



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

## 8955<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 26 January 2022, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Ms. Juul . . . . . (Norway)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
India . . . . .	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mrs. Toroitich
Mexico . . . . .	Mr. Ochoa Martínez
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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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**

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Ms. Thuraya Hijazi, Director of the Release Me project in northern Syria.

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

Recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working methods, I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to between seven and 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** I thank you, Madam President. It is a pleasure to be back here in New York in person and to be able to greet everyone.

Let me at the outset stress that Syrians continue to suffer deeply and that the violence in Syria is indeed continuing. This past month alone has seen air strikes in Idlib that reportedly killed civilians and damaged civilian infrastructure; mutual shelling across front lines; a flare-up of hostilities in the north-east; attacks with improvised explosive devices that killed civilians in northern Syria; air strikes attributed to Israel damaging the port of Latakia; continued violence in the south; a growing number of security incidents related to drug smuggling; and attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including on civilians and humanitarian actors, in north-eastern and central Syria.

In recent days, as we have seen on the news, there has been an unprecedented attempt at a prison break by thousands of detainees with suspected ISIL affiliation in Hasakah, sparking clashes with air strikes from the United States-led Global Coalition against Daesh in support of the Syrian Democratic Forces on the ground. There have reportedly been dozens of fatalities. We understand that in the past few hours the Syrian Democratic Forces have taken back control, and all or most of the ISIL fighters seem to have surrendered. However, the situation is still unfolding. We remain very concerned about the safety and security of the civilians caught up in this situation, many of whom have been displaced. UNICEF drew attention to reports of ISIL members being holed up in dormitories for minors, putting hundreds of children in detention at risk. Even if this particular ISIL uprising may have been quashed, the episode brings back terrible memories of the prison breaks that fuelled the original rise of ISIL in 2014 and 2015. I see it as a clear message to us all of the importance of uniting to combat the threat of internationally proscribed terrorist groups and of resolving the broader conflict in which terrorism inevitably thrives.

We must remember in that context that the tragedy of the Syrian people is only deepening. Fourteen million civilians now need humanitarian assistance. More than 12 million remain displaced and many are right now facing freezing winter conditions. Tens of thousands are detained, abducted or missing. Syria's economy has collapsed. Criminality and smuggling are flourishing. There are also reports of young people seeking any opportunity to leave the country, sometimes falling prey to traffickers and warlords. Education is fragmented and severely degraded, as indeed are institutions and infrastructure across the board. The country remains de facto divided, and society is deeply fractured. Syrians see no concrete progress towards a political solution. Despite the continued violence and suffering, it is also clear that there is a strategic stalemate. There have been no shifts in the front lines for nearly two years. It is clear that no existing actor or group of actors can determine the trajectory or outcome of the conflict, and indeed that a military solution remains an illusion.

I have continued to engage widely on these realities, including in visits this past month to Tehran and Doha, and in a meeting with the Syrian Negotiations Commission. On Monday, I briefed a meeting of Foreign Ministers in the European Union Foreign Affairs

Council. In addition, in late December Ms. Khawla Matar, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, attended an Astana format meeting where she met senior officials from Russia, Turkey and Iran, the Syrian Government and opposition and regional observers. She also participated in a meeting of the Working Group on the Release of Detainees/Abductees, Handover of Bodies and Identification of Missing Persons. Participants in that meeting made some positive proposals, ideas that if implemented would mark some genuine progress on this file. But what is absolutely needed now is to follow up on those ideas, as we are urging all stakeholders to do.

More broadly, I am calling anew for serious diplomatic discussions on a range of steps that could begin to impact the conflict dynamics, build some trust and confidence between and among Syrians and international stakeholders, and make progress step by step, step for step, within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). I have been convening senior officials from key stakeholders in bilateral consultations in Geneva. The Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission are of course invited to Geneva for those consultations, and I hope to engage them further soon. Meanwhile, following consultations in December with Russia, the European Union, Turkey and Qatar, in January I consulted the League of Arab States, Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States in Geneva. I will be continuing the consultations with additional interlocutors in the coming period. This is a rolling process in which it will be necessary to revert to interlocutors repeatedly over time.

My question for all the interlocutors is the same: can they identify not only what they demand, but also what they are prepared to put on the table in exchange for steps from the other side? Frankly, I welcome fresh ideas from any quarter that could bring about action on issues such as detainees, abductees and missing persons; humanitarian assistance and early recovery, building on the progress made in adopting and continuing to implement resolution 2585 (2021); the conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns; restoring socioeconomic conditions — which, as the Council is aware, have collapsed after more than a decade of war and conflict, corruption, mismanagement, the Lebanese financial crisis, the coronavirus disease and, indeed, sanctions. Solidifying calm throughout Syria and interim stabilization is of course a key aspect as is,

at the same time, cooperating in countering terrorism. Then there are also what I call diplomatic issues.

In time, I hope that we can begin to identify and agree on incremental, reciprocal, mutual, realistic, precise and verifiable steps that could be taken in parallel in areas such as these. That would build trust and confidence, make an impact on the suffering of the Syrian people and help to move the political process forward. Our goal remains to create the kind of safe, calm, neutral environment where a constitutional process could take hold, and ultimately where elections can take place administered under United Nations supervision, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015). All of this would be in the context of respecting and restoring Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and enabling the Syrians to determine their own future. As part of that, I am actively engaged in seeking to reconvene the Syrian-led and -owned and United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee. The Committee's work so far remains disappointing. The present challenge is to ensure that the delegations not only submit constitutional texts but are prepared to revise them in the light of the discussions to try to find some common ground or at least to narrow their differences. We need a productive drafting process, according to the Committee's mandate. Let me remind the Council that as outlined in its terms of reference, the Committee must work expeditiously and continuously to produce results and make continued progress.

I am continuing to engage, including with both co-Chairs, in an effort to produce a clear understanding, and some ideas have been floated. I am ready to convene a seventh session of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva as soon as understandings are in place. It remains my wish that we could then have several sessions in the months ahead and indeed do serious work. When we have the agreement of the co-Chairs, we will of course brief the civil-society Middle Third in preparation for a seventh session.

You will be pleased to know, Madam President, that from here I will fly to Oslo to meet with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. I thank the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Norway for its kind and generous invitation to the Board, as well as the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution and UN-Women for their logistical support. The members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board continue to advise me on a broad range of questions related to the crisis in Syria and its resolution. Their suggestions are serious and practical.

My team also continues to engage Syrian women more broadly, and I value their contributions to resolving the conflict. We equally look forward in the coming weeks to convening participants in Geneva through the Civil Society Support Room. We are also continuing our constant engagement with a diverse group of civil-society actors through a dedicated digital platform.

I can promise the Council that I will continue to spare no effort to engage the Syrian Government and the opposition, all sectors of Syrian society — men and women — and all key international stakeholders, in pursuit of my mandate in line with resolution 2254 (2015). It is an enormous challenge to make real progress that can make a difference to the Syrian people, but that is what we must do. I will therefore need everyone's guidance and support.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Hijazi.

**Ms. Hijazi** (*spoke in Arabic*): My name is Thuraya Hijazi. I am a feminist and political activist and the Director of the Release Me project in north-western Syria, which works to empower women survivors of violence and to develop local peace programmes. I am also a former detainee in the Syrian regime's prisons. Today I want to attempt to convey the voices of women in my country because, as the Security Council is aware, we will soon mark 11 years since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, which has become a deep-rooted crisis, notwithstanding the repeatedly frustrated attempts of all Syrians to realize their dream of bringing about political change. The Syrian regime, which is still holding steady owing to unconditional support from Russia and Iran, has yet to be held accountable, while the international community remains silent. Meanwhile, as a result of international interventions, the Syrian opposition has been unable to restructure itself in order to be able to present itself as an alternative to the regime.

