



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
25 January 2021

Original: English

---

## Letter dated 22 January 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, Norway (on behalf of Norway and Ireland), Norway, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference on “The situation in the Middle East (Syria)” convened on Wednesday, 20 January 2021. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Tarek Ladeb  
President of the Security Council



**Annex 1****Briefing by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen**

As the Syrian people face the year 2021, a decade of conflict has seen them experience death, injury, displacement, destruction, detention, torture, terror, violations, indignities, instability, intervention, occupation, division, de-development and destitution on a massive scale. Today millions inside the country and the millions of refugees outside are grappling with deep trauma, grinding poverty, personal insecurity and lack of hope for the future.

For many, the daily struggle just to survive crowds out most other issues. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 8 in 10 people in Syria are living in poverty. The World Food Programme has assessed that 9.3 million people inside the country are food insecure. Humanitarian assistance by States Members of the United Nations and donors remains a lifeline for Syrians.

But trends are expected to worsen. A perfect storm of factors — the impact of a decade of conflict, global economic conditions owing to the pandemic, the spill-over from the Lebanese crisis, such internal factors as war economies, corruption, mismanagement, as well as external factors and measures — is producing a slow tsunami that is crashing across Syria. With rising inflation and bread and fuel shortages, we can expect the Syrian Government and other de facto authorities to be increasingly unable to provide basic services and subsidies for basic goods.

The pandemic also continues to take its toll. Syrians are suffering. It remains essential to keep any sanctions from worsening their plight. A torn society faces a further unravelling of its social fabric, sowing the seeds for more suffering and even more instability.

However, the Syrian people are at least seeing less all-out violence than they did before. The last 10 months have been the calmest since the conflict began, with the front lines barely shifting. But this is a fragile calm that could break down at any moment. The past month alone showed us an abrupt and significant escalation around Ayn Issa, in north-east Syria, an intensification of air strikes attributed to Israel, continuous attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the east and central areas of the country, mutual shelling and air strikes in and around Idlib, as well as turbulence in the south-west.

The calm is also a very relative calm. Civilians continue to be killed in ongoing cross-fire and attacks by improvised explosive devices. They continue to face a range of other dangers as well, from instability, arbitrary detention and abduction to criminality and the activities of United Nations-listed terrorist groups.

As the Syrian people face poverty and insecurity — to say nothing of the unfulfilled hopes and dreams that so many of them have — I salute the work of all those Syrians in civil society who continue to strive to do what they can to improve the situation and support a political process. I was pleased to be able to engage with several of them in late December via our Civil Society Support Room.

But, as they stressed to me, the political process is not yet delivering real changes in the lives of the Syrian people, and neither is it providing a real vision for the future. Steps that could build confidence are not really being taken, including full and unhindered humanitarian access; progress on detainees, abductees and the missing — at the very least information on such persons, access to them and the release of women, children, the sick and elderly; a nationwide ceasefire; a cooperative and effective approach to countering the United Nations-listed terrorist groups; steps to create a safe, calm, neutral environment; or external and internal steps to

address the socioeconomic crisis. Moreover, there are no political talks among the Syrians other than those on a constitutional track. Free and fair elections to be held pursuant to a new constitution and under United Nations supervision, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), seem far in the future.

As I continue to take stock of the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), it is clear that no one actor or group of actors can impose their will on Syria or settle the conflict. They must work together. Indeed, the process must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, even though the conflict is highly internationalized, with five foreign armies active in the country. We cannot pretend that the solutions are only in the hands of the Syrians, or that the United Nations can do it alone.

That is why we need more serious and cooperative international diplomacy. This really should be possible. After all, despite their differences, key States are committed to resolution 2254 (2015), and they have shared interests, including on such issues as stability, the containment of terrorism, the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and preventing further conflict.

We must be able to build on those aspects together. I am more convinced than ever that we need a comprehensive approach that addresses all issues and brings together all actors taking mutual and reciprocal steps on all the matters outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). Such an approach could unlock genuine progress and chart a safe and secure path out of the crisis for all Syrians, men and women alike. I continue to engage widely on this front with all key actors. I look forward to continuing to do so, including of course with the new United States Administration, which takes office today.

As I pursue this wider path, I continue to work with the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee. The fifth session of the Committee's small body will convene in Geneva next week, from 25 to 29 January, coronavirus disease (COVID-19) conditions permitting. It will — as agreed and in line with the mandate, the terms of reference and core rules of procedure — discuss constitutional principles and basic principles a future constitution.

I note that there are still considerable COVID-19 challenges in Geneva. We will be ensuring that the strictest health and safety protocols are followed. We highly appreciate the cooperation of the Swiss authorities in enabling the session to go ahead, and we appreciate the commitment of the Chairs and Constitutional Committee members to respecting the measures put in place.

I hope that I will soon be able to continue my consultations with the Syrian Government in Damascus and with the Syrian Negotiations Commission on the overall political process. In the meantime, in preparing for the Constitutional Committee session, I have been virtually engaging with the two Chairs. I also met virtually with the middle third civil society group yesterday.

Let me also note that I met virtually with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board twice in December. I look forward to engaging the Board virtually again this week and next. Its members have emphasized the importance of women's full participation. They stress that, in the process, the core constitutional rights of women across political, social and economic spheres must be safeguarded. They have pressed for more concrete and tangible progress in the work of the Constitutional Committee. The moment pandemic conditions allow, I hope we will be able to reconvene the Board in person.

I see the coming session of the Constitutional Committee as very important. For more than a year, many subjects have been discussed. I believe that the time has come for the Chairs to establish effective and operational working methods, so that the meetings are better organized and more focused. I believe that we need to

ensure that the Committee begins to move from “preparing constitutional reform” to “drafting a new constitution”, as it is mandated to do. The Committee can do this, I believe, by beginning to consider specific constitutional issues and draft provisions. I also believe that the Chairs can and should reach agreement on a workplan for future meetings with clear agendas and topics, and there needs to be more urgency in the process.

I believe that all those are reasonable goals, but I cannot assure the Council that they will be met this time. My consultations are ongoing and will continue in Geneva this weekend before the Committee session begins. I strongly appeal to the Chairs and to all members of the Committee to be ready to move to a new phase of work in this next session.

This is no doubt a time of huge global and regional challenges. We must ensure that addressing the conflict in Syria is high among our shared priorities. Syria has a great and proud history, but it is enduring the most profound tragedy. We need to begin to unlock progress, step by step, in a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing manner, along the path prescribed by resolution 2254 (2015). If we do not, the dangers to Syria’s civilians, to Syria as a State, to its society and to the region will only grow. That cannot be acceptable to any Syrian or to any of us. That is why I count on the support of the Security Council and all key actors for maintaining calm nationwide, supporting confidence-building and moving the political process forward.

---

**Annex 2****Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

I will address five main topics in my briefing to the Security Council today: the economic crisis, the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the protection of civilians, humanitarian access and how humanitarian organizations are providing assistance across Syria.

Syrians are starting 2021 with a currency whose value has drastically declined and with food prices at historically high levels, partly because subsidies for such key commodities as bread have been cut. In December, monitoring by the World Food Programme showed food prices had increased again — by 13 per cent since November and by 236 per cent since December 2019. Nearly one in five households reported poor food consumption in December, which is double the level recorded last year.

Bread shortages continue in many areas. Domestic wheat production cannot meet demand, and most of what is produced is grown in areas outside Government control. In Government areas, production fell significantly last year.

As a result of decreased purchasing power, over 80 per cent of households report relying on negative coping mechanisms to afford food, perhaps the most worrisome of which is a growing reliance on child labour. One in 10 families say they have to rely on their children to contribute to the family income.

Fuel shortages and power cuts in the middle of winter are another manifestation of the deep economic crisis. Black market prices for heating fuel are up to 10 times the subsidized rate. There are shortages of fuel for transportation and long queues at fuel stations.

We have previously informed the Security Council of our concern that many vulnerable families would not be sufficiently prepared for winter this year. Unfortunately, those concerns are proving to be justified. As a result of heavy rainfall affecting thousands of people in the north-west this week, people are telling us that they, their children and their elderly parents are spending nights standing upright in their tents because they have been inundated with so much water. There are similar problems in other parts of the country. Heavy rains in Tartous have caused flooding in at least one internally displaced persons camp. Rural Damascus faces particularly harsh weather owing to its high elevation, and many people there are vulnerable.

Compounding the economic crisis is the impact of COVID-19. While testing remains too limited to convey the true extent of the outbreak, there are indications that Syria may be experiencing a renewed wave of infections. Cases reported in Government areas increased by 64 per cent between November and December. More than 50 per cent of tests are coming back positive in Sweida and Tartous; in Homs it is 60 per cent. Survey data in December revealed 45 per cent of households as having lost one or more sources of income over the previous month because of restrictions related to COVID-19.

