political solution finally to bring an end to the violence and let them live their lives in peace and safety.

We remain deeply concerned by the negative impact of recent developments on the humanitarian, political and security situation in the region, especially taking into consideration possible impacts of a Turkish military operation. I will focus on those three dimensions of the consequences of a Turkish military operation.

First, regarding the humanitarian impact, the current situation in Syria already has dramatic consequences for civilians, as highlighted by previous speakers. Many civilians are trapped in the conflict. The safety of thousands of civilians, including children and humanitarian personnel, is under threat. There have already been reports of civilian deaths and injuries, including among children. Let me stress that, according to civil society organizations operating in the area, thousands of children are spread across three camps in the north-east. Those children — almost half of them under the age of 5 and the majority under 12 — rely completely and exclusively on humanitarian aid. Any interruption to camp services, which are already overstretched, would put their lives at risk.

Let me again to reiterate, as we have stressed on a number of occasions in this Chamber, that all parties must fully comply with their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including the principle of the protection of civilians, which means, among other things, the protection of civilian infrastructure and avoiding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It is also an obligation under international law to ensure safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid, as well as the free and unhindered movement of civilians fleeing violence.

Let us also recall that summary executions, which are reported to have happened after the incursion started, are serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that may amount to war crimes. All reports of such alleged violations should be investigated and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

Secondly, let me turn to the political impact. We remain concerned about the potential impact of recent military operations on the political process under the auspices of the United Nations, since they have the potential to undermine the progress achieved so far by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Pedersen, especially his work on the Constitutional Committee. Poland underlines its commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian

State, which can be assured only through a genuine political transition in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process.

We take note of the agreement reached by Turkey and Russia in Sochi and hope that its provisions will translate into long-term de-escalation and the tangible stabilization of the situation in north-east Syria. We underline that the parties bear responsibility for the safety of the civilian population in the area, including the Kurds, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law.

We also wish to stress that Turkey remains a key partner for the European Union, a NATO ally and a critically important actor in the Syrian crisis and the region, including as a crucial member of the global coalition. We expect Turkey to act responsibly and with a long-term perspective in the context of the Syrian conflict.

Thirdly, let me turn to the security impact. Last but not least, we are concerned that prolonged military escalation in north-east Syria might contribute to the further destabilization of the broader region, already in immense turmoil. We are receiving very disturbing reports of the escape of an unknown number of fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) from prisons in the area. That undermines the progress achieved by the global coalition and creates an environment conducive to the resurgence of ISIS.

Let me now turn to the issue of mines. It goes without saying that we commend the United Nations Mine Action Service for its efforts aimed at alleviating this problem in Syria. Sadly, explosive remnants of war were recorded as the leading cause of child casualties in Syria during the second half of 2018, accounting for almost 500 reported deaths and injuries, which were completely unnecessary. Explosive weapons continue to be used indiscriminately and systematically in populated urban and rural areas, particularly affecting internally displaced persons and those voluntarily returning to unsafe areas. Clearing contamination is therefore essential and constitutes a first step towards ensuring the safe return of a civilian population, who is suffering the most as a result of this devastating conflict.

In conclusion, I want to recall Poland's position on the safe return of Syrian refugees who have fled their

homes. A durable solution for Syria should ensure the security of a sustainable, dignified and voluntary return of Syrians to their country of origin, in accordance with international law and the principle of non-refoulement. Finally, we fully support the renewal of resolution 2449 (2018), allowing for cross-border delivery of assistance, because, in our view, it is necessary so that all these people in Syria can simply survive.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): Let me, like others, thank our briefers today.

The United Kingdom welcomes the fact that the United States-brokered ceasefire is holding in north-east Syria and that the fighting appears to be over. We note the agreement announced on Tuesday by President Vladimir Putin and President Recep Erdoğan that this ceasefire is now permanent and the subsequent announcement by the Turkish Ministry of Defence that they see no need for further operations. In that context, let me say that we call on Turkey — as we do all actors in the Syrian conflict — to comply with the obligations towards civilians under international humanitarian law. We will be looking very closely at the details and implementation of the agreements announced, including their impact on governance and the local population.