It is the country's entire people who are paying the price throughout Syria. Syria today has become four Syrias, each of them a large detention centre imprisoning those living within it. Ninety per cent of Syrians live below the poverty line and 60 per cent suffer from food insecurity. There are 9 million Syrians living outside the areas controlled by the regime, and 5.6 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid and relief mechanisms, which the Security Council constantly politicizes. In addition, there are more than

2.4 million children in Syria not enrolled in school, and approximately 40 per cent of them are girls who make up one of the country's most vulnerable groups. We can only imagine what future awaits them.

Despite every effort, especially those of the Special Envoy for Syria, the Security Council has so far failed to find a political solution to the Syrian issue. As a result, Syria has become a humanitarian tragedy, held hostage and subject to regional and international conflicts, which has made us Syrians lose hope for a just political solution. That is reflected in the fact that the areas of influence in Syria's de facto geographic divisions are backed by certain countries that are granted immunity for all violations of international humanitarian law. We know that the de facto Powers, having achieved organizational, administrative and military progress, want a future political solution that guarantees their control and gains in the areas under their influence. We also know that the Council is aware that Russia and some Arab regimes have made attempts to normalize relations with the regime despite all the atrocities it has committed against Syria and the Syrians.

We know that internationally and regionally Russia is taking advantage of the fluctuating position of the United States and the absence of European influence. It is attempting to restore and strengthen the legitimacy of the regime by highlighting certain issues and exceptions, such as the revival of the Arab Gas Pipeline and the efforts of the United Arab Emirates to encourage Syria's return to the League of Arab States, among other things. We have also listened with concern to Special Envoy Geir Pedersen's recent statements in support of normalizing relations with the regime under the pretext of so-called engagement. All of those developments have had a negative impact on the implementation of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, given the absence of alternative or economic and diplomatic measures from the international community that can contribute to achieving justice and peace in Syria.

In my capacity as a witness to Syrian women's participation in the revolution since it was launched, and to the many violations that the Syrian regime commits against women inside and outside prisons, I would like to inform the Council that women's problems are not limited to the spread of systemic violence that occurs when perpetrators cannot be deterred. They are also rooted in the United Nations reports that monitor the violence and explain the extent of its spread and impact

on women and society but that unfortunately do not provide any action plans. They merely treat the victims as statistics.

As women politicians, we know the root causes of the abuses that women are subjected to, as well as their connection to the political economy of war and violence. We also know the impact of sexual violence on the status of women and their reproductive and political roles. We also know that the politicization of humanitarian issues by the Syrian regime and its international allies has contributed to increasing the economic and legal vulnerability of women and depriving them of education and health. If the conflict persists, Syria will become a source of extremism and a regional centre for organized crime, particularly in terms of drug smuggling, which is a major source of revenue for the regime. The camps and shelters, which already lack services, will also become spaces for the commission of every kind of violence against women and girls. Empowered by their strength and will, Syrian women seek to transcend the role of the victim of the killings, arrests, displacements and asylum-seeking they have experienced. We seek to counter all the forms of exclusion that patriarchal authorities impose on us in armed conflicts. We are trying to leverage our experiences to bring about radical change so that we can assume our role in rebuilding Syria. We therefore call on the Security Council to take the following actions.

The Council must put pressure on the Syrian regime to release detainees and uncover the fate of the forcibly disappeared without undertaking negotiations. It must adopt mechanisms to ensure that there is no normalization of relations with the regime. The Council must put pressure on the regime and the de facto Powers to allow international organizations to investigate crimes committed by force of arms and prevent impunity for the perpetrators. It must emphasize that any Syrian leadership must represent the will of the Syrian people, including young men and women, and be free from any external interference. The Council also needs to advance the political process to reach a comprehensive and sustainable political solution that includes the active participation of women, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), resolution 2254 (2015) and other relevant resolutions. It should link the political solution to accountability in a way that guarantees women's rights. It should link reconstruction to a comprehensive political solution and to the voluntary and safe return of Syrian refugees. Lastly,

it should support the criminalization of all violence against women by guaranteeing a consensus-based, gender-sensitive Constitution based on all international conventions. Gender analysis and feminist policies should always be high on the negotiation agenda.

We therefore urge the Council to push for the launch of genuine negotiations under its auspices and under the umbrella of international law, and including all the countries involved in the Syrian war. Perhaps our dream of building a civil and democratic Syrian State without the Al-Assad regime or any form of tyranny may come true. Seeing the Council working hard to fulfil those demands will enable hundreds of women to be ready to participate actively in the political process and run as contenders for all positions and levels of decision-making, as we rightly deserve.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Hijazi for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his tireless and ongoing efforts to find a political solution to this protracted and devastating conflict. My special thanks also go to Ms. Thuraya Hijazi. While their briefings can often be painful to hear and their messages are often pointed, we applaud Syrian civil-society actors like her for their courageous work. The United States also supports the engagement of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, and we call for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the agenda on women and peace and security.

As we approach the eleventh anniversary of the Syrian uprising, the United States stands with the Syrian people and continues to advance multiple objectives in pursuit of a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict.

The first of those objectives is sustaining the campaign of the United States and the Coalition to prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), which we view as a cornerstone of our counter-terrorism efforts in the region. The ongoing situation at the detention centre in Hasakah, which Mr. Pedersen referenced, is a stark reminder that ISIS remains a real threat.

The second objective is sustaining local ceasefires across the country, which is key to keeping the levels of violence down throughout Syria.

Thirdly, we are working to support the expansion of full, unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syria. We will continue to urge the Security Council to not only reauthorize Bab Al-Hawa but also to reopen border crossings at Al-Yarubiyah and Bab Al-Salam to allow access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Those actions are essential to meeting the ever-growing emergency needs of the Syrian people across the country.

Fourthly, the United States continues to press for accountability, particularly for chemical-weapon violations, crimes against humanity and war crimes and to ensure respect for human rights.

Finally, we are working to support a Syrian-led political process, as envisioned and agreed by the Council in resolution 2254 (2015). As the Special Envoy has indicated, it is only through that inclusive political process, with the participation of the Syrian people, that we can reach a durable solution to the conflict.

We understand that some States have offered less-than-constructive comments about the Special Envoy's efforts to advance political dialogue. The Syrian regime's Foreign Minister, Mr. Faisal Mekdad, stated publicly last week that the step-for-step model as a way to resolve the crisis in Syria was unacceptable to it. We encourage all stakeholders, especially the direct parties to the conflict, to support the Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate a political resolution to the crisis in Syria.

We share the Special Envoy's frustration at the Syrian Constitutional Committee's lack of progress and agree that any future meetings of the small drafting group should be based on an agreement between the sides on the modalities for discussing draft texts and their revisions. We are disappointed with the unwillingness of the participants from the Al-Assad regime to make progress towards that end, including in the sixth round of negotiations.

We remain deeply concerned about the tens of thousands of Syrians believed to have been arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared by the Al-Assad regime. We encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to focus on promoting a large-scale and unconditional release of detainees, in coordination with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the families of the missing and detained. We also ask him to do all he can to push the Al-Assad regime to provide information to

families about the status of their missing and detained loved ones.