As to the protection of civilians, so far this year at least 13 children have been killed in incidents involving explosive weapons and unexploded ordnance across Syria. At least 14 more have been injured. In Al-Hol, in the north-east, we are monitoring with concern the security situation in the camp following a surge in violent incidents, which also reduce the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate safely. The responsibility for security inside the camp rests with local authorities. Security must be provided in a manner that does not endanger residents, violate their rights or restrict humanitarian access. Let me highlight again that most

of the 62,000 people who remain at Al-Hol are young children, under the age of 12 years, who are growing up in unacceptable circumstances.

Infrastructure that is indispensable to the survival of civilians must also be protected. The Allouk water station, on which almost half a million people in Al-Hassakeh continue to rely as their primary water source, resumed operations on 20 December. It is critical that technical teams continue to be provided safe access to the water and electricity installations at Allouk.

That brings me to my next point, humanitarian access. The United Nations has been unable to proceed with a planned first cross-line mission from Damascus into Idlib, as parties on either side remain unable to agree on the composition of the mission. The United Nations will continue to engage with all relevant parties to work towards a solution that will allow the mission to go forward. I hope to have more to say on this topic next month. In the meantime, cross-border operations into north-west Syria dispatched an average of 1,000 trucks of aid a month in 2020, reaching 2.4 million people each month throughout the year.

That brings me to my final point, which concerns the humanitarian assistance being provided to people in need across Syria. The United Nations-coordinated humanitarian operation assisted an average of 7.6 million people a month across the country in 2020. That is an increase of approximately 20 per cent as compared to 2019. On 1 December I released an overview of global humanitarian needs for 2021, including for Syria. The overview highlights that there are 13 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country and another 10.1 million in need, including 5.5 million Syrian refugees, in the region. The needs are calculated on the basis of our independent assessments and are the basis for our response, which focuses on life-saving humanitarian needs and repairs to critical humanitarian facilities. A total of \$10 billion is being requested, including \$4.2 billion for needs inside Syria, to respond in 2021.

Let me also update Council members on how the United Nations is organizing itself to provide assistance in Syria. The United Nations assistance continues to be guided by the humanitarian principles, and United Nations leadership remains attentive to the necessary oversight of the Organization's work on the ground through our established internal coordination mechanisms and regular engagement with Member States, both in the form of dialogue and through the governing bodies of United Nations entities. Appropriate internal oversight mechanisms and other frameworks remain in place, including the parameters and principles of United Nations assistance in Syria, and we continue to work in compliance with the resolutions adopted by the Council and other relevant decisions, including General Assembly resolution 46/182.

The United Nations country team in Syria continues to engage in discussions with the Syrian Government and with Member States in the region regarding its work on resilience and early recovery and the new strategic framework for 2021-2023. Given the importance of further engagement, the United Nations in Syria is working on a six-month extension of the strategic framework to ensure that critical operational activities continue. We will continue to use every opportunity that we have to deliver aid to those most in need. That will require adequate funding, improved access and an end to the violence that has tormented Syrians for nearly a decade.

---

**Annex 3****Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

[Original: Chinese]

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings. China supports the Council's consideration of both the political and humanitarian issues concerning Syria in one meeting.

Since the outbreak of the crisis 10 years ago, finding a political solution to the issue at an early date and restoring peace and calm to the country have been the common wishes of the Syrian people and the shared expectation of the international community. In that regard, I would like to make the following points.

First, we should firmly promote the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. The fifth session of the Constitutional Committee will convene in Geneva next week. China commends Special Envoy Pedersen for his good offices. We hope that the Syrian parties can work within the framework of the Constitutional Committee and deepen dialogue to resolve differences, broaden consensus and achieve meaningful progress in the relevant areas. The Constitutional Committee's work must remain independent and free from outside interference. The international community should create favourable conditions for talks among the Syrian parties and provide encouragement and guidance instead of wilfully putting pressure on one single side. The Syrian Government has repeatedly expressed its support for Special Envoy Pedersen and its willingness to actively participate in the work of the Constitutional Committee. That should be acknowledged by the international community.

My second point is on stabilizing the security situation in Syria. The current security threats to Syria are mainly from foreign occupation and terrorist activities. Only by addressing those two issues can a favourable security environment be created for the political process in Syria. Faced with foreign military and terrorist forces, the Syrian Government has the right to defend the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to conduct counter-terrorism operations to defend its national security. Many Council members are concerned about terrorist activities inside Syria and the spill-over risks. In accordance with international law and Council resolutions, the international community should adopt uniform standards, support Syria in enhancing its counter-terrorism efforts and not allow the sustained presence of terrorist forces in the Idlib region.

My third point is about improving the economic and humanitarian situation. Over the past few months, the prices of fuel and bread in Syria have skyrocketed and the value of the Syrian pound has dropped. Its people do not have enough fuel in the cold winter, and the number of confirmed coronavirus disease cases keeps increasing. The dire humanitarian situation in Syria warrants a high level of attention and focus. The Syrian Government, shouldering its responsibility, is actively taking actions to promote economic recovery, improve livelihoods and control the pandemic. The international community should assist the country and make an effort to ease the humanitarian crisis on the ground. China has used bilateral and multilateral channels to provide assistance to Syria worth approximately \$130 million, and we are ready to continue to help and support the Syrian people. Relevant United Nations departments and agencies should take active measures to address the humanitarian situation in Syria, improve their cooperation with the Syrian Government and relevant parties and enhance the effectiveness of their humanitarian operations.

Fourthly, it is necessary to remove unilateral coercive measures against Syria at an early date. It must be pointed out that the economic and humanitarian difficulties in Syria are, to a large extent, caused by the economic blockade and other unilateral coercive measures, which severely undermine Syria's economic base and hinders its people's access to medical supplies and services. In the virtual Arria Formula meeting on unilateral coercive measures last November, the Secretary General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent gave a detailed briefing on the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures on the humanitarian situation in the country and the difficulties in the actual implementation of the humanitarian exemptions mechanism. The Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights recently stated very clearly that unilateral coercive measures hamper the rebuilding of infrastructure such as hospitals in Syria and undermine its people's rights to survival and development, including their rights to housing and medical care, thereby worsening the humanitarian situation. She urged the country concerned to remove the sanctions. We hope that the relevant countries will respect the facts and closely heed such calls.

China would like to reiterate that diplomacy that relies on sanctions will not succeed and will lead only to endless suffering for the people of the targeted countries. We urge the countries concerned to respond to the appeal of Secretary-General Guterres, listen to the strong calls by the international community and immediately remove the unilateral coercive measures against Syria.

---

**Annex 4****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings on both the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

I welcome the announcement by the Special Envoy of the upcoming next round of Constitutional Committee talks in Geneva. Those meetings are an important step towards restoring trust between the Syrian authorities and its legitimate opposition.

I encourage the Special Envoy to explore additional measures to rebuild confidence between the parties. In that regard, the release of arbitrarily detained people, especially women and children, remains an imperative. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, more than 1,800 people were arbitrarily arrested in Syria 2020.

We remain cautiously optimistic about the ceasefire agreement in north-western Syria. As we heard, the truce largely holds, but violence prevails in many places across the country, putting in danger the most vulnerable. We must admit that the war is far from over. Confrontations continue, including deadly attacks by extremist groups.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict, millions of people have been forced to leave their homes. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1.5 million Syrians live in internally displaced person camps across Syria. Ahead of winter, it is crucial that humanitarian workers have access to all of those locations, of which there are thousands. Estonia calls on the Syrian authorities and other parties to the conflict to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need.

We are now one year into the first reduction of cross-border aid to Syria after the Russian and Chinese double vetoes at the end of 2019. That decision of the Security Council seriously damaged our capacity to support Syrian civilians. The promises of replacing cross-border deliveries with cross-line aid have fallen short in their substance.

We remind the Syrian Government and its allies that the European Union will not support Syria's reconstruction or lift any sanctions until a genuine political process is firmly under way. Resolution 2254 (2015), the Secretary-General's guidelines and the document on humanitarian aid "Parameters and principles of UN assistance in Syria" remain at the core of sending aid to Syria. Only in that way can we ensure that humanitarian aid will not be instrumentalized to reassert unjust policies on the Syrian people.

**Annex 5****Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

Let me first thank Ambassador Kelly Craft for all she did during her tenure as the Permanent Representative of the United States of America and for all her achievements during those 18 months. I wish her all the best for her future projects. I thank Mr. Lowcock and Mr. Pedersen for their briefings.

France notes with concern the continuing heightened tensions and the risk of escalation on the ground. We warn against any attempt to change the front lines in northern Syria. We reiterate our call for the implementation of a definitive and verifiable cessation of hostilities at the national level, in accordance with the appeals of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, as well as Council resolutions. The Special Envoy must lead those efforts.