The security situation in the north-east remains volatile. Military developments have led to 180,000 people displaced, 80,000 of whom are children and over 10,000 of whom have fled to Iraq. A number of international aid workers have felt compelled to leave, which has had a serious impact on operations. It is essential that humanitarian actors have unrestricted access to areas where people continue to be in need. We hope that these displaced people will soon be able to return to their homes safely and that damage caused to critical infrastructure is swiftly repaired.

On 16 October, the Council agreed press elements expressing our collective concern about the impact of recent developments on the humanitarian situation and the possible resurgence of Da'esh. The Sochi agreement has not alleviated our concern. It is imperative that the Council be kept informed of the humanitarian situation, including in internally displaced persons camps, as well as on the threat posed by Da'esh. We note the return of regime forces to areas of north-east Syria following the agreement between the Syrian Democratic Forces and Damascus. Given the appalling record of the regime's security forces elsewhere, the behaviour of those forces is something we will monitor very closely.

We continue to support the rights of Syrian refugees to return to their homes when it is considered safe to do so, but we would have serious concerns about any attempt to force refugees to return to Syria against their will. Any returns must be voluntary and in line with the principles of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Any attempt at deliberate demographic change would be unacceptable.

The United Kingdom is one of the largest donors to the humanitarian needs of Syrians, and we do so throughout Syria and its neighbours. There is no politicization in our provision of life-saving support. But, as we and our European Union partners have previously made clear, we will not provide stabilization or development assistance in areas where the rights of local populations are ignored.

All of those concerns mean that the United Nations has a much more important role to play in north-east Syria, particularly given the difficulties being faced by other humanitarian agencies. To allow humanitarian agencies to prepare, plan and respond, we would welcome clarity about how the United Nations plans to scale up its response. Assistant Secretary-General Mueller made clear — and it was echoed by the humanitarian co-penholders — the need for the renewal of the cross-border aid resolution 2449 (2018). I would also like to acknowledge Ms. Marcaillou's assessment and depiction of the scale of the challenge; as the United Nations Mine Action Service seeks to step up its efforts, we will need — and we expect — to see the regime cooperating fully and allowing access.

We cannot let events elsewhere in Syria distract us from the dire humanitarian situation that persists in Idlib. We were extremely concerned to learn of the resumption of air strikes and shelling last week. Let us remember that over 1,000 civilians have been killed since the beginning of May, including more than 500 women and children, and over 688,000 people have been forced to leave their homes. We therefore urge all parties to respect the ceasefire agreed on 31 August. We look forward to the board of inquiry's investigation into the appalling attacks in Idlib and its subsequent update to the Security Council.

The United Kingdom would once again like to welcome the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee next week — a momentous occasion. Mr. Pederson has the United Kingdom's full backing. A political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015)

is crucial for peace in Syria. The Syrian people have suffered through nine years of conflict and, as events in Idlib and the north-east testify, that suffering is not over. The Constitutional Committee is an opportunity for Syrians from all sides to sit down to grapple with the real issues that have caused the conflict. It is an important signal, but it must be more than that — it must be the start of real, genuine change. That will require serious engagement and commitment from all participants to succeed. Unless the regime realizes that its actions have been a fundamental reason for the conflict, nothing will be achieved. We call on the regime representatives to demonstrate that understanding at the upcoming first meeting.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our thanks to Ms. Mueller, Mr. Khiari and Ms. Marcaillou for their respective detailed and useful briefings.

The overall outlook for the humanitarian and security situation in Syria, widely described in the statements of the representatives that took the floor before me, means we cannot help but voice our concern for the safety of the civilian population. Humanitarian needs have increased significantly, while the statistics after eight and a half years of war continue to be alarming. There are currently more than 6 million internally displaced persons and approximately 6 million refugees being hosted in neighbouring countries and in Europe. Throughout the country, the death toll exceeds 370,000, one third of whom are civilians.