We are alarmed by reports of repeated and continued attacks by the regime and its allies that are impacting health-care workers and medical facilities in Syria. Among the health-care professionals reportedly targeted are the workers who responded to the regime's chemical-weapon attacks in eastern Ghouta, as well as those who are trying to stop the spread of the coronavirus disease. We call on all parties to cease attacks that affect health-care workers and medical facilities and demand accountability for those acts.

We condemn the reported attacks by the Russian military in Idlib, particularly those affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including the bombing on 2 January that damaged a water station near Idlib, which has cut off access to water for nearly a quarter of a million Syrians. As the United Nations Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria said earlier this month, the continued destruction of civilian infrastructure will only cause more civilian suffering. We urge the regime and its Russian backers to cease their attacks, particularly those impacting civilians, in this vulnerable region.

Finally, there can be no lasting peace in Syria without accountability for the regime's atrocities, some of which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The United States supports efforts to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of abuses committed in Syria. That work is critical to supporting justice and accountability efforts that will pave the way for a stable and enduring peace.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, for briefing us on the situation in Syria. We also listened carefully to Ms. Thuraya Hijazi's remarks.

We support the continuation of inter-Syrian consultations in Geneva in the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We believe that there is no alternative to promoting a Syrian-led and -owned settlement process, with the support of the United Nations and without external interference or the imposition of artificial deadlines. We should point out that Damascus is prepared to do that and has confirmed its intention to go to Switzerland to participate constructively in the seventh session of the drafting commission of the Constitutional Committee. In view of that, we will

continue to work with the Syrians, the Special Envoy and other stakeholders, first and foremost our Astana partners. To that end, representatives of Russia, Iran and Turkey, with the participation of interested parties, held a meeting in December 2021 in Nur-Sultan. We hope that Mr. Pedersen will also focus on convening the Constitutional Committee without getting distracted by other initiatives, especially if the Syrians themselves — the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition — do not support them.

The efforts on the political front are all the more necessary because the situation in a number of regions in Syria remains tense. Problems persist in the areas that Damascus does not control — Idlib, the area east of the Euphrates and the zone of Turkish operations in northern Syria. We believe that long-term peace and security in Syria can be achieved only through the full restoration of the Syrian Government's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including its control of its national borders and natural resources, along with the continuation of efforts to combat terrorism.

We are deeply concerned about the reports of raids in Syria's north-east by terrorists from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, who attacked a prison housing dangerous jihadists, some of whom escaped. We believe that the Security Council needs additional information about the incident. In that regard, we have requested that a separate briefing on that issue and the situation in north-east Syria in general be provided in a timely manner.

The situation in and around Syria would be generally improved by a resumption of the natural ties between Syrian and its Arab neighbours, including on the political and economic fronts, as well as the full restoration of Damascus to the Arab family.

In conclusion, we must say that the Security Council's consideration of various aspects of the situation in Syria for two days in a row is a very abnormal approach and a very irrational use of its resources. We regret the fact that in planning the Council's programme of work, our Western colleagues chose to prioritize political reasons over common sense. We urge that priority be given to the quality of our meetings rather than their quantity. If necessary, meetings can always be requested, as we have shown through our initiative today.

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, for his insightful briefing.

We understand the difficulty of his task, given the complexity of the issues at stake in Syria. We also listened carefully to Ms. Thuraya Hijazi's briefing.

Six years after the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), there are still difficulties in implementing it. This situation has helped to perpetuate the torment and suffering of the Syrian people. A political solution is the primary path to achieving peace in Syria. It requires the establishment of a ceasefire, the restoration of State authority throughout Syria's territory and the engagement of all the parties in a dialogue in good faith.

After six rounds of discussions in Geneva, the negotiating parties have yet to agree on an outline for a national constitution that corresponds to the aspirations of the Syrian people. The fragmentation of the Syrian political class and the lack of trust among the various actors destroy any chance of giving substance to this dialogue, particularly within the Constitutional Committee, despite the hopes raised by its inclusive structure. It is important to stress that the absence of delays in the round of negotiations inherent in the Syrian political process should not be considered a blank cheque for apathy. It is clear that the political stalemate is casting a shadow over the efforts of the Syrian Government to enable the country to emerge from the isolation it is in, as well as its ability to attract foreign investors for the purpose of mending the social and economic fabric.

Women have an important role to play in settling the political climate in Syria. Ms. Hijazi's poignant message is a plea that reveals the importance of that role. We note with interest the involvement of women in the peace process, particularly in the context of discussions with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. Beyond the difficulties and dead ends, it is vital that all actors working to find a viable solution to the Syrian political crisis bear in mind the course set by the first paragraph of resolution 2254 (2015), relating to the preservation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

We would like to conclude by expressing our support for the work being done by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, in a complex environment, while encouraging all the stakeholders and actors in the subregion to demonstrate greater commitment to finding a solution for the peace process in Syria.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Like my colleagues, I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his very comprehensive briefing. I have also listened carefully to the statement by Ms. Hijazi. I want to highlight the following points regarding some relevant issues.

First, with respect to the political process, China supports the advancement of a Syrian-led and -owned political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We hope that the next round of the Constitutional Committee will begin soon. We should point out that the relevant work should remain independent and free of external interference. We also welcome the new round of meetings of the Astana process that took place last month and hope that the process will continue to contribute to a comprehensive solution to the Syrian issue. China has always emphasized that constitution-building and elections alone are not enough. To truly make progress on the political track, the international community needs an integrated approach to the major issues that endanger Syria's sovereignty, security and development in order to create conditions that can enable the political process there.

Secondly, regarding the occupation of Syria by external forces, Syrian sovereignty should be fully respected. That principle should always be insisted on when dealing with the Syrian issue. No foreign troops are permitted to be deployed in Syria, including the Golan, without the consent of the Syrian Government. Whether we are talking about the military operations across the Syrian border, the construction of settlements in the Golan area or the theft of oil from north-eastern Syria, all have undermined the country's sovereignty, violated the interests of the Syrian people and interfered with the international community's efforts to achieve a political settlement. China urges the countries concerned to earnestly respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, abide by the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and end the occupation and annexation of Syria and the attacks on it.

Thirdly, regarding the fight against terrorism, China is concerned about the recent attack on the prison housing terrorist detainees in north-eastern Syria, which may have resulted in their escape. We urge the relevant parties to ensure that such incidents do not happen again. The existence of terrorism in Syria is not something that we can regard as normal. The international community must take a clear stance on counter-terrorism, act to cooperate in countering

terrorism in accordance with international law and the relevant Council resolutions and jointly fight terrorist forces in Syria. We should respect the Syrian Government's leadership in fighting terrorism and refrain from engaging in double standards. China is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with Syria to help it improve its capacity to fight terrorism.

Fourthly, regarding cooperation among the countries of the region, the situation in Syria bears on regional security and stability, and a speedy and comprehensive solution to the Syrian issue is in the common interests of the States of the region. China welcomes efforts by the relevant countries to strengthen diplomatic, economic and trade interaction with Syria and is pleased that Arab countries are actively considering ensuring Syria's serious return to the League of Arab States. We hope that such encouraging momentum will yield practical results and form synergies with the good offices of the United Nations. The international community should encourage the countries of the region to strengthen dialogue and cooperation and create positive conditions for them.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our consistent position, which is that having the Council consider the issue of Syria three times in one month does not facilitate an integrated and comprehensive consideration of the relevant issues. Serious consideration should be given to combining them into one meeting or making other, more reasonable arrangements. That will not only help us seek a package solution to the relevant issues but also economize on the Council's resources.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his comprehensive briefing and vigorous diplomatic efforts to advance the political process. We also listened carefully to the briefing by Ms. Thuraya Hijazi.