Only a cessation of hostilities will bring relief to the Syrian people and unite the efforts of the international community to address the threat posed by listed terrorist groups in line with international law. The resurgence of Da'esh in the centre and north-east must be a matter of common concern. The terrorist organization has taken advantage of the current instability to rebuild its strength. France will continue to fully play its part in the fight against terrorism, together with its partners in the international coalition. That is a priority.

The humanitarian situation remains catastrophic. Food insecurity is increasingly becoming the harsh reality for the Syrian population. The coronavirus disease pandemic continues to spread, and the official figures provided by the regime seem far from genuine. The shortfalls in terms of aid delivery, particularly in the north-east, are alarming. The severe winter conditions make life wretched for hundreds of thousands of people who do not have adequate shelter. In that context, it is more essential than ever to ensure safe humanitarian access to all those in need. We will not stop reiterating that international humanitarian law is an obligation for all. I refer in particular to the protection of civilians, which remains an absolute priority.

France commends the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy to preserve the centrality of the United Nations process. That is my third point. The Constitutional Committee will be meaningful only if it ultimately leads to substantive discussions between the parties and allows for the rapid completion of the constitutional reform provided for by resolution 2254 (2015), which Syria very much needs. However, the drafting of a constitution is just one step. If the next meeting fails to yield substantive results, the Special Envoy and the Council will have to draw the necessary conclusions and review their approach.

It is high time for the political process to respond to the aspirations of the Syrian people and give them hope. That requires progress on the issue of detainees and missing persons and means giving the Syrian people their voice back through elections. We call on the Special Envoy to continue his efforts to implement those key elements of resolution 2254 (2015), in particular the electoral aspect, and to keep the Council informed about his progress. We also call on Russia to use its influence to ensure that such efforts succeed.

The crisis in Syria today is far from over. Only a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), will allow for a way out of the chronic instability and enable refugees and displaced persons to return home voluntarily, safely and with dignity.

---

That is a priority for France given the impact of the Syrian conflict on the stability of the region and international peace and security.

Until such time, the European Union and its member States, whose pledges account for 70 per cent of those made during the fourth Brussels Conference, will continue to assume their share of responsibility to fund the humanitarian response in Syria, including in areas held by the regime. They will also continue to ensure full respect for ensuring the impartial and transparent delivery of aid and its full compliance with the document on parameters and principles established by the United Nations.

However, until the regime commits to engaging in a credible transition process, France and the European Union will not normalize their relations with the regime and will continue to encourage their partners to follow the same line. Equally, we will not fund reconstruction or any assistance aligned with the regime's development priorities. It is essential that the United Nations do the same so as not to be complicit in serious human rights violations committed by the regime.

It is those responsible for such violations who are targeted selectively by the European sanctions. They will need to be brought to justice for their crimes. That is why we continue to provide our full support to mechanisms to combat impunity.

**Annex 6****Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T. S. Tirumurti**

Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings on the recent political developments and the humanitarian situation in Syria.

As we are all aware, discussions on the Syrian conflict began in March 2011, during the initial days of our previous innings in the Security Council. Amid prevailing sharp differences, the impasse was then broken with the adoption of the first presidential statement, under India's presidency in August 2011 (S/PRST/2011/16). Subsequently, the first resolution on Syria was adopted in March 2012 (resolution 2042 (2012)), despite deep divisions among Council members, endorsing the six-point plan of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Kofi Annan.

By December 2012, three resolutions had already been adopted on Syria, but there had hardly been any progress in terms of their implementation. The politicization and militarization of the conflict brought disastrous consequences. Terrorist groups took advantage of the situation and entrenched themselves. The humanitarian consequences of the conflict rendered more than 1 million people homeless and nearly 300,000 as refugees in neighbouring countries. When Lakhdar Brahimi took over from Kofi Annan, the failure of the international community in addressing the crisis had already started affecting the entire region.

As we begin our new Council term eight years later, it is indeed disheartening to note that the ongoing crisis in Syria still has no end in sight and the political process is yet to take off. The conflict has become even more complex with the involvement of regional players. Terrorism emanating from Syria has spread far, reaching even parts of Africa. Foreign fighters involved in the Syrian conflict have also moved to other places as mercenaries. The humanitarian situation has worsened, further exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The fact that the conflict has been so long-drawn and intractable points to the inevitability of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), culminating in constitutional reform and free and fair elections. We hope that the conflict in Syria will end completely sooner rather than later and that the reconstruction of Syria will begin, so that Syria reclaims its place in the comity of nations as well as its historic role in the Arab world. Towards that objective, India is ready to play a constructive and meaningful role in the Council.

On the political track, the fifth session of the drafting body of the Constitutional Committee is scheduled to meet in Geneva on 25 January. As agreed at the fourth session, held a month back, the Committee will be discussing basic principles of the constitution. We hope all parties will show the commitment, flexibility and compromise necessary to move forward on the political track. The international community, including the United Nations, should continue to assist the parties in that process.

We note that, since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in March last year, the situation has been generally calm in north-west Syria, which is a positive development. We hope that the Astana guarantors will further strengthen interaction with the United Nations to maintain the sanctity of the ceasefire on the ground.

However, it is a matter of concern that hostilities in other parts of the country have continued unabated. The presence of foreign terrorist fighters, along with

continued terror activities, has worsened the situation on the ground. It is imperative that all parties adhere to their international obligations to fight terrorism and terrorist organizations in Syria, as designated by the Security Council.

Allow me to now address some issues of immediate concern on the humanitarian side. As emphasized by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, the Syrian people are facing very harsh conditions compounded by these cold winter months. In the past two months, the prices of fuel and bread have doubled, the Syrian pound has devalued, people lack fuel to withstand the cold and half of households report poor food consumption. Those are all serious concerns that must be addressed as a priority if we are to avoid a dire humanitarian situation.

We call on the international community to provide assistance to Syria in rebuilding its infrastructure, safeguarding people's livelihoods and fighting COVID-19. In this situation, compounded by both economic and humanitarian crises, we should be sensitive to the debilitating impact that sanctions continue to have on the lives of the common people of Syria.

India supports the United Nations continuing its humanitarian relief operations through all possible channels, with the cooperation of the Syrian Government. In that regard, it is important to delink humanitarian assistance from progress on the political track. We believe that the noble and necessary cause of humanitarian assistance should always be free of politics.

Since the conflict broke out in 2011, India has provided \$12 million in humanitarian assistance to the Government of Syria through bilateral and multilateral channels. Furthermore, India has set up a biotech park and an information technology centre and extended \$265 million in lines of credit for projects in the steel and power sectors. In July 2020, in order to help Syria fight the COVID-19 pandemic, we sent a gift of 10 metric tons of medicines to Damascus. We also organized an artificial-limb fitment camp in Damascus during December 2019-January 2020, which benefited more than 500 Syrians. We have also provided 1,000 scholarships for Syrian students to study in India. As Syria's reliable and long-standing friend, India stands ready to continue to render all possible help and support to the Syrian people.

**Annex 7****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason**

At the outset, knowing that it is the last day on the Security Council for the representative of the United States, I wanted to send my personal best wishes to Kelly for her future and certainly to remind her not to forget her Irish roots as she leaves one family and returns to another.

I thank you, Mr. President, as well as Mark Lowcock and Geir Pedersen for today's briefings, which have set out very starkly indeed the enormous challenges that we still face in Syria. I will concentrate today on the political issues only, as the representative of Norway just spoke on behalf of Ireland as co-penholder on the humanitarian aspects.

Today is another painful recognition of the fact that, after almost 10 years of a brutal war with devastating consequences for the ordinary people of Syria, we seem no closer to a credible political solution that can implement resolution 2254 (2015). That is no reflection on Special Envoy Pedersen and his dedicated team, but it does flow largely from the lack of serious engagement by the Syrian authorities in the political process. To be clear, Ireland fully supports the role of the United Nations and commends Mr. Pedersen and his team on the sterling work that they do and for the briefing they gave us today.

It is welcome news that the Constitutional Committee members continued their dialogue on national foundations and principles, but clearly progress to date is neither sufficiently rapid nor substantive enough. Ireland can only hope that at the upcoming fifth session we will see all parties working urgently, and, we underline, sincerely towards concrete outcomes on the basic principles of the constitution.

I want to commend especially the work of the civil-society members of that Committee and to welcome in particular the ongoing consultation and engagement with Syrian women representatives, including the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. We know that, in such dire circumstances on the ground, conflict has the greatest impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and that usually, very often, that means women, in this case Syrian women. But we also know that they are resilient women, and we know that the work of the Board is highlighting the importance of ensuring their full and meaningful equal participation in political life. That is being done when those women are facing challenges that would defy many of us. I assure Mr. Pedersen that we will keep saying that and supporting that.

Progress on the constitution is a critical part of the work that we need to do to find peace. There are also several other vital aspects of resolution 2254 (2015) that must be urgently addressed if Syria is to achieve sustainable peace.