Faced with this appalling situation, the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea encourages the United Nations and its partners to spare no effort to provide a scaled-up collective response that will help to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria. To mitigate the humanitarian impact, it is also incumbent upon the Security Council to ensure that humanitarian partners can continue to provide aid to people in need wherever access is possible. We must continue to support displaced persons in communal shelters and host communities, as well as those internally displaced persons in camps and informal settlements such as Rukban and Al-Hol.

The international community has unanimously expressed its concern regarding the humanitarian situation in Syria. My Government commends the negotiations between the United States and Turkish

Administrations, which have led to a ceasefire that should allow, as agreed, oversight of the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from the border between Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic.

In that connection, we also wish to welcome the signing of the memorandum of understanding between Russia and Turkey on the normalization of the situation in north-east Syria and, in line with the recent statements by the Secretary-General, we commend initiatives aimed at reducing the escalation of the situation. We believe that that agreement is a step towards maintaining stability in the region. The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea hopes that such agreements will help to ease Turkey's concern over its security and the terrorist threat and that the parties honour their commitments, including the withdrawal of arms, forces and equipment from Kurdish units.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the latest Russian-Turkish agreement is fully in line with Equatorial Guinea's position, which has always supported negotiations between the parties, inclusive dialogue and a peaceful approach to resolving any dispute.

We believe that we are now making decisive progress in the resumption of the peace negotiations in Geneva within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. Only an inclusive and credible political process will be able to provide a lasting solution to the conflict in Syria in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of South Africa.

I thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Ms. Agnès Marcaillou and Mr. Khaled Khiari for their briefings.

South Africa voices its deep concern about the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. While the previous briefing by the then Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Lowcock, in September (see S/PV.8619) focused on the upsurge in violence in north-west Syria, the new front in Syria's complex war is exacerbating an already fragile humanitarian situation.

According to the most recent Secretary-General's report (S/2019/820), more than 1,000 civilians have been killed since late April, with 209 killed between 1 August and 22 September. Since the beginning of May this year, more than 630,000 people have been

displaced, some not for the first time, with many seeking shelter in the open.

In north-east Syria, more than 180,000 civilians, including 80,000 children, have now been displaced due to the increased military operations since 9 October. With regard to the damaged Allouk water system, we welcome and applaud the United Nations efforts in repairing that infrastructure, which supports 400,000 people in the region, and call on all parties to ensure that the additional necessary repairs to return the water system to full operation can be completed without delay.

The humanitarian situation has worsened further following the withdrawal of some international humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations from north-east Syria. Their withdrawal and suspensions of operations have added further challenges and complications for those civilians in the area requiring assistance to meet their basic needs.

These combined events have exacerbated a humanitarian crisis that has already been declared one of the world's worst. Last month the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution that addressed the dire humanitarian situation in Idlib. Such lack of Council unity is not the message that we want to convey to the Syrian men, women and children who have lost their lives, sustained severe injuries and endured multiple displacements due to the dismal conditions in which they live. We are the international body that has been entrusted with peace and security. Yet, because of our internal rivalries, we are failing to discharge our responsibility. At the very least, we should be able to agree on humanitarian assistance.

Let us be clear: Syria is at a delicate stage. There is a glimmer of hope and prospects on the political front given the positive developments with regard to the official launch of the Constitutional Committee by the end of this month. The Council should be galvanizing all its energies towards that political process and invest everything possible for a fully inclusive Syrian-led political process.

However, the developments in north-east Syria in recent days have also aggravated the fragile situation we are talking about. The Council must endeavour to rally around a common position to assist the process and implement its mandate to maintain international peace and security. The brief elements of presidential statement S/PRST/2019/12, which we adopted last week, are a start. It may not say much but at least it shows that

we can agree on some common ground. South Africa would be willing to work with the penholders and interested delegations on this matter to seek consensus.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that it is crucial that there be utmost restraint and a de-escalation of hostilities, as well as the recognition of Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and that all parties comply with international law.