More than a decade has passed since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that the international community must develop a new approach to dealing with the Syrian crisis in order to end it peacefully and sustainably. To that end, my country would like to focus on the following aspects.

First, the United Arab Emirates believes that opening channels of communication and building bridges are the most successful paths to resolving the protracted crisis in a way that alleviates people's suffering and achieves

stability. The recent visit to Damascus of His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, our Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, was part of my country's bridge-building efforts in the region. We believe that dialogue, constructive participation and support for all diplomatic efforts will help to end the Syrian crisis. The visit aimed to change the general perceptions on the ground with regard to a solution to the protracted Syrian crisis. Accordingly, we believe that it is important to strengthen and activate the Arab role in a way that is supportive of and consistent with Mr. Pedersen's diplomatic efforts. That will help to achieve progress on the political track with the aim of ending the crisis and restoring security and stability to Syria and the region.

Secondly, we agree with the Special Envoy's emphasis on creating opportunities for gradual and tangible steps, which require collective efforts to support and reinvigorate the Constitutional Committee. My country therefore calls for current efforts to focus on strengthening dialogue and overcoming the obstacles that have prevented an agreement on constitutional principles. In that context, the flexibility and realism that the Special Envoy urged after his consultations with Syrian, regional and international actors must be taken into consideration. The United Arab Emirates emphasizes that a political solution is the only way to end the crisis in Syria. We also stress that achieving genuine progress on the political process requires all parties to make necessary concessions in good faith and to pursue confidence-building measures in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Thirdly, creating an environment conducive to peace and stability in Syria requires ending foreign interference in Syrian affairs. We stress the importance of maintaining the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. In that context, the United Arab Emirates supports the call of the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy for Syria to reach an immediate and sustainable nationwide ceasefire. Likewise, efforts must continue to counter terrorism in Syria. The persistence of terrorist activities is one of the most destabilizing factors for security in Syria and the region. In that regard, it is alarming that Da'esh continues to launch terrorist attacks, including the recent dangerous developments in the Ghweiran neighbourhood of Hasakah governorate, as well as the continued targeting of parts of Deir ez-Zor and eastern Homs.

In conclusion, we hope that 2022 will be the year that the international community makes all the efforts needed to achieve tangible progress towards ending the Syrian crisis, with a view to fulfilling the aspirations of our brother people of Syria and providing them with a decent living in a safe and stable homeland. We assure the Council that the United Arab Emirates will work with all Council members to achieve those goals.

**Mr. Ochoa Martínez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Hijazi for their briefings, and to welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey. We appreciate Mr. Pedersen's efforts to advance the political process as well as his consultations with international actors, including in the framework of the Astana process. However, as the Special Envoy has said, there has been little progress, which is very regrettable.

We are concerned about the fact that the security situation continues to deteriorate. Attacks have been recorded in Idlib province, where the civil water supply infrastructure was damaged, as well as at the port of Latakia. The recent attack on a prison in Hasakah shows that the Islamic State is gaining strength. We are also very concerned about the welfare and safety of the hundreds of children held in that prison. They are victims of terrorism and their lives are at risk, which is why we call on their States of nationality to repatriate them urgently.

Given the Council's failure to refer the case of Syria to the International Criminal Court, we commend the progress achieved on other fronts, such as the sentence handed down on 13 January by a court in Koblenz, Germany, against the officer in charge of Al-Khatib prison in Damascus, who was found guilty of crimes against humanity. That ruling, as well as another issued in February of last year by the same court, can provide victims with a sense of justice and represent progress in the process towards accountability.

Finally, Mexico condemns the violations of Syria's territorial integrity and calls for a reversal of the plans announced last December to build Israeli settlements in the Golan.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): I would like to welcome Special Envoy Pedersen, thank him for his briefing and commend him for his work and efforts. I also thank Ms. Hijazi for her passionate plea.

We have become so used to the violence and suffering emanating from Syria that the harrowing stalemate in which that ravaged country finds itself today may strike some as somewhat positive. But as we heard from the Special Envoy, the fighting and violence, including activity by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, have not stopped. The current stalemate is not something that the Council can build on to overcome the situation. It worsens the suffering of the Syrian people, the incessant violence against civilians, the hunger, extreme poverty, fear, angst, terror and the shattering of hopes for a brighter future for ordinary Syrians. The perpetuation of this status quo is unsustainable and is contrary to what the Council stands for. We must upend it to ignite hopes for a better future for the Syrian people. The Council has a responsibility to save Syria from hell. It can and should prioritize the protection of civilians and unimpeded humanitarian assistance to all in need and remove the systematic threats to peace and security.

Resolution 2254 (2015) provides the basis for a real, inclusive political transition with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. Its full implementation should therefore be an absolute priority for the Council, a priority that the Syrian regime has disregarded in the past and continues to disregard as we speak. The Constitutional Committee is the only existing platform for envisaging and pursuing a political transition, but so far it has mainly produced disappointment. That is primarily due to a lack of genuine involvement and investment on the part of the regime. The Committee is preparing to convene for its seventh session, as we heard, without having produced any tangible progress. It keeps beating its own record with not much to deliver. We wholeheartedly support the tireless work of Special Envoy Pedersen, including the initiative he communicated today to consult with stakeholders to move the political process forward. He also deserves the Council's full backing in putting the necessary pressure on all concerned, including the regime, in order to advance the political process. Given the Council's inability to stand united, and in the absence of any timetable or deadlines, the Constitutional Committee risks becoming a smokescreen for inaction and the perpetuation of the status quo. The constitutional process will not change the grim reality overnight, but it can serve as a catalyst for a new democratic Syria. It can be the heart of a transformative process that spreads in concentric circles, ultimately involving all segments of Syrian society, and leading to democratic

institutions that adhere to the rule of law and uphold the human rights of all.

I reiterate my delegation's support for the Special Envoy's step-by-step approach. Incremental, concrete and verifiable steps can serve to build the trust that is necessary to advance the political process. A nationwide ceasefire, the release of all political detainees, the immediate and full halt of all attacks on civilian areas, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, extrajudicial and targeted killings, full cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and economic support and early recovery are all basic but necessary steps that must be taken. But they are only initial steps. They represent the floor, not the ceiling. We would also like to see a workplan with concrete and measurable indicators to verify how bilateral consultations with relevant stakeholders have contributed to advancing the political process, where the obstacles lie and what the Council should do to overcome them.

*(spoke in French)*

A viable political transition is hardly possible without transitional justice. The massive and systematic violations of international law, human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria demand redress for the Syrians affected and an overhaul of the structures that have allowed evil to take root in Syria. What has happened in Syria must never happen again — there or anywhere else — and we can prevent it by combating impunity.

Accountability and justice for the victims are vital to a meaningful political transition that results in a democratic Syria — a State that respects the fundamental rights of its citizens and lives in peace alongside its neighbours. We support all international and national efforts to hold the perpetrators of the heinous crimes committed in Syria to account, including through the referral of the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court and the application of universal jurisdiction by national courts. Millions of Syrians want answers. It is our duty to help them.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for the ongoing efforts by him and his team to facilitate a sustainable resolution to the conflict. I also thank Ms. Hijazi for her powerful briefing.