Violent conflict and terrorism remain, we know, a grim reality for many ordinary Syrians. In Mr. Pedersen's words, a fragile calm largely continues, but it still falls far short of the lasting and verifiable nationwide ceasefire as we demanded in resolution 2254 (2015). Shelling, airstrikes and attacks using improvised explosive device attacks continue to kill and injure civilians. We know that that, of course, is completely unacceptable and not sustainable.

As we see it, there can be no sustainable peace without accountability and no true peace without justice. We believe that it is imperative that those who are responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and for human rights violations and abuses be held to account and that the recommendations of impartial mechanisms, including the United Nations Independent International Commission

---

of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, be implemented.

We firmly believe that we should collectively stand against impunity and ensure that those who torture, murder and commit other heinous crimes be held accountable. Evidence of serious violations and abuses has been extensively documented. Accountability and reconciliation are linked and are key to sustainable peace.

As pointed out by the Special Envoy, we have yet to see meaningful progress on detainees, abductees and on missing persons. Ireland supports Mr. Pedersen's call for significant action, including the provision of access to prisons and detention facilities, so that we can have real information on the missing. Action on those issues is urgent, and it is also essential as a confidence-building measure.

Today millions of Syrian people, ordinary Syrian people, remain scattered as refugees, and the conditions necessary for them to return in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner are far from having been achieved. Only a credible political solution can lead to such conditions. We hope to see that urgently.

Ireland remains concerned that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its affiliates remain active and are, of course, exploiting the vacuum that exists in some parts of Syria. The European Union is contributing by non-military means to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL/Da'esh for the stabilization of north-east Syria.

After nearly a decade of conflict, the political process quite simply has failed the ordinary Syrian people. We regret that deeply, as they continue to suffer unconscionably — both inside and outside Syria. Once again, only a political solution can end that suffering and prevent continued conflict and instability.

We will continue to work with Mr. Pedersen; he can count on Ireland as he works with the Syrian authorities, and we hope that the Syrian authorities will sincerely engage with those efforts. We want to restore peace, justice and, above all, hope to the people of Syria.

**Annex 8****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani**

I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

I would like to start by thanking Ambassador Kelly Craft for her service and partnership. Kenya wishes her all the very best in her future endeavours. Her departure from the Security Council just as I arrive reminds me that, although there may be permanent members and that we all serve in Permanent Missions, at a human level we all are elected. We are all passing through and hope to make the best contribution possible. I hope that this realization is one we all hold, because it may allow us to forge greater consensus to meet the urgency of the expectations of the people of Syria, and those in other files, for peace and security. I also congratulate the United States on a peaceful transition of power from one Administration to another, which is being observed by the world and appreciated for its seamless transition.

My delegation appreciates the combined meetings on the political and humanitarian situations, as they provide a holistic and undeniably interlinked overview of the situation in Syria.

We are gravely concerned by the immense suffering of the Syrian people. No one can forget the depredations and evil visited on them by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other forms of extensive and inhumane violence. We vividly recall the caravans of refugee families fleeing for their safety from homes and regions that the Government could not protect.

Kenya stands with the Syrian people. We understand the pressures and interests that are feeding into how the Syrian people are treated and how the solutions to help them are being crafted and implemented in the light of those interests.

Kenya believes that the Security Council and the multilateral order must put the Syrian people first. That is the reason for which the Council was created. That is the only claim for the Council to be held in high esteem by all the well-meaning citizens of the Members of the United Nations.

Seeing the lack of consensus and the subjecting of the interests of the Syrian people to multiple competing interests makes us understand even more profoundly why it is so important to reform the multilateral system to be a more effective mediator of global peace and security.

It is based on this position that Kenya strongly believes that the long-term solution to the Syrian crisis lies in a political dialogue that includes the widest spectrum of the Syrian people. Our urgent note of caution is that, in the pursuit of inclusive dialogue, the terrorist groups and their leaders that have caused such immense suffering and atrocity should not be rewarded with political recognition.

Kenya notes the conclusion of the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee, which was held from 30 November to 4 December 2020. What is needed now is urgent collaboration by the parties on the constitutional reform process as the basis for a political solution that can be the foundation for security. We look forward to the next briefing highlighting the outcome of the fifth session of the Constitutional committee.

On the alarming humanitarian situation, Kenya is gravely concerned about the ongoing targeted attacks on civilians and humanitarian aid workers as well as the high number of coronavirus disease infections. In that regard, we hold that there should be no limitation on the delivery of aid. For that reason, we urge stronger cooperation between the Syrian Government and the United Nations to better

support cross-line and cross-border humanitarian assistance to reach the civilian population in great need.

In conclusion, Kenya reiterates its support for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue. We remain convinced that the multilateral system, and in particular the Security Council, must find more ways to generate the consensus and collaborative approach that the people of Syria deserve and the entire world expects.

**Annex 9****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

I would like to take this opportunity to wish my friend Ambassador Kelly Craft all the best in her personal and professional future. Our time in the Security Council overlapped very little, but our teams worked quite well in various forums as befits two good neighbours. I wish dear Kelly good luck. We will keep in touch.

I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

Mexico welcomes the progress — modest though it may be — made at the recent meetings of the Constitutional Committee and hopes that, at the session scheduled for next week, progress will continue to be made on defining the constitutional principles, and that the drafting of a new constitution can proceed.

We recognize the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to ensure the participation of civil society in the Committee, in particular women. Mexico firmly believes that women's leadership and substantive participation is essential for peacebuilding.

We also call for a redoubling of efforts and progress in other areas in favour of the political transition, such as the national ceasefire, the unilateral release of detainees and the clarification of the facts in relation to missing persons.

The Syrian conflict, as has been stated here, cannot be resolved through military means. The only way to address it is through consultation and political dialogue facilitated by the United Nations, and with the support of regional and international partners. Therefore, we welcome the Al-Ula declaration, in which the Gulf Cooperation Council reaffirms its support for that political process, on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015).

As this is the first time that Mexico is intervening in its capacity as a member of the Security Council on this issue, we want to recognize the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, all United Nations agencies and all humanitarian actors on the ground who have contributed to addressing this humanitarian crisis.

However, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated a situation that was already serious, but is now even more so, as the population requiring humanitarian assistance for subsistence now stands at around 13 million people. Given the immensity of the humanitarian challenge, allow me to highlight three points.

First, with regard to the critical food situation, a decade of conflict has led to more than 9 million people facing food insecurity. Humanitarian assistance from the various United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors is imperative to prevent this situation from deteriorating further. All humanitarian actors and shipments must have unrestricted access and must not be subject to unnecessary bureaucratic delays.

Secondly, with regard to the impact of winter and the situation of displaced persons, despite the efforts made, there is still a lack of adequate housing and necessary protection, which further hampers the living conditions of the population. Camps, such as Al-Hol, are mainly inhabited by women and children, who in the absence of adequate protection resort to unsafe practices that have already caused very regrettable accidents. The fires are a case in point.

Thirdly, with regard to the increase in cases of COVID-19, medical personnel must be provided with personal protective equipment and, in due course, both the personnel and the entire Syrian population must have access to vaccines. We again call on all States to increase cooperation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 74/274, to ensure equitable access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment. That is the best way to address the pandemic. The Syrian people are entitled to the highest standard of physical and mental health.

The distribution of protective equipment to health personnel, as well as food and protective supplies for the winter season, are examples of the importance of keeping all channels active to deliver humanitarian assistance. If necessary, more crossings, such as Bab Al-Hawa, should be opened, with the fundamental objective of saving lives.

This is not a matter of geopolitics. Mexico calls on all actors involved to prevent the politicization of the provision of humanitarian assistance, which the Syrian people urgently need, and to prevent the assistance from being deliberately prevented from reaching its destination.

**Annex 10****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: French]

In the various briefings that they have given to the Security Council, Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Mark Lowcock have faithfully presented the hope but also the frustration and even disappointment at the situation in Syria. The statements that they have just made do not depart from that tradition.

The position of my country, the Niger, regarding the Syrian crisis remains constant. For us, the resolution of the crisis must be achieved on a political and not a military basis, according to an inclusive process led by the Syrians themselves. We therefore believe that we must firmly support the Special Envoy in his tireless efforts to promote dialogue and mutual trust between the parties concerned and to get the political process back on track, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

That is why my delegation is pleased that the work of the Constitutional Committee has resumed after several months of interruption. We hope that, at the upcoming meetings, all members of the Committee will engage in the negotiations in good faith, seeking the compromises necessary to put Syria on the path to peace and security.

The cessation of hostilities remains an essential precondition for achieving tangible progress in resolving the crisis in Syria. The continued fighting, bombings and the use of improvised explosive devices remain a genuine source of concern for us. My delegation therefore calls on the parties concerned to respect the commitments made in the various agreements in order to achieve a comprehensive national ceasefire.