South Africa wishes to reiterate that the situation in Syria must be resolved through negotiations and dialogue and calls on all parties to make every effort towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). South Africa has noted the memorandum of understanding signed between Turkey and the Russian Federation on 22 October. My delegation hopes that the memorandum together with the previously agreed ceasefire between Turkey and the United States of America on 17 October, along with the continuous and steadfast efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen, all work together towards achieving long-term peace, stability and prosperity for Syria and its people.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have long noted and been aware of the fact that my friend, the German representative, has a predisposition towards inviting me to engage in dialogue during Security Council meetings. I cannot deny him that pleasure. I wish to make this an interactive dialogue. He does not need to give me the article from *The New York Times*. I have seen it. It is just another fake that has emerged and has long been refuted by our Defence Ministry. It is clear that it is a cheap fake.

I would also like to provide something, that is, the text of my briefing at a press conference that I held for journalists. I do not recall the exact date but I believe that it was on 16 or 18 September. During the briefing I described the fake news, the fraudulent information and the fabrications being used as part of the de-confliction process by so-called credible United Nations sources in Idlib. Unfortunately, as a result, it is being used by United Nations representatives. I think that the commission that was mentioned today should above all see to it that they ascertain how organizations

and bodies of the United Nations became complicit in this shady scheme.

On the basis of the aforementioned fake information our humanitarian champions deliberately patched together an unacceptable draft resolution (S/2019/756), which we, as was mentioned by the representative of Germany, vetoed along with China. I believe that the draft resolution was presented for the following purpose — so that they might later have the pleasure of mentioning that fact at Council meetings. It seems that this was the reason for putting the draft resolution before the Council.

My German friend is perfectly aware of the fact that the fate of the draft resolution was known even prior to its submission. I warned him about that from the very outset. We constantly hear instructions from others as to what we need to do and what we should not do. I want to ask him what Germany itself is doing to stabilize the situation in Syria beyond lecturing others and constantly insisting on new conditions. When will it deign to consider the needs of the Syrian people? We are not lecturing or competing with anyone, we are simply taking action.

The President: The representative of China has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Germany commented on my statement just now, so I would like to respond by making two points. First, before he comments on others' statements, he should first understand the content of those statements. If he is confused about them, it might not be appropriate to make such comments. I emphasized in my statement that we should consolidate the results that have recently been achieved in countering terrorism, continue to act in accordance with Council resolutions and international law — let me emphasize, international law — unify standards and combat all forms of terrorism. I have a personal background in international law. It is common sense that international law includes international humanitarian law and everyone should understand that. I also want to highlight the fact that China has its own principles and positions that it bases its statements on, and it is not anyone else's place to lecture or comment on them.

Secondly, how China votes in the Council, including on resolutions drafted by the humanitarian penholders, depends on the merits of the case. Our position is based on our consideration for international peace and security

and for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, security considerations and humanitarian needs of the country concerned. It is also based on China's principles and positions, which we have steadfastly adhered to. We regard to how we vote, do not have to look to others to help make our decisions, and it is not Germany's place to worry about that.

The President: The representative of Germany has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I will be brief. I am not predisposed to get into discussions with our Russian colleague, but I am predisposed to defend international humanitarian law and human rights, and I am doing that in implementation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It may not be for me to criticize Chinese positions, but it is for me to uphold international law and international humanitarian law, and the term "international humanitarian law" was not mentioned in either the Russian or the Chinese statement.

The President: I wish to remind representatives that I have no intention of going beyond 6 p.m. I will suspend the meeting at exactly 6 p.m. whether or not anyone is speaking. Members' cooperation is appreciated.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the work that you and your friendly delegation have been doing during your membership of the Security Council and your presidency of it this month.

On 9 October the Turkish regime began a new chapter in its aggression against my country, in flagrant violation of international law, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant Security Council resolutions, the outcome documents of the Astana meetings and the Sochi memorandum, all of which stress the importance of respecting Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Turkish aggression has resulted in the occupation of Syrian territory and the killing and injuring of hundreds of martyrs and civilians, including women, children and public servants. It has also displaced hundreds of thousands of people and done significant material damage to schools, hospitals and vital infrastructure

such as dams and power and water plants. It seems that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs considers all of that an illusion undeserving of attention, which shows that its humanitarian claims are empty.