In 2022 the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria will enter its twelfth year. As many as 13.4 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance and

more than half of Syria's population has been displaced by violence. Over the past 11 years, the Syrian regime has perpetrated appalling violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and the United Kingdom strongly supports efforts to hold those responsible to account. Without political progress, significant reform and an end to attacks on civilians, an unrepentant Syrian regime cannot be considered fit to govern.

This year there have already been multiple incidents across Syria that have resulted in damage to civilian infrastructure, including water supplies, worsened the humanitarian crisis and caused the death of civilians, including children. An attack on 20 January in which missiles targeted civilian infrastructure in Afrin resulted in the deaths of at least eight civilians and injuries to approximately 30 others, including women and children, some of whom remain in critical condition. We condemn the ongoing targeting and destruction of civilian infrastructure in north-west Syria.

The developments in north-east Syria over the past week have also highlighted how Da'esh and its poisonous ideology, even without territory, continue to pose a threat in Syria, Iraq and the wider world. We welcome the news today that the Syrian Democratic Forces have retaken control of Ghweiran prison in Hasakah. We look forward to further detailed and constructive Security Council discussions tomorrow on how best to address the threat posed by Da'esh.

The United Kingdom is grateful for Special Envoy Pedersen's recent efforts to stimulate discussion on a step-for-step approach and for his update on those efforts today. In resolution 2254 (2015), the Council agreed that only a United Nations-led political process could end the conflict and bring lasting peace to Syria. Any step-for-step process should fully comply with resolution 2254 (2015), be designed to benefit the people of Syria and accompanied by a clear process of verification. Assuming the Syrian regime and its backers are willing to engage in good faith, we stand ready to support that process.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Hijazi for their briefings.

The war in Syria is not over. The Syrian regime's resumption of bombings in Idlib at the end of December, with the support of the Russian Air Force, testified to that. The bombings targeted civilian infrastructure, including two farms and a water station

that supplies some 300,000 people. France condemns those bombings. We also condemn in the strongest possible terms the 20 January attack by Da'esh on a detention centre in Hasakah, in north-eastern Syria. We commend the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Coalition for their action in response to that event. France reiterates its call for an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities. The protection of civilians must remain an absolute priority.

Only a political solution can serve as a lasting solution to the conflict, and resolution 2254 (2015), which the Security Council adopted unanimously, remains our road map for that. There will be no lasting peace in Syria until it is fully implemented. In Geneva on 12 January, France and the Special Envoy engaged in consultations within the framework of the step-for-step approach. I would like to reiterate our full support to him. Every actor must shoulder its responsibilities, and that applies first and foremost to the Syrian regime, which is not currently willing to take any such action, as the lack of any progress since 2018 on the fate of disappeared persons shows. In that regard, France supports the efforts of the Special Envoy to convene a seventh session of the Constitutional Committee and deplores the Syrian regime's systematic obstruction of the work of the sixth session.

In the absence of a solid political solution, there is no reason to normalize relations with the Syrian regime. Our positions on the lifting of sanctions and reconstruction remain unchanged. That is the position of the European Union and its 27 member States. Our priority will continue to be to work in close cooperation with our European partners for a political settlement to the conflict. The European Union and France have long stood by the Syrian people. The European Union has contributed €25 billion to the Syrian crisis response since 2011. As long as there is no political solution, the needs will only continue to grow. Reconstruction will be the end of this political process rather than the start. I reiterate that the regime, and its backers, must shoulder their responsibilities.

Furthermore, the Syrian regime's systematic violations of people's right of return to Syria demonstrate that the conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees are not being met. Once again, the regime must shoulder its responsibilities. France will continue to work tirelessly to combat impunity for crimes committed in Syria. The perpetrators of all such crimes must be held accountable for their actions.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing and commend his tireless efforts to support the political process in Syria. I also welcome Ms. Thuraya Hijazi, Director of the Release Me project in northern Syria, and appreciate the perspectives that she brought to the discussions of the Security Council today. I also welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Over the past week, we have been witnessing violent clashes in the north-eastern city of Hasakah in the aftermath of the attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on the Ghweiran prison attempting to release detained members of the armed group. More than 100 people have reportedly been killed, while some 50,000 have been displaced from their homes. Such attacks in Syria continue to hinder the already difficult process of seeking a peaceful resolution through dialogue and consensus. We express our condolences to the families of those who died and restate our firm condemnation of all acts and manifestations of terrorism by whomever and wherever they are committed. The international community must be relentless in the fight against terrorism and hold perpetrators accountable.

Against the backdrop of these worrisome but familiar conditions in Syria, let me first of all reaffirm Ghana's support for a political solution to the ongoing conflict and stress the importance of constructive engagement by the parties in a spirit of good faith, mutual respect and compromise. We urge the Council to collectively support a nationwide ceasefire and the recommitment of all sides to the political process within the parameters of resolution 2254 (2015).

Secondly, notwithstanding the modest progress made by the Constitutional Committee over its previous six sessions, its work remains an important aspect of the transitional process that should not be obstructed on the pretext of procedural challenges. We know that the real issue is a lack of trust. Enhanced confidence-building measures will therefore be necessary if substantive progress is to be made in subsequent sessions. We support the early convening of the seventh session, with a clear and mutually agreed strategy for the drafting phase, at least in those areas of commonality identified in previous sessions.

Thirdly, Ghana welcomes the approach to make women part of the solution to the conflict in Syria, noting that women account for nearly 30 per cent of

the participants of the Constitutional Committee. The Special Envoy's consultations in Geneva with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board must also be sustained as part of the measures to involve women in the wider political process. We equally advocate for the participation of young people and civil society in order to ensure an inclusive and durable solution.

Finally, we call for an end to the persistent human rights violations and abuses and highlight the need to address the issues of forced disappearances and the arbitrary detention of persons, including children, in violation of international law.

In conclusion, I would like to appeal for a united front in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which embodies the Council's collective objective of supporting a just and lasting peace in Syria.

**Mrs. Toroitich** (Kenya): We would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Thuraya Hijazi for their briefings this afternoon.

As we begin another year of monthly deliberations on the political situation in Syria, the need for progress that can deliver a long-desired peace to the Syrian people is more compelling and urgent than ever. As we have said before, there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. I therefore reaffirm Kenya's solidarity with the people of Syria in their quest for peace, which we believe can be achieved only through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue, with the support of the international community.

The Constitutional Committee's achievement of meaningful progress is a crucial key to unlocking the political track. While we commend the Special Envoy's continued engagement in Damascus, we regret the lack of agreement on the methodology for convening a seventh round of consultations of the Constitutional Committee. Kenya reiterates its plea to the parties to agree to that undertaking and engage meaningfully and constructively in the interests of the millions of Syrians who are counting on their leadership to achieve a brighter future.

We take particular note of the Special Envoy's transactional diplomacy approach, aimed at identifying and agreeing on incremental, reciprocal, mutual, precise and verifiable steps, in parallel with the efforts of the Constitutional Committee. We think it can truly build the trust and confidence that is needed to move the political process forward. There is also a need for

the relevant regional and international stakeholders to do more within the context of resolution 2254 (2015), with a special focus on the missing persons and detainees file, early recovery activities, addressing socioeconomic conditions and mitigating the effects of sanctions.

All regional and global actors in Syria must also engage in a coordinated manner so as to contribute positively to the political process in their pursuit of peace, stability and economic development. We once again commend the Special Envoy's continued engagements with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, including in the meeting that is currently under way in Norway. That demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the equal representation of women in the political process, as well as addressing the needs of the multitude of Syrian women that the Advisory Board represents. In that regard, we particularly encourage the inclusion of economic and social empowerment programmes that target women, refugees, internally displaced persons and those in need of humanitarian assistance.