We also support the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for an immediate national ceasefire in Syria to create the conditions for the success of the political process and to make effective the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, whose spread is increasing exponentially in the country.

On the humanitarian front, it is clear that a substantial improvement must be made in the mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout the Syrian territory. At a time when the Syrian population continues to suffer from the combined effects of economic hardship and the increase in COVID-19 cases, procedures at the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point and between the line of control must be streamlined to allow for the accelerated delivery of humanitarian assistance, including much-needed medical supplies and equipment, to the Syrian health-care system in order to address the pandemic. My delegation reiterates its appeal to all parties to abide by their obligations to protect civilians and allow timely, safe and unimpeded access to all humanitarian workers concerned with helping millions of people in need, often at the risk of their lives.

Similarly, the Niger remains concerned about the plight of the many women, and even children, who were arbitrarily detained in both camps. We call on the parties to the conflict to respect human rights and to share information on the fate of those detainees.

We support the calls by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a massive and unilateral release of detainees, as well as for meaningful action on the case of missing persons. That will undoubtedly contribute to the easing of the overall situation and could greatly help to promote the progress we all expect towards a successful resolution of the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the members of the Council to always bear in mind the difficult conditions that the Syrian people are in when considering the multiple facets of this crisis, which has lasted too long.

Like all nations facing terrorism, the Syrian Arab Republic has the right to protect its sovereignty and to relentlessly combat terrorist groups, which seek to exploit the current health crisis in order to regroup and regain lost ground, ignoring the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire during this time of pandemic. Of course, this fight must be carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law, ensuring in particular the protection of innocent civilians and their access to humanitarian assistance.

**Annex 11****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul**

I make this statement on behalf of the co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file, Ireland and Norway. We would like to thank Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, and Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for their briefings today.

We meet today for the first Security Council meeting of 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Almost 10 years have passed since the conflict began. After turning the page on 2020, we continue to witness an extremely challenging humanitarian situation throughout the country. Our role as humanitarian co-penholders will reflect a long-term engagement with the humanitarian response in Syria. The overall objective will be to ensure that humanitarian assistance continues to reach all people in need, by all means and modalities necessary, in line with the humanitarian principles.

The total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection increased from 11 million to a record high of 13 million people over the past year. The socioeconomic crisis in Syria continues to spiral to new disastrous depths. Throughout the country we have seen increasing food prices, worsened fuel shortages and continued loss of livelihoods — all further exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In all likelihood, more than half of Syria's population now faces food insecurity.

We are concerned as the number of reported COVID-19 cases continues to rise, with a disastrous impact on an already shattered health system. With limited or lacking test capacity, indicators such as the fatality ratio leave little doubt that community transmission is widespread. It is vital that the Syrian health-care system receive the support needed to battle the pandemic, including equitable access to vaccines. Needless to say, we give our full support to the World Health Organization's efforts.

Clean and uninterrupted water supplies are essential in all situations, but even more so in the midst of a pandemic. We are deeply concerned by renewed reports of interruptions at the Allouk water station, denying more than half a million people access to their primary source of water. All parties involved must commit to a settlement and support United Nations efforts to find a sustainable solution.

Winter came late but has hit hard. People now go cold and hungry all over Syria. The impact on the over 2 million internally displaced persons living in inadequate emergency shelters is devastating. Several children have died tragically in tent fires as families try to keep warm. We are following with concern the winter storms in the north-west of the country, which are reportedly the biggest so far this season. The heavy rainfall across western Aleppo and Idlib governorates in north-west Syria has reportedly caused damage to sites for internally displaced people. Reports are indicating that at least 41,200 people have been affected and at least 62 camps have been damaged or destroyed by the storm. We ask for the urgent scaling up of the relief efforts for children and families in the affected areas.

The protection needs of Syrians are mounting. Earlier this month, we again received heartbreaking news of children killed in accidents caused by unexploded ordnance in places such as Dar'a and Deir ez-Zor. They were not the first and will not be the last. The hard work of humanitarian mine clearance has barely begun. That also demonstrates the need to step up efforts in mine-risk education in all affected areas.

Reports by the Secretary-General underscore the immense and growing humanitarian needs facing Syrians. The United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and non-governmental organizations partners continue to mount one of the world's largest humanitarian responses, reaching an average of 7.4 million people per month across Syria. The ongoing response demonstrates the need for ensuring a principled approach to humanitarian assistance and protection, reaching people in all parts of the country.

While humanitarian access remains challenging, some progress has been made in certain areas of the country over the past year. We hope to see that development continue in 2021. Recent reports from the Secretary-General and humanitarian partners emphasize that cross-line support to the north-east is still not reaching the population on a scale sufficient to meet their needs. We therefore call on all parties involved to facilitate a concerted scaling up of cross-line support. In the north-west, thanks to the efforts of the United Nations and its partners, the crossing at Bab Al-Hawa continues to play an indispensable role in the delivery of aid to the 3 million people in need.

In conclusion, I want to pay tribute to all humanitarian and medical personnel for their tireless efforts. We call on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and protect those who risk their lives while saving others.

## **Second statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul**

I will now make some additional remarks on the political track in my national capacity.

The only way to bring an end to the displacement, destruction and humanitarian need is through a nationwide ceasefire and a political solution. Military victories may be won on the battlefield, but only a lasting and inclusive political solution can end the suffering of the people of Syria and prevent renewed conflict and instability. Norway will do its utmost to support a political settlement in Syria.

We give our full support to Special Envoy Pedersen and his Office in their efforts to facilitate the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That includes the critical work of the Constitutional Committee, as well as broader endeavours to end the conflict and bring sustainable peace to Syria.

On the Constitutional Committee, we welcome the resumption of meetings during the latter part of 2020 and the upcoming round of talks scheduled for next week in Geneva. For the first time, the Committee's small body will discuss constitutional principles. We look forward to good-faith engagement from all sides on issues of substance, with a view to finding common ground and paving the way for the drafting process to start. It is the Syrian parties that need to move the constitutional process forward. The process must be Syrian-owned, with strong support from the international community and the Security Council. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

More than five years have passed since resolution 2254 (2015) was adopted by the Council. We urge the parties and all actors to contribute to concrete progress. We support the Special Envoy's call for taking stock of where the political process stands in order to find the best possible way to move it forward. In addition to the important work of the Constitutional Committee, we also need wider efforts to address the full range of issues, with regional and international partners and all parties constructively engaged.

We also remain concerned about the countless persons who remain missing or detained in Syria. We call on all parties to release arbitrarily detained persons — particularly women and children — and facilitate their return to their families. No confidence-building measure is more important. We urge all parties to take all the necessary steps to better protect children and ensure children's rights, including keeping schools and health facilities safe.

We know from experience that inclusivity is vital for peace processes to succeed and for political settlements to be not only just, but more sustainable. In that respect, we commend the Special Envoy for his close dialogue with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and for being a strong advocate for the active participation of women, including those from diverse backgrounds, and the broader civil society in the constitutional process. The direct and meaningful participation of women and civil society in the political process is key to building sustainable peace with the respect for human rights and the rule of law at its core.

Lastly, let me turn to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Recent attacks in central and eastern Syria, claiming dozens of casualties, remind us that ISIL remains a serious threat, both to Syria and to international security and stability. We must remain vigilant of their existence and their potential to grow and inspire terrorist attacks far beyond Syria and Iraq. Norway is committed to stabilization efforts in both countries and to continuing our support for the fight against ISIL.

---

**Annex 12****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia**

[Original: Russian]

Before turning to the topic of our meeting, I would like to pay tribute to United States Permanent Representative Kelly Craft, who today is attending her last Security Council meeting in that capacity. I would like to thank her for her cooperation and for the friendly spirit she has shown despite our disagreements in the Council, including on today's topic. I am sure Mrs. Craft has left her mark on the history of the Security Council and has contributed to its work. I ask her to please accept our sincere wishes for all the best and every success in all her future endeavours. We hope that she will not forget her Security Council friends. I will now turn to what Permanent Representative Craft referred to in her statement as the Russian version of the Syrian story.

We are grateful to Geir Pedersen and Mark Lowcock for their information on the situation in Syria.

We welcome the fact that, despite the coronavirus factor and the known restrictions in that regard, the fifth session of the drafting committee of the Constitutional Committee has already been scheduled for 25 January in Geneva. That confirms the resolve of the Government delegation to stabilize and resolve the situation in the country, despite the accusations against it and economic, political and military pressure from Western States. We intend to support Mr. Pedersen's mediation efforts and, together with our colleagues in the Astana format, to encourage the delegations from Damascus and the opposition to work constructively. We have consistently advocated non-interference in the political process led and conducted by the Syrians themselves, as explicitly set out in resolution 2254 (2015). It is all the more inadmissible to prejudge the outcome or to impose artificial deadlines. Incidentally, resolution 2254 (2015) is silent on and has no bearing on the upcoming elections.