It is unfortunate that neither Ms. Mueller nor Mr. Khiari condemned the Turkish aggression, referring to it as the Turkish military operation in north-eastern Syria as if it were in north-eastern Venus, Mars or Mercury, not a country that is a founding member of this Organization and is sovereign under international law. As they always do, the Turkish regime and its partners in the aggression against my country have tried to legitimize it and whitewash the facts. To justify its aggression, the Turkish regime included in its letter addressed to the President of the Council (S/2019/804) a number of lies that fool no one. It claimed, for instance, that the aggression is intended to facilitate the return of displaced persons, preserve the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and combat terrorism. It even gave its aggression the name "Operation Peace Spring" and called the area it seeks to occupy a "safe zone", in an illustration of the schizophrenia of the Turkish regime, which only a few years ago announced a zero-problem approach to its neighbours. That has ended up as an approach of zero principles, zero friends and zero good-neighbourliness.

It is not that surprising that in its aggression against my country the Turkish regime invoked Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, since that echoes the approach taken by its NATO allies. They have invoked that article to justify direct military intervention, invasion and the undermining of the sovereignty, security and stability of a number of States Members of the United Nations. That was the case when the so-called international coalition was established, an illegitimate coalition whose crimes and puppet militias paved the way for the current Turkish aggression. It is strange that this magical article should be invoked by some to justify waging wars and military aggression on countries that are members of the United Nations without any consideration for the actual mandate of the Security Council, which is the maintenance of international peace and security. We all remember what happened in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya. Perhaps the Council ought to hold a meeting with representatives of the Office of Legal Affairs in our Organization to clarify this important article of the Charter, debunk the myths and misconceptions surrounding it and

distinguish between legitimate self-defence, on the one hand, and war, invasion and aggression on the other, all of which are condemned by the Charter.

My Government condemns the Turkish aggression in the strongest terms and categorically rejects the Turkish regime's attempts to justify its actions on pretexts of self-defence or counter-terrorism. This regime has violated the Adana security agreement concluded between both our countries in 1998. It has recruited, supported, trained and armed thousands of terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 countries, according to United Nations reports. Those terrorists were welcomed by Turkish intelligence officials at Turkish airports with a view to facilitating their infiltration of the shared border with my country. Their crimes were pre-planned. For years, they were provided with political, military and media support before they were recently integrated into the invading forces in their aggression against the north-east of my country.

Turkey's aggression has today been condemned by the representatives of several European countries. They referred to that aggression as unilateral Turkish action, or as the Turkish operation, at best. However, that condemnation does not in any way absolve those countries of being accountable for their own actions in creating the current situation. They laid out on a golden platter all of the justification Erdoğan needed to carry out his aggression and played a key role in supporting and sponsoring the illegitimate separatist militias in north-eastern Syria. They also played a major role in instigating the emergence and exacerbation of the threat posed by terrorist organizations currently operating in and around Idlib.

The former United States Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition Against Da'esh, Mr. Brett McGurk, confirmed that Turkey had allowed 40,000 Da'esh operatives from 110 countries to join its terrorist ranks, refusing to close its shared border with Syria. Those were McGurk's words and that is the reality. Did those countries not realize what was happening? What did they do to dissuade the terrorists from coming to my country? They did nothing — nothing but lament international humanitarian law. We must combat terrorism with international humanitarian law. We must not send terrorists back to their places of departure in Europe; rather, we must accommodate Da'esh terrorists in 10-star hotels and ask the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to provide them with food

from the best restaurants in Paris. By this, we would have implemented the international humanitarian law.

It is regrettable that some continue to demonstrate their usual traits of hypocrisy and double standards. They commend the Turkish regime for its so-called generosity in hosting Syrian refugees and its cross-border humanitarian action. They choose to ignore the fact that Erdoğan would not have welcomed a single Syrian citizen were it not for his plans to use Syrians as tools for achieving his expansionist agenda in the region, to fulfil his illusions of establishing the "Ottoman Sultanate of Erdoğan" and to use them as a means of blackmailing Europe. He has repeatedly issued threats against Europe, even if that means hundreds of Syrians drowning in death boats belonging to Turkish smugglers in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.