On the security front, the air strikes that continue to be reported in north-western Syria, as well as the attacks using improvised explosive devices in Afrin and Dara'a, are endangering many people's lives, which is deeply concerning. We condemn those incidents, including the recent attack on a prison, which has claimed several lives and left many people injured. It is imperative to have accountability for the crimes and violations perpetrated against innocent people. As the recent attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have shown us, concerted and urgent action against Security Council-listed terrorist groups such as ISIL and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham is more crucial than ever. Kenya calls for robust collective action to combat such groups. In conclusion, we call on all stakeholders to focus on the interests of the Syrian people.

**Mr. Raguttahalli** (India): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing today. I also thank Ms. Thuraya Hijazi for bringing a civil-society perspective to this meeting.

The Special Envoy briefed us in detail about his recent efforts to engage proactively with all the stakeholders, including Damascus. We welcome his recent visits to Tehran and Doha, the participation of his Office in the Astana process and his consultations with France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, the League of Arab States

and the European Union. We support his step-for-step approach and hope that his efforts will soon bear fruit and culminate in a seventh round of Constitutional Committee negotiations and further progress towards the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We continue to underline the critical importance of building mutual trust among all the parties, including external players. The recent diplomatic engagement between Damascus and other capitals in the region is reassuring. We welcome the decisions by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to move towards a normalization of diplomatic ties by reopening their embassies in Damascus. We also welcome the decision by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries to designate Damascus as the host of the 2024 Arab Energy Conference.

India has reiterated since the beginning of the conflict in Syria that imposing external solutions cannot help to resolve it. It is up to the Syrians to decide what is best for Syria and for their future. The involvement of external players in the conflict, which has lasted for more than a decade, has adversely affected Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Regarding confidence-building measures, we welcome the efforts of the Syrian authorities to prioritize the return of displaced Syrians to their respective areas of origin.

On the security front, we remain concerned about the overall situation in Syria, including the increasing number of ceasefire violations in north-west Syria. We call on all sides to refrain from taking any action, including military provocations such as missile strikes, that could lead to violence and disturbances in Syria. Furthermore, the growing influence of terrorist groups in camps for internally displaced persons such as Al-Rukban and Al-Hol should be urgently addressed.

Groups designated by the United Nations as terrorists, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham have, as mentioned in recent reports of the Secretary-General, continued to gain in strength in Syria. Da'esh has also intensified its activities, which is evident from attack on the prison in Al-Hasakah last week. The attack by Da'esh in Iraq also indicates the strengthening of this terrorist group in the region. We strongly condemn these attacks and reiterate that the global fight against terrorism cannot and should not be compromised for narrow political gains.

The re-emergence of ISIL/Da'esh in Syria and Iraq calls for urgent action by the international community.

Terrorists cannot be defeated by forming alliances with non-sovereign entities or groups. In fact, such a skewed approach will be counterproductive to our collective efforts.

As the Syrian conflict enters its twelfth year this March, the sufferings of the Syrian people continue to multiply many times over. The support of the international community to address the humanitarian challenges therefore remains integral to the success of the political process. For our part, India stands ready to support the friendly people of Syria by any means possible, as we have continued to do since this conflict first began. Let me conclude by reaffirming India's commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I want to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his update and for his tireless work, including his extensive engagement with Damascus. We really appreciate that. I also wish to thank Ms. Thuraya Hijazi for her eloquent and moving briefing earlier, which reminded us of the terrible plight of so many, especially women and children, who are caught up in this awful conflict. She also reminded us about the need for women to have a place at the table so that politics works, and justice is achieved.

We also commend Mr. Pedersen for his ongoing engagement with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. It is essential that the inclusion and meaningful participation of women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders, like Thuraya, be prioritized. I want to note, of course, that an advisory role is not really what we need. We want to make sure that there are substantive and direct opportunities for women's participation. We want to see women at the table in the room where the political negotiations are happening.

Ireland reiterates its call on the Syrian authorities to engage meaningfully with the Constitutional Committee. Such engagement is essential to ensuring political progress in line with resolution 2254 (2015). As Mr. Pedersen heard on Monday in Brussels, Ireland and our European Union partners have taken positive note of his ideas on "steps for steps", and we are all looking forward to further engagement. However, it is also essential that Damascus engage with his efforts.

We strongly condemn the recent Da'esh attack in Al-Hasakah city and are appalled at reports of civilians

among the dead. The international community must remain committed to ensuring Da'esh's lasting defeat.

We are also gravely concerned about the continued uptick in violent incidents in the north-west. The targeting of civilians resulting in high civilian casualties, including innocent children, is utterly reprehensible. Let us be clear in this regard: intentional attacks against civilians are war crimes. In the first four days of January alone, UNICEF reported the killing of two children and the injury of five others near Idlib. We call on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law, to respect international human rights law and to take definitive measures to prevent child casualties.

Accountability for these attacks, and for all crimes committed in Syria, is essential for peace. Justice is the right of every victim and every survivor. Ireland welcomes the conclusion of proceedings against a former Syrian intelligence officer in the Koblenz Higher Regional Court, which found him guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced him to life imprisonment.

We commend Germany and other States that have taken domestic action to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria. Much more remains to be done to help the Syrian people realize the justice to which they are entitled. Ireland strongly supports all efforts to this end, including the work of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism.

We call on the parties to end the abuse of returnees and urge refugee-hosting countries to respect their obligations under refugee law, including the principle of non-refoulement. Syria does not yet offer a safe environment for refugee returns, and I recall in this regard that all returns must be safe, voluntary and dignified.

We are gravely concerned about the tens of thousands of people in Syria who have been unlawfully detained and forcibly disappeared. The cruel suffering endured by the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons continues. Ireland recalls that arbitrary detention was a key driver of the protests in 2011, and we once more call on all parties, particularly the Syrian Government, to unilaterally release the unlawfully detained and clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons.

As we begin a new year, it is essential that the Security Council redouble its efforts to support Mr. Pedersen in his work as Special Envoy. We have a collective responsibility in this regard to work to ensure substantive and meaningful progress towards an inclusive political solution in Syria. We will certainly play our part in the Security Council to help in the delivery of the long-awaited peace that the Syrian people so desperately need.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho** (Brazil): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing on the situation on the ground. I also thank Ms. Hijazi for her briefing. The delegation of Brazil welcomes the delegations of the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran to today's meeting.

It is discouraging to hear from the briefers that there still appears to be no signs of relief for the suffering of the Syrian people, that there appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel, that there is no political horizon after so many years of conflict. Continuous violence, acute economic crisis with escalating hunger, systematic human rights violations and a stalled peace process configures, in the words of Special Envoy Pedersen, an unacceptable status quo.

Brazil remains convinced that only a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led United Nations-facilitated political process, with due regard for the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity, will bring lasting peace and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population. We agree with the Special Envoy that the strategic impasse on the ground strengthens the assumption that a military solution remains elusive and deleterious for Syria's future.

Brazil congratulates the Special Envoy for his wide-ranging outreach efforts aimed at re-engaging key stakeholders in order to try to find a way out of the current stalemate in the political process. Resolution 2254 (2015) provides a road map that could restore Syria's unity and sovereignty. We are closely following the idea of new incremental, reciprocal, realistic and verifiable steps of both a political and economic character to try to build trust and confidence and help to move the political process forward.