Despite the stabilization of the situation in Syria, risks of escalation remain. We note the high degree of tension, in particular in areas not controlled by the Government — Idlib, the Euphrates region and Al-Tanf. The terrorists of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continue to shell population centres and Syrian army positions and continue the practice of harassing civilians, carrying out executions and illegally enriching themselves. There has been an increase in Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams cells in the Euphrates region as well as in clashes between Kurdish units and tribes and among various Kurdish forces. We also condemn Israeli air strikes on territory, which threaten the stability of the entire region.

It is disappointing that Western countries have imposed sanctions against Syrian Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad. That action demonstrates the West's unwillingness to seek a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis, which it instigated, to a large extent.

With regard to the humanitarian component of the Syrian file in the Security Council, let us focus on the key aspects that require an urgent solution.

The countdown in the operation of the cross-border mechanism for the provision of humanitarian assistance to Syria is accelerating. We have repeatedly said that the work of the mechanism raises many questions because of its lack of transparency and accountability — all the more so because the share of United Nations humanitarian shipments through it within the total volume of humanitarian aid from Turkey is extremely small.

Against that background, of course, it is discouraging that, for almost a year now, there has not been any movement in the humanitarian convoy to Idlib across the contact lines. Mr. Lowcock has said that the parties cannot agree on this convoy. I want to correct him. Damascus has fulfilled its obligation to approve the mission, having issued an authorization back in April. The way to the enclave is open. What is stopping the so-called “other parties” from cooperating? We ask this question over and over again because we do not understand the meaning of the declaration of commitment on compliance with international humanitarian law and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance signed by armed groups — terrorists, in fact, who have been classified as such by the Security Council — under the auspices of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). We have not heard anything from OCHA on that document. We would like to finally hear from them.

We would like to address the new co-penholder on the Syrian humanitarian dossier — the delegations of Ireland and Norway. They should not take the example of their predecessors and focus only on the cross-border mechanism. It will not be long before we are once again faced with the question of whether it needs to be extended. The flywheel of passion and emotion will spin exponentially faster, but predictably in a one-sided manner. Once again, the majority will keep silent about the lack of progress in aid deliveries from Damascus to Idlib.

Our position is very clear: the cross-border mechanism, created as a provisional tool in 2014, is becoming outdated and continues to undermine Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Syrian Arab Republic is no longer the terrorism-torn country it was when the mechanism was first launched. It is being rebuilt, and the Government has facilitated the delivery of aid from inside the country in every way possible. Suffice it to mention the World Health Organization’s (WHO) humanitarian aid to the north-east alone — more than 90 per cent is distributed to territories not controlled by Damascus.

Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity must be restored. We call on our Irish and Norwegian colleagues, as well as on all other members of the Council, to show their impartiality and look at the situation from that perspective. Criticism of our position on the cross-border mechanism sounds blasphemous in a situation where supplies to Idlib from Damascus are being delayed due to far-fetched and inexplicable pretexts.

I cannot fail to mention the topic of unlawful unilateral restrictive measures — simply put, sanctions. During the Security Council meeting in December (see S/2020/1257), we drew attention to the anti-sanctions guidelines for the period of the coronavirus disease pandemic, which were issued on 10 December by Alena Douhan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights. This is essentially a summary of all the problems faced by humanitarian workers in Syria. It was dialogue with them that provided the basis for the preparation of this document.

I will cite only the following as one of the most vivid examples of the difficulties faced by ordinary Syrians. The Syrian Central Bank’s exclusion from international payment systems and the potential “dual use” of humanitarian goods prevent the Government of Syria from purchasing not only polymerase chain reaction tests, personal protective equipment and syringes but — absurd as it may sound — even toothpaste. Restrictions on the use of online platforms that cannot be accessed from Syrian territory also contribute to Syria’s difficulties. For example, in the absence of sufficient medical staff, remote medical consultations for patients, telemedicine, which the modern world prides itself on, are hampered. Schoolchildren are deprived of the opportunity to study online from home.

In the same context, it is worth highlighting the right of Syrians to access the coronavirus vaccine. The sanctions pressure that is exerted on Syria significantly limits the ability of the inhabitants of Government-controlled territories to protect themselves from the pandemic. The reasons are the same: blacklists of sanctions violators discourage potential contractors.

This vicious circle that ordinary Syrians have been trapped in needs to be broken as soon as possible. It is unacceptable to label the Government and accuse it of inaction while completely cutting the country off from the outside world, business contacts and financial transactions. Syria has a legitimate right to self-sufficient sustainable development, and Damascus is doing all it can in the current complicated circumstances to keep its economy afloat.

Colleagues will be reminded that the occupied north-east of Syria is rich not only in hydrocarbons, but revenues from their sale go not into Syrian treasury but elsewhere. In the meantime, Syria is suffering environmental damage for which no one wants to be held accountable, and the United Nations simply keeps silent. The occupying Power is responsible. The north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, which used to be the breadbasket not only of the country but also of the region, now is also cut off from the national economy. While the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports a significant increase in crop production in 2020— an average of 77 per cent as compared to the previous five years — the rate of starvation in the country is increasing. In this situation, is it right to blame Damascus, which is experiencing problems in feeding its citizens because it lacks access to its national resources?

As much as some colleagues might like to see Russian or Syrian propaganda in sanctions-related topics, this issue is increasingly raised at the United Nations. In addition to the Special Rapporteur's materials and the Secretary-General's calls in December, the WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Ahmed Al-Mandari, openly admitted during a briefing that sanctions are negatively affecting all aspects of life in Syria, including health care.

We cannot help but ask Mr. Lowcock a question in that regard. During the 14 January Council meeting on Yemen (see S/2021/56), he emotionally stated that having humanitarian exemptions would not solve the problem of supplies to that country and that, even if they did allow goods to be delivered, the prices would be severely inflated. He said it raised serious concerns in the context of Yemen because it severely limits the ability of humanitarian workers on the ground. We appreciate his frankness and courage in that regard. But what is the difference between the situation in Yemen and the situation in Syria? The same dysfunctional humanitarian exemptions, the same blocking of bank accounts, the same fear of suppliers falling under secondary sanctions and the same rising fuel prices amid increasing shortages. Should we only talk about this in the context of Syria if people start starving on the same scale as in Yemen? This is a selective approach to country-specific files. We are counting on Mr. Lowcock to be as principled on Syria as he was on Yemen.

Finally, I would like to ask another question, once again to Mr. Lowcock. The humanitarian plan for Syria and the country-specific United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework expired in December 2020. It would be interesting to learn about the progress in preparing new versions of those documents. Furthermore, in the context of coordinating humanitarian efforts and promoting development — what some call nexus, although that term is not entirely clear to us — and given the growing trend for Syrian refugees to return to their homes, the issue of rebuilding the social infrastructure in Syria — hospitals, schools and housing — is becoming increasingly urgent.

In that regard, we once again wish to underscore that imposing political conditions for the United Nations work in the interest of Syria's development is unacceptable. We should be guided by the real needs of the Syrians and the priorities of the Government, as set out in the agreed parameters for United Nations assistance. We recall the internal document "Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance to Syria," which contained an unacceptable thesis about the conditions of assistance, and proceed from the assumption that, in reality, the United Nations remains impartial and independent. This document also mentions the work of the Inter-Agency Task Force. We would like to ask Mr. Lowcock about its parameters and progress, as we understand that OCHA is a member of it.

### **Second statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia**

First of all, I would like to start by saying that I presumably should appreciate the lesson on manners that the representative of the United Kingdom gave me. I also checked the timing of his intervention; it was five minutes and 57 seconds. However, I would like to remind him that he speaks English and does not need interpretation. If I had spoken in English, I could have condensed my statement to perhaps three minutes. But I have respect for the interpreters, who have to cope with the speed of my statement and interpret it. Still, I would like to apologize to him for stealing his precious time. Judging by the fact that he left, he was indeed in a hurry. However, it seems to us that it was not the only reason. It looks like certain parts of our statement were not particularly pleasing to the representative of the United Kingdom.

On the idea of separating political and humanitarian meetings on Syria, as far as we know, it is already in the February programme. Let us strike an understanding, then. When we have political Syria on the agenda, we speak about political Syria. When we have humanitarian Syria on the agenda, we speak about humanitarian Syria. We do not mix the two, as was often the case in our previous meetings, when political and humanitarian files on Syria became practically indistinguishable, according to the statements of some of our colleagues.

Now, on what Mr. Lowcock commented, I would not call it an answer to a question that I graciously asked him yesterday. If he is unable to comment more in depth on the strategic framework for Syria, then I suggest that we invite another briefer who is closer to that issue to our next meeting on Syria.

On the comparison between Yemen and Syria, I do not agree that the two situations differ. Although Syria was not put on the list by the State Department, the sanctions applied against Syria are no less harmful than the consequences, for Yemen, of the State Department's decision.