Erdoğan would not have facilitated any United Nations cross-border action were it not for his desire to cover up the smuggling of tens of thousands of foreign terrorist, arms shipments and looting oil, antiquities, wheat and Syrian factories and produce across the border. Those were the real outcomes of resolutions 2449 (2018) and 2165 (2014). Was the Council aware of all of that? Of course it was aware, but the hostile actions of some Governments against Syria prompted an allegiance with the devil at the expense of international law, ethics and human values, resulting in the bloodshed of the Syrian people.

The Ottoman Empire first occupied Syria in 1516. The same Empire fell at the gates of Damascus in 1916. I ask the Council to take note of that coincidence. In 1516, the Ottoman Empire occupied Syria; in 1916, more than 100 years ago, the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist at the gates of Damascus — not Vienna. Our neighbour, Turkey, must understand that we share common history, geography and interests — not hostile relations.

My delegation sent an official letter to the Council yesterday containing the detailed response of the Syrian Government to the information contained in the sixty-third report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions related to the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/2019/820). In view of the time constraints, I will simply reiterate that improving the humanitarian situation significantly in my country will require full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic by countering external political, military and economic interference in the domestic affairs of my country. It will

also require ensuring the full withdrawal of all foreign forces that are acting illegitimately in the Syrian Arab Republic. They are violating the sovereignty of my country, thereby supporting terrorism and obstructing our efforts and those of our allies to improve the humanitarian situation, as is the case in Rukban camp in the occupied area of Al-Tanf — an area that no one has mentioned today. Not one speaker has mentioned the fact that Al-Tanf, which is Syrian territory, is currently occupied by United States forces. We also reiterate the importance of lifting the unilateral coercive measures under which the Syrian people are suffering. It is equally important to ensure full cooperation with the Syrian Government in supporting its efforts to combat terrorism and make progress in the humanitarian and development fields. Not to do so would be fishing in troubled waters.

Finally, I wish to refer to our recent interaction with Ms. Marcaillou, who was recently in Damascus, as she mentioned in her briefing. She attended important meetings with my colleagues in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and we informed her that we had developed a two-pronged national mine action strategy. We also clarified that a significant and important part of our demining work is being carried out by the Syrian Government and our Russian allies. We further explained that an Armenian mission, specialized in the field of demining, is undertaking commendable efforts in this field. We informed her that we are continuing to cooperate with the Aga Khan Development Network to remove mines in the Salamiyah area. We also told her that the European Union (EU) claims to fund 30 humanitarian projects in Syria, but that it has not allocated any funding to demining projects. We told Ms. Marcaillou all that in Damascus. The EU rejects funding the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service to remove mines in Syria. Is demining not a humanitarian activity? If demining is not a humanitarian activity but a political one, then I ask: Why did Ms. Marcaillou brief the Council today on the humanitarian situation in Syria?

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

Mr. Sinirlioglu (Turkey): Over the past two weeks, developments in the north-east of Syria have been the subject of lengthy discussions. Various views have been expressed, which is fine. We are all entitled to hold our own views. But we are not entitled to our own facts. I therefore view today's meeting as a platform for me to

set the record straight with regard to Operation Peace Spring and the ensuing developments.

Operation Peace Spring was a limited cross-border counter-terrorism operation to fight such terrorist organizations as the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Da'esh. I therefore flatly reject and strongly condemn any representation of our counter-terrorism operations as an offensive or aggression. We all very well know, condemn and fight Da'esh, which is responsible for many inhuman actions, violence and terrorism. Turkey has been at the forefront of the fight against Da'esh. As an active member of the Global Coalition against Da'esh since its inception, Turkey has fought against Da'esh in Syria more than any other country and paid the heaviest price. Turkey is the only country that engaged in hand to hand combat against Da'esh in Syria.

However, there is a deliberate effort to conceal or forget the realities about the PKK/YPG, so let me remind the Council about this group with a few facts. As widely recognized and according to the United States Intelligence Community's 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment, the PYD/YPG is the Syrian militia of the PKK. This fact was also recently recognized by the President of the United States. And the PKK, as we should all know by now, is designated as a terrorist group by the European Union (EU), NATO and the United States. However, some Member States have provided heavy weapons, ammunition and training to PKK/YPG under the assumption that it was acceptable to use a terrorist organization against another terrorist organization, in this case pitting the PKK against Da'esh.