In that regard, Brazil urges the members of the Constitutional Committee to bridge their differences and engage seriously in drafting a new constitution that is conducive to peace, stability and reconciliation. The next meeting of the Constitutional Committee

in Geneva should bring about long-awaited concrete results.

Brazil reiterates the Secretary-General's call for a national ceasefire in order to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population and condemns the use of terrorism and all forms of violence against civilians. We once again call on all parties to refrain from harming civilians and to comply with international humanitarian law.

The growing and continuous presence of terrorist groups on Syrian territory is particularly worrisome. Brazil echoes UNICEF's call on all parties in Syria to keep children out of harm's way and protect them at all times.

As a bitter winter worsens the already terrible situation of people living in camps and informal settlements across Syria, the continuous flow of life-saving international aid should continue. In addition, humanitarian exemptions for any sanctions must be observed so as to ensure that they do not undermine access to food, shelter and essential health supplies for those most in need during this particularly harsh winter.

In 2022, let us not only hope, but also work hard towards a favourable political outcome to Syria in order to bring about the peace, stability and reconciliation so desired by the Syrian people.

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

Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We appreciate his and his team's tireless efforts to seek a political solution in Syria. I also wish to thank Ms. Thuraya Hijazi for her important words here today.

Let me express our sincere hope that 2022 will bring with it advancement in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), including a nationwide ceasefire. However, for that to happen, it is necessary for both the Syrian parties and us, the international community, to do more to move past this strategic stalemate.

We already have the framework for a political solution agreed by consensus in the Security Council. Now more must be done to implement it. Norway urges all actors involved in the conflict to contribute constructively and in good faith and to take concrete steps to move forward on the political track. Let me

also take this opportunity to reiterate Norway's support for Special Envoy Pedersen, including his recent efforts to further the "step-for-step" approach and his efforts to seek progress in the work of the Constitutional Committee. We must all contribute to the process by identifying steps that can lend the political process new momentum and make genuine progress for the sake of the Syrian people, their neighbours and the larger international community.

A sustainable end to the conflict in Syria requires including, and hearing from, all relevant parties. That includes the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the peace and security agenda and the prioritization of women's direct participation in formal mechanisms. We thank Ms. Hijazi for reminding the Council of the importance of that today.

Let me also emphasize the important work and role of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board in bringing a diversity of Syrian women's voices into the political process and into the work of the Special Envoy. Norway is pleased to support them.

The prison attack in Al-Hasakah on 20 January is one of the largest coordinated actions by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) since the terrorist group was declared territorially defeated in Syria in 2019. That shows all too clearly that ISIL is still active, capable and a threat that we must continue to fight. We are concerned that the lack of a political solution to the Syria crisis gives further room for ISIL to grow.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned by the situation for civilians in Al-Hasakah. It is highly concerning that a large number of boys reportedly have been exposed to — or even injured or killed — fighting between ISIL and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

Let me conclude today by reiterating Norway's continued commitment to finding an inclusive, Syrian-owned and -led, political solution, as well as addressing the humanitarian, economic and security situation on the ground. Issues like the release of detainees, the safe and dignified return of refugees, combating terrorism and ensuring inclusive political reform are central to bringing the long tragedy and suffering of the Syrian people to an end.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is holding a meeting today to discuss the political situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, and tomorrow the Council will hold another meeting on the humanitarian situation. A few days ago, the Council held a meeting on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.8946) during which some also tackled, in a selective and biased manner, the situation in Syria. In addition, at the beginning of every month, the Council holds a meeting on the so-called "chemical dossier".

That raises the question: does the Council really discuss the situation in Syria during these monthly meetings, or have they become just a platform for some countries to repeat unfounded allegations and accusations against the Syrian Government in an attempt to tarnish its image?

What does it mean that the Council holds all of these meetings and does not hold a single emergency meeting to condemn the repeated Israeli acts of aggression against Syria's sovereignty, or to condemn the practices of the occupation forces of the United States and Turkey? Why does the Council not adopt a presidential statement or a press statement to clearly and unequivocally condemn all those violations of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations? Do all of those repeated, gross and continuing violations for years not warrant a single Council meeting to prove to the Syrian people and the world public opinion that it is shouldering its responsibility, in line with the Charter, and that it is taking seriously those grave threats to international and regional peace and security?

What happened, and continues to happen, in the city of Al-Hasakah requires the immediate attention of the Security Council in order to look into the repercussions of those dangerous incidents as a result of the crimes committed by the Da'esh terrorist organization and the separatist Kassad militia, as well as the United States occupation forces. Those dangerous incidents are also a result of the insistence of the Governments of certain countries not to shoulder their responsibilities to repatriate their own citizen foreign terrorist fighters

and their families held in camps and detention centres in north-east Syria, and then to prosecute and rehabilitate them on their own territories in order to finally remove them from Syrian territory and terminate the illegitimate presence of United States occupation forces on Syrian soil.

My delegation stresses that any discussion of my country's situation will be limited and a waste of time and effort as long as the attempts of certain Western countries continue to cover up the fundamental challenges facing Syria and ignore the aggressive practices that exacerbate the situation and lead to catastrophic consequences for the lives of each Syrian.

We listened to the briefing delivered by Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and the statements delivered by the representatives of the Member States of the Council. We would like to stress that the Syrian Arab Republic is committed to a political solution based on an intra-Syrian national dialogue that is Syrian-led and -owned and meets the aspirations of the Syrian people and ensures full commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

The Syrian Government has therefore facilitated the launching of the work of the Constitutional Committee, and it follows it with great interest, although it is aware of the obstructive role of the Turkish regime and its representatives as well as certain Western countries that have no interest in the success of the Committee's work.

Syria stresses the need for the Special Envoy to abide by his role as a facilitator and work on implementing the provisions of the terms of reference agreed by the parties, without interfering in the substantive dialogue among the members of the Committee. He should objectively and neutrally report on developments.

Syria looks forward to the seventh session of the Constitutional Committee and commends the positive and constructive engagement of the national delegation during the previous six sessions, as well as its proposals, which reflect the aspirations of the Syrian people. In addition, we underscore that we reject all forms of foreign interference in the work of the Committee, or any attempt to obstruct it, or to impose artificial timelines, or predetermined outcomes, or bypass the provisions of the agreed terms of reference, under any pretext.

The Syrian Arab Republic stresses that it is unacceptable to continue to disregard the grave

violations of its sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, which have been assured in all relevant Security Council resolutions, or to turn a blind eye to the major challenges related to the improvement of the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people caused by unilateral coercive measures imposed on them, which are diametrically opposed to their interests, for whom others assert they care.

Syria also emphasizes that the Security Council must act firmly and swiftly to do the following.

First, it must ensure respect for its resolutions and other United Nations resolutions on the occupied Syrian Golan and ensure their implementation to end the Israeli occupation of the Golan and counter Israeli plans to build thousands of new settlement units therein and double the number of settlers in the Golan. The Council must compel Israel — the occupying Power — to end its repetitive hysterical acts of aggression against the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and hold it accountable for them.

Secondly, it must end the Turkish occupation of Syrian territories in the north and north-west parts of the country and stop the Turkish regime's crimes and practices, which are based on sponsoring terrorism, spreading chaos and destruction, Turkification, forced migration, demographic alteration, looting economic resources and property and the use of potable water as a tool of war against millions of Syrians, for which they must be held accountable.