**Annex 13****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Inga Rhonda King**

I thank Under Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Envoy Pedersen for their usual informative briefings.

Syria's humanitarian crisis and its resultant socioeconomic downturn continues to be a source of profound concern. As the Syrian pound depreciates, food insecurity and shortages of other essential commodities increases, placing the Syrian people in a perilous position. Humanitarian aid therefore remains a critical lifeline for millions, particularly those residing in overcrowded camps for internally displaced persons, and especially in the harsh winter months and in consideration of the coronavirus disease pandemic. Consequently, aid access facilitated by the cross-border mechanism, as well as other indispensable modalities, is vital to the humanitarian response. Yet it still requires significant scaling up and enhancing to ensure that those in need of support are able to receive it in line with the humanitarian principles and in a timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded manner.

Mr. Pedersen likened the confluence of circumstances in Syria to a slow tsunami. Intrinsically related to the issue of Syria's socioeconomic downturn is that of the imposition of unilateral coercive measures. We continue to appeal for the lifting of those measures, which are not only incompatible with international law but also undermine the country's capacity to combat the pandemic.

The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and the maintenance of an effective humanitarian response require an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities, as called for by the Special Envoy. There is no military solution to the conflict, and we strongly urge parties to exercise maximum restraint and to fully respect the ceasefire in the north-west. While we recognize the substantial threat posed by the scourge of terrorism, we remind parties that all counter-terrorism and other military activities must comply with the enduring principles of international law. Distinction, proportionality and precaution ought to guide all actions.

The only sustainable solution to the protracted conflict and its attendant humanitarian crisis remains through an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. In pursuit of this durable and sustained resolution, the work of the Constitutional Committee remains an essential component. We therefore continue to encourage all parties to negotiate in a spirit of compromise to make tangible progress during the upcoming fifth session. We also reiterate our support for the steadfast efforts of the Special Envoy in that regard.

The viability of the political process also requires the undertaking of meaningful confidence-building measures to foster goodwill and facilitate reconciliation. As such, it is imperative that the outstanding issues of detainees and missing persons be urgently addressed to encourage further progress.

In conclusion, we appeal to the international community to take pragmatic steps to assist Syria in restoring peace and stability. Such steps include the withdrawal of all unauthorized foreign forces, in respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and by contributing to Syria's reconstruction, as the restoration of the country's critical infrastructure will undoubtedly assist in alleviating the overall humanitarian situation. The well-being of the Syrian people ought to remain at the forefront of all actions, for it is they who continue to suffer the consequences of the conflict.

**Annex 14****Statement of the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Tarek Ladeb**

[Original: Arabic]

I now wish to make the following statement in my national capacity as the representative of Tunisia.

I should like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Lowcock, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Pedersen, for their briefings.

Tunisia welcomes the resumption by the Constitutional Committee of its work, which is facilitated by the United Nations. The fifth round of talks is scheduled for the beginning of next week in Geneva, following the fourth round that took place late last year.

We hope that this round will enable the Constitutional Committee and its small body to continue their work and lead to progress in the formulation of constitutional principles and foundations.

In that context, we urge the Syrian parties to be flexible and focus on common aims in order to make it possible to find common ground and reach a consensus regarding the substance of the Constitution and to move the expanded political process forward, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We also commend Syrian women for the active role that they are playing into the effort to reach a comprehensive settlement.

As Mr. Mark Lowcock stated in his briefing, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains a matter of grave concern. We are alarmed by the deteriorating living conditions of Syrians against the backdrop of the worsening economic crisis and the repercussions of the coronavirus disease pandemic. Deteriorating food and water security would exacerbate the situation, compound the suffering of the Syrian people and hamper efforts to contain the pandemic.

It is therefore necessary to address the various factors of the crisis and the drivers of instability, in order to prevent the situation from degenerating further. In that connection, we would like to reiterate the need to prioritize the following:

First, a ceasefire must be established. The establishment of a ceasefire is both an urgent necessity and a long-term goal, especially in view of the recent increase in tension, violence and terrorism in several parts of Syria.

In this context, we reiterate the need to work towards the restoration of overall calm in order to bring about the conditions needed to improve the humanitarian situation and to create the safe, neutral and stable environment required to move the political process forward. We also urge all parties to exercise restraint, adhere to international law and international humanitarian law and strive to ensure that civilians, civilian and medical facilities and medical and humanitarian workers are protected.

At the same time, Tunisia stresses that it is necessary to combat terrorist organizations that are on the Security Council lists in an effective, collective and coordinated manner and in accordance with international law. Doing so is essential any long-term political solution to the Syrian crisis and a prerequisite to restoring security and stability to Syria and the region.

Secondly, there is a need to guarantee humanitarian access. Tunisia commends the efforts of the United Nations, its partners and specialized agencies to ensure that life-saving assistance can continue to reach all parts of Syria and is expanded to meet the growing need, using the various access methods available. We reiterate that it is incumbent upon all parties to help facilitate the safe and prompt delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance to those in need, without discrimination.

Thirdly, early recovery efforts must be bolstered by maintaining the infrastructure for basic services and providing decent livelihoods. In this regard, it would be useful if the scope of humanitarian projects and programmes could be expanded to include the maintenance of hospitals, schools, roads, water supply, electricity and sanitation, while providing decent and sustainable livelihoods for the affected and most vulnerable groups, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the response to the humanitarian crisis.

Lastly, the Security Council has stressed in successive resolutions relating to the humanitarian situation and in its resolution 2254 (2015) that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution to the crisis.

As the conflict approaches the ten-year mark, we reiterate our firm position that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The only way forward is to expedite a political settlement based on resolution 2254 (2015) that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and facilitated by the United Nations, as that will end the human suffering of the Syrian people, address the deep roots of the crisis, preserve the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and restore peace and stability to Syria and the region.

**Annex 15****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

Let me start by marking Ambassador Craft's final meeting by simply saying how much I have appreciated her honesty, integrity, compassion and friendship during her time on the Security Council. I have no doubt that she is proud of that too.

I also want to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

I listened carefully to the Russian Ambassador's statement, as I always do, and I think he would be the very first to admit that it was a lengthy statement, longer than the five minutes that we, as Security Council members, recommend to each other in presidential note S/2017/507. I, in no way, wish to be impolite about this — is an issue we all have, not only he. And that tells me, as winter bites in Syria and as Mr. Pedersen seeks action on the Constitutional Committee, that we need to take the proper time as a Council to consider these two issues and return to separate meetings, as has been our practice over many years.

As the Syrian conflict approaches its eleventh year, the situation continues to deteriorate. Over 500,000 people have died during the conflict, the vast majority of them civilians. The conditions for the millions of civilians displaced by the conflict are dire. Since the beginning of the crisis, the United Kingdom has given over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid in Syria and in surrounding countries. And I encourage others, especially those who support the Syrian regime and who say they are so worried about the impact of sanctions, do more themselves to support the Syrian people.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to compound the humanitarian situation, with confirmed cases having now surpassed 42,000. The true figure is undoubtedly much higher. All donors will need to work together to ensure the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines across Syria, while ensuring that those in most acute need of a vaccine are prioritized. The United Kingdom is committed to working with the United Nations to lay the groundwork for the delivery of vaccines and longer-term pandemic preparedness. There are complex challenges to overcome, but the World Health Organization and other United Nations delivery agencies have the United Kingdom's full support.

Efficient, effective cross-border and cross-line access, as we have heard from the United Nations and from non-governmental organizations for many months now, remains essential to meeting the needs of the Syrian people. Over the course of 2020, we saw the loss of three border crossings and a further increase in humanitarian needs by over 2 million people. Cross-line access alone is sadly not enough to sustain the humanitarian needs of 30 million people — that is, about three quarters of the population.

Aid running through Bab Al-Hawa has never been more important, and the rationale for renewing the cross-border mandate in the summer has not diminished. Indeed, with the prospect of a vaccine, the delivery of which may well require complex storage and supply chains, it only grows stronger.

In order for the humanitarian response to keep up with growing needs, the volume and frequency of aid being delivered via Damascus to north-east Syria needs to increase, including to those areas outside of regime control. That means alleviating bureaucratic hurdles and ending arbitrary denials of access for aid workers, an

abhorrent example noted by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock last month of the blocking of food aid to 220,000 people in Raqqa is simply unacceptable.

We are also concerned about the recent water crisis in regime-controlled Syria. As with many serious problems, rampant corruption has played its role, with regime diesel supplies designated for the city's water pump generators being sold illegally. The food, fuel and economic crises, all of the regime's making, sadly continue.

An improvement in the humanitarian situation is possible only with a reduction in violence. We remain deeply concerned by ongoing violations of agreed ceasefires, with routine violence in the north-west, including shelling and sporadic air strikes, an escalation in tensions in the north-east and a surge in attacks claimed by Da'esh.