Unsurprisingly, those weapons have been used to target Turkey and civilians in Syria, about which we have repeatedly warned the countries providing such weapons, but to no avail. Perhaps a few Turkish and Syrian civilian souls were seen as acceptable collateral damage in the fight against terrorism and against Da'esh. Yet the PKK/YPG did not stop there. They released Da'esh terrorists so that they could conduct terrorist activities in Turkey or north-west Syria. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the PKK/YPG has changed the demographics of the region by expelling local Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen people from their own lands. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian Kurds have fled their homes for safety in Turkey and northern Iraq as a result of the oppression by the PKK/

YPG. Those who are opposed to the extremist ideology of the PKK/YPG either go missing or are killed.

In a very short time, the area controlled by PKK/YPG became a testing ground for a new totalitarian terrorist State, so the idea of supporting one terrorist organization to eliminate another failed once again. Perhaps that was why the States Members of the United Nations initially committed to prevent and combat terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations.

From the very first day, the objectives of Operation Peace Spring have been clear: to eliminate the long-standing existential terrorist threat along our border with Syria, enforce Syria's territorial integrity and unity, protect the local population and create an environment conducive to the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians to their homes. The Operation was conducted in full compliance with international law and international humanitarian law. It only targeted terrorists and their hideouts, weapons and vehicles. We took all necessary measures to prevent any harm to civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure. These are some of the reasons why the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people — the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, the interim Government, tribal leaders and representatives of minorities, including the Syrian Christian communities — supported the Operation.

On 17 October, we agreed with the United States on future joint steps to address the legitimate security concerns of Turkey, including enforcement of a safe zone by the Turkish Armed Forces, the withdrawal of YPG and the reappropriation of their heavy weaponry. On the night of 22 October, the United States side confirmed that the withdrawals of the YPG from the safe zone was completed. In response, Turkey declared that there was no further need to conduct a new operation outside of the Operation Peace Spring area because, on the same day, President Erdoğan and President Putin agreed on a memorandum of understanding. Accordingly, the established status quo in the current Operation Peace Spring area, whose width is 32 kilometres, will be preserved. Russian military police and Syrian border guards will facilitate the removal of YPG elements and their weapons to a distance no less than 30 kilometres from our borders outside the Operation Peace Spring area.

Following the removal of YPG/PKK, we will have joint Russian/Turkish patrols in the west and east of the

Operation Peace Spring area at 10 kilometres from our border, except Qamishli city. All PKK/YPG elements and their weapons will also be removed from Manbij and Tell Rifaat. A joint monitoring and verification mechanism will be established to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the memorandum.

Following the successful conclusion of those diplomatic efforts, Turkey decided to permanently halt Operation Peace Spring on 22 October. We would like to thank both our American and Russian friends for acknowledging our legitimate security concerns and accepting to work with us against PKK/YPG. Our common efforts have prevented the establishment of a terrorist State in northern Syria. This may not be good news for some, but it is a very important step in the political process towards re-establishing peace and security in Syria.

There are now a number of issues on which we must all focus. One of them is the future of detained Da'esh terrorists. We have already announced that we will take over the custody of Da'esh elements and their family members held in detention facilities and camps in the current Operation Peace Spring area. We are ready to work with the countries of origin and international organizations for the rehabilitation of spouses and children who have not participated in crimes. But we all know that the only sustainable solution remains the repatriation of all foreign terrorist fighters and their families to their countries of origin. It is time to have a frank discussion about this issue. Stripping people of their nationalities and dumping them elsewhere is not the way to fight against terror. It is the way to wash one's hands of the situation.