Thirdly, it must end the illegitimate presence of the United States forces in the north-east and south-west parts of Syria, condemn their sponsoring of the separatist Kassar militia or other terrorist entities, such as Maghawir Al-Thawra, in Al-Tanf and Rukban camps. They must stop the looting and smuggling of national treasures, especially given what we have seen in Al-Hasakah governorate over the past few days, namely, the attack by Da'esh terrorists, the Kassar massacres of innocent victims and the massive barbaric destruction of infrastructure by the occupying United States Air Force, which resulted in many civilian deaths. It also forced thousands of families to leave their homes and seek safe haven. All of those actions are United States attempts to recycle the terrorist Da'esh organization and create a pretext for the United States forces to remain in the region, especially given the increase in domestic and international demands for them to leave the Syrian territories.

Fourthly, it must end the economic terrorist policies and collective punishment through the inhumane, illegitimate and immoral unilateral measures imposed by the United States and the European Union on the Syrian people. They have had a catastrophic impact on every aspect of Syrians' daily lives, especially with the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic and extreme climate change, which has been compounded by drought, the lack of rain and extreme cold weather this winter

Fifthly, it must implement and ensure respect of all its counter-terrorism resolutions and support the efforts of the Syrian State and its allies to eradicate the vestiges of terrorist groups in Syria, such as Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, and hold countries that sponsor such terrorist organizations accountable for the violations and for any drop of blood that was shed by those terrorist organizations.

In conclusion, the responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security requires it to act swiftly to counter any violation of the Charter of the United Nations and deter any violation of its resolutions. It must address the issues that come under its consideration objectively and with neutrality, including preventing its use by some countries as a platform to target other United Nations States Members.

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

**Mr. Keçeli (Turkey):** We speak often in this Chamber of the need to tackle the root cause of a conflict. The fact is that the root cause of the crisis in Syria was political. The Syrian people have been deprived of their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. They have known injustice for decades — the injustice of not having the protection of a proper constitution. The conflict emerged when the Syrian people overcame fear and sought democratic rights, freedoms and a democratic constitution. We cannot pretend that, were hostilities to cease, the Syrian people would be happy to return to the pre-conflict status quo. The root cause of the conflict remains, which is the restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms by the Al-Assad regime.

We speak of accountability in this Chamber. We therefore must remain accountable to the Syrian people. Yet there are some who wish to normalize relations with the regime, when instead we must normalize the implementation of the universal human

rights afforded to the people of Syria. We know that the only way that that will happen is by advancing the political process through the Constitutional Committee, thereby achieving a political settlement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). In accordance with that approach, we held the seventeenth international meeting on Syria in the Astana format.

We support and appreciate efforts by Special Envoy Pedersen, which we hope will lead to the success of the Constitutional Committee. Yet, so far, we have not seen any goodwill on the part of the regime. It is clear that they intend to stall the process until they kill the opposition on the ground. The regime's attacks in Idlib specifically target civilians and civilian infrastructure. Strikes destroyed the Al-Arshani pumping station, which serves as a water source for almost one quarter of a million people. A recent targeted attack on a farm is yet another example of violence perpetrated by the regime. Those attacks have become commonplace, but that does not make them any less heinous. They are grave violations of international humanitarian law.

Some actors in the region have misguidedly tied their hopes of eradicating Da'esh to another terrorist organization — the Kurdistan Workers' Party/ People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG). We have consistently warned the international community about that terrorist organization. On numerous occasions, we have expressed our concerns that members of Da'esh are being released in exchange for bribes, which will only aid in its resurgence. The recent prison break and subsequent clashes demonstrated once again the impotence and unreliability of the PKK/YPG-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces.

Let us also briefly address the acts of aggression by the PKK/YPG for the sake of the Council. More than 350 civilians died last year during terror attacks by the PKK/YPG. They attacked Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin. They recruited child soldiers. They prevented civilians from returning to their homes, including Kurds and Yazidis. They violently suppressed peaceful civilian protests. They arrested Arabic teachers. Those acts and atrocities are well documented in the reports of international organizations and non-governmental agencies.

Most recently, last Thursday, seven civilians, five of whom were children, were killed, and 30 civilians were injured by rocket fire from the terror group. We assure the Council that all terrorist organizations, be

they PKK/YPG or Da'esh, will pay for the atrocities they commit. Turkey will never tolerate any terrorist organization. No terrorist organization will find safe haven along our borders.

In order to establish a lasting political solution in Syria, there should be no support from the international community to the regime or to the terror organizations. The world entrusted the permanent members of the Council to maintain world peace, to uphold the Charter of the United Nations and to protect the people we have pledged to serve. We have elected the non-permanent members to do the same. Unfortunately, so far, the Security Council has failed the Syrian people. We implore all members of the Council to act now and save the people of Syria and their future.

We will not honour the lies and baseless allegations of the Syrian regime with a response. Their presence here is an affront to the Syrians that lost their lives at the hands of the regime.

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

**Mr. Takht Ravanchi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): During 2021, Syria witnessed a relatively calm military situation and a gradual return of refugees and displaced persons. At the same time, Syria's bilateral relations with some countries have improved. Likewise, the convening of the fifth and sixth meetings of the Constitutional Committee, despite the challenges, have raised hopes for the convergence of views among the parties.

Despite such significant developments, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria continue to be seriously violated, either through the occupation or by the aggressions of the Israeli regime and terrorist activities. As such, the sufferings of the Syrian people resulting from occupation and aggression, as well as the imposition of unlawful and inhumane sanctions, continue.

The Syrian crisis has no military solution and cannot come to an end without bringing its occupation to an end, restoring its sovereignty and territorial integrity and confronting the threat of terrorism. To that end, all occupying and uninvited foreign forces must leave Syria without any precondition or further delay.

Additionally, the Council must strongly condemn the holding of the recent provocative meeting of the Israeli Cabinet in the occupied Syrian Golan and its

stated intent to build two new settlements there. The Council must compel the Israeli regime to end the occupation of the Syrian Golan. As has recently been stated by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, any actions aimed at changing the legal and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan are null and void and have no legal effect.

Moreover, the guarantors of the Astana format, in a joint statement following their meeting in December, condemned continuing Israeli military attacks in Syria, which violate international law, international humanitarian law and the sovereignty of Syria and neighbouring countries, as well as endangering stability and security in the region, and called for their cessation. They also considered the abuses of civil aircraft by the Israeli regime as a cover for its aggressions on Syrian territory to be a stark violation of international regulations, endangering the lives of civilians.

On the political track, as was conveyed to Mr. Pedersen during his recent visit to Tehran, Iran supports his ongoing efforts aimed at holding the Constitutional Committee's next meeting soon. We emphasize again that the Committee must work in full accordance with its terms of reference and rules of procedure, without any external interference or pressure and without setting any artificial deadline for its work or any other conditions of a similar nature. Ultimately, it must be a truly Syrian-led and Syrian-owned effort and the role of the United Nations must be exclusively to facilitate that process.

Iran will continue to make its serious contribution to the efforts related to the release of detainees and, in that regard, urges all parties to cooperate towards the realization of that noble humanitarian endeavour. The unanimous adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) last year was an important development. The resolution must be implemented fully, effectively and in a balanced manner, particularly with respect to the early recovery projects and the removal of unilateral sanctions. We once again reject separatist activities and illegitimate self-rule initiatives in Syria, and condemn any effort to support those illegal measures.

The Syrian crisis must be settled peacefully and in accordance with the principles of international law, particularly the principle of full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to support the

Government and people of Syria in their efforts to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I will now adjourn the meeting

so that the Council can continue its discussion on the subject in closed consultations.

*The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.*