The second issue I would like to raise is the importance of ensuring the flow of humanitarian assistance in coordination with the United Nations. The first cross-border humanitarian assistance convoy from Turkey reached Tel Abyad on 15 October. There is now a continuous flow of humanitarian-assistance items and services, including food, sanitation, shelter and health care. We will increase humanitarian operations in the light of the needs on the ground. We will continue to cooperate with the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations in addressing humanitarian needs. An office dedicated to coordinating the delivery of cross-border assistance into the region has already been established in Akçakale, on the Turkish side of the border.

Following Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's visit to the border provinces two weeks ago, we established a great direct communication channel on humanitarian issues between the United Nations and the Turkish Foreign Minister. The first positive outcome was the reparation of a water-treatment system servicing more than 400,000 people.

The deconfliction mechanism, already in place with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in order to protect civilian infrastructure and humanitarian personnel in north-west Syria, has also been expanded to cover the north-east. So far, OCHA has shared the coordinates of 425 civilian locations and convoys with the Turkish authorities. Any report of damage to the civilian infrastructure receives due attention by our authorities.

Thirdly, we must also focus on how to help displaced people. Following the two previous operations in Syria, more than 365,000 people returned voluntarily to their homes and lands. We will pursue the same model in north-eastern Syria. We will make every effort to ensure that those who choose to return to their homeland fully enjoy their basic rights. I repeat that all returns will be voluntary, safe and dignified, in close cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

I must also underline that we are surprised by the statements of some European States on the idea of a safe zone. Those countries, which close their borders with barbed-wire fences to protect against the flow of refugees, were willing to create a refugee camp outside their borders. Yes, we are still waiting for them to honour their obligations arising from the 2016 Turkey-EU refugee agreement.

Let me put one thing on the record. Turkey reserves its right to self-defence against terrorist elements that may have remained in the Operation Peace Spring area. Our fight against terrorism will always be in accordance with international humanitarian law. In this context, I agree with some of the previous speakers that any military operation, including counter-terrorism operations, should be conducted in line with international law and international humanitarian law. This point has been emphasized by the Secretary-General many times. Any violation of international humanitarian law should be investigated, and perpetrators held accountable. Of course, that is true for every operation conducted by anybody, including our American and other friends. We

should also keep in mind that this is true not only for the operations in Syria, but everywhere.

As President Erdoğan has emphasized on multiple occasions, Turkey cannot and will not tolerate any terrorist activity at its borders. Terrorist organizations may take different names or forms, and they may adopt different strategies, but our vigilance in the face of terrorism will remain the same. Our commitment will never be shaken for a moment, and we expect the same from the international community.

It is time for everyone to recover from the self-imposed amnesia about the PKK/PYD/YPG, which does not represent the Kurds in Syria, Turkey, Iraq or Iran. It is a terrorist organization with a separatist agenda in Syria. We will never allow this agenda to prevail.

Turkey has never had second thoughts about the future of our southern neighbour. We have always supported a United Nations-sponsored, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We have also agreed and emphasized the work to be done in the context of the political process that will resume in Geneva on 29 October, in line with the United States and Russian agreements. We must all work for the success of this process. For our part, we will do so in full and close cooperation and coordination with the United Nations.

When our Syrian brothers and sisters needed shelter, the Turkish people never hesitated to open their doors and hearths. Four million Syrians are living in Turkey, including 300,000 Syrian Kurds. In some countries, the mere idea of hosting Syrians was met with hatred and unveiled all forms of xenophobia and racism. In Turkey, on the other hand, we have shared our schools and hospitals. We have shared our present, and we are ready to share our future. And we will never accept outrageous allegations or lectures that unfairly target Turkey and the Turkish people. Unfortunately, in our world today, shame is in retreat, and double standards are on the rise.

The foregoing are the facts and the real background of the recent developments in Syria.

With regard to the previous speaker's statement, I would like to say a few words. I do not deem the regime's representative to be my legitimate counterpart. I will therefore not dignify his delusional accusations with a response. A regime that has massacred and tortured

the Syrian people for more than eight years lost its legitimacy long ago and should not have the right to sit behind the Syrian nameplate in this Chamber. His mere presence is an insult to the millions of Syrians

who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of this regime. The facts about the situation in Syria speak for themselves, and whole world knows who is lying.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.