The political settlement envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), which the Council adopted unanimously just over five years ago, remains the best means of resolving Syria's multiple crises. It is vital that the parties engage constructively on the substantive issues of the Constitution during the fifth session of the Constitutional Committee this month. Progress to date has been too slow, but there is a sense that we are approaching a watershed moment. We hope the regime delegation will arrive in Geneva willing to engage in good faith in the talks.

Without a new constitution, free and fair elections involving all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, cannot take place as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015). Plans to hold elections according to the previous Constitution would contradict the political process by the Council. The United Kingdom will not recognize elections that are neither free nor fair.

Free and fair elections should involve all Syrians, including members of the diaspora. If the Syrian regime wants refugees to return, they need to ensure that the conditions set out in paragraph 14 of resolution 2254 (2015) are met and that Syrian citizens will not be returning to the status quo that led to and sustained this conflict.

Let me turn to the subject of sanctions. The Syrian regime and its Russian backers blame "Western" sanctions for the failing economy in Syria. In reality, the regime has devastated its own economy through nepotism, corruption and by funding brutal violence against its people. It must bear responsibility for that. On 1 January, the United Kingdom's autonomous Syria sanctions regime designated 353 individuals and entities responsible for repressing civilians in Syria. It is the United Kingdom's most extensive sanctions regime. I want to be clear: United Kingdom sanctions target those individuals in the regime responsible for civilian suffering and prevent those who support and benefit from the regime from entering the United Kingdom, channelling money through United Kingdom banks and profiting from our economy. Food and medicine are not subject to sanctions, and exemptions are in place for humanitarian aid and the COVID-19 response.

As we have said so often, the path to the removal of sanctions is clear. Rather than interfering with aid, bombing schools and hospitals and detaining and torturing its people, the Syrian regime must heed the calls of its population, engage seriously with Special Envoy Pedersen and the United Nations-led political process and achieve a peaceful end to the conflict.

**Annex 16****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

This meeting marks my final opportunity to address the Security Council as the Permanent Representative of the United States of America. When I assumed this position, in September of 2019, I vowed to speak in this body with moral clarity, to always have in mind those who could not be present themselves — families fleeing the abominable Maduro regime, Rohingya communities desperate for a return to normalcy, South Sudanese women exhausted by the inaction of political leaders. And the besieged people of Syria — bombed, starved, displaced and tormented by the Al-Assad regime and its supporters. That this body has failed to do more to address the needs of the Syrian people and promote real, positive action towards a peaceful resolution to this crisis is scandalous.

The United States has worked tirelessly with partners to push for a change in the political dynamics that afflict the Council and continue to deny the Syrian people a path towards peace, stability and hope. The Council is failing millions of Syria's civilians, not just today but for more than a decade. It is appalling. As Ambassadors, we serve our respective countries. However, we have the responsibility to be selfless public servants who work to improve the lives of people around the world.

To Mark Lowcock and Geir Pedersen, my sincere gratitude for their untiring efforts and those of their respective teams. They have, and they will continue to have, the full support of the United States for their work to alleviate suffering and to bring this conflict to a peaceful, negotiated solution.

The United States welcomes plans for the convening of the fifth round of the Constitutional Committee next week in Geneva. The important work of drafting a new constitution has been delayed for far too long. The Al-Assad regime must meaningfully participate in the Committee's work to deliver a constitution that represents the entirety of the Syrian people. We also underscore Special Envoy Pedersen's authority to take measures he deems appropriate to facilitate the parties' efforts to begin work on a new constitution itself.

We are under no illusions here. It is clear that the Al-Assad regime is deliberately stalling the Committee's progress to distract the international community as the regime prepares to carry out a sham presidential election this year. Any such election would be illegitimate. The vast majority of the international community and reputable non-governmental organizations agree that the current elections framework in the 2012 Syrian Constitution does not meet the most basic international standards.

The United States will not recognize the elections as legitimate per resolution 2254 (2015), a policy shared by nations on this call. Syria must undertake steps, as unanimously agreed in resolution 2254 (2015), to enable the participation of refugees, internally displaced persons and the diaspora in any Syrian elections that occur pursuant to a new constitution.

Clearly, the Al-Assad regime hopes to use the 2021 Syrian presidential elections to further the false narrative that the Al-Assad regime has participated constructively in the political process per resolution 2254 (2015), that Al-Assad's rule is legitimate and that reconstruction and normalization should follow. That could not be further from the truth.

This cynical ploy ignores the tragic realities faced by millions of Syrians who have been uprooted from their homes, by the families whose loved ones remain arbitrarily detained and are missing and by the civilians killed or injured by the

regime and its craven allies' barbaric attacks. The United States will withhold reconstruction funding until the United Nations political process is completed.

The Constitutional Committee is only one aspect of the necessary political steps to be taken under resolution 2254 (2015), and we urge the Special Envoy to redouble efforts to advance progress in the other aspects of the political file. As many as 130,000 Syrians remain missing after being arbitrarily detained by the regime and continue to suffer inhumane conditions without access to adequate health care.

We condemn the Al-Assad regime's systematic campaign of arbitrary detention, torture and mistreatment of prisoners. There must be an immediate and serious effort led by the Special Envoy to secure the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons held by the Al-Assad regime, to provide information on missing persons to their families and to allow humanitarian access to detention facilities. The Syrian people should not have to wait one more day for action on the release of detainees and missing persons.

Millions of Syrians have fled to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and many millions remain internally displaced since the beginning of the conflict. We thank Syria's neighbours for their incredible generosity.

I had the great privilege of meeting with the Syrian refugees in Turkey. These are real people, not just numbers that we repeat each month in the Council. I recall meeting the brave, selfless members of the White Helmets — Ammar, Isameel, Abdilhadi, Maisaa and Afnan. They told me of the despair and suffering inside Syria, the children without adequate food, the pregnant women without access to health care and the communities living in terror. They pleaded for the world to wake up to the horrors of this conflict and take action to restore Syria to a place of peace.

And I must say that we have to count on people — the honest press, like Sena Alkan at CNN Turkey — to continue to be the voice of refugees and to continue to highlight what Turkey has done in taking in Syrian refugees.

And each month our Russian colleagues tell us a very different story to this body, a story breathtaking in its dishonesty and cynicism. To all those struggling to survive the reality in Syria, displaced by the murderous regime and disregarded by its allies, the United States says this: we are with you.

Last March, I visited the Bab Al-Hawa crossing to see the United Nations humanitarian operation in action. From the points along the Turkish border you can see people — internally displaced from their homes, their lives uprooted — living in informal camps huddled against the fence that separates Turkish soil from Syria. These are the people, the majority of whom are women and children, who have entrusted us in the Council to keep them safe, to keep them alive.

When resolution 2533 (2020) is up for renewal, in July, I urge members not to abandon the Syrian people. I urge them to do everything in their power to keep this indispensable border crossing, Bab Al-Hawa, authorized for United Nations deliveries of food, shelter and medical supplies to millions of Syrians. Failure to renew that mandate will send a signal that the Council is not on the side of the Syrian people, but rather supporting a regime that has terrorized and systemically starved its people in the dogged pursuit of its own power.

The United States looks forward to working closely with the new co-penholders, Ireland and Norway, and every member of the Council later this year to renew resolution 2533 (2020). Anything short would be an abdication of our responsibilities.

The situation in Rukban continues to demand the attention of the Council. It has now been 16 months since the Al-Assad regime allowed the last humanitarian delivery to Rukban. Let me repeat that: 16 months. The Al-Assad regime and

Russia must allow unhindered humanitarian access to the camp, including United Nations humanitarian delivery convoys. This kind of politicizing and weaponizing of aid should outrage the Council and trigger immediate action to deliver aid to this community now.

My time as my country's representative to this body comes to its close. There is nothing more certain that I have learned in time: to everything there is a season. For me it concludes as it began, with still the strongest conviction that the heart of all Government is stewardship — not to rule, but to serve. That it is as agents and delegates of the people that we hold what offices we fill. And it is by our fidelity to the principles of freedom and democracy, upon which the security and welfare of all our citizens are secured, that we will be measured.

We are surely, as the world most always is, in turbulent times. This body grew out of a historic turbulence. The anxieties flowing from a pandemic very likely, and only naturally, may detract somewhat from the mindfulness of the causes all Governments must serve, and the values all Governments must cherish.

Of those, again I say, freedom and democracy are cardinal. As the wisest of all our Presidents reminded my nation, in another period of terrible turbulence, both are always being tested or challenged. Lincoln is a star in the firmament, and he surely never shone more brightly than when, in the briefest of all presidential addresses, he gave voice to the hope and prayer that “government by the people, for the people and of the people” should not “perish from the earth.”

Freedom and democracy are always under test. That is why this body exists. And from my personal viewpoint, it has been an incredible honour to serve here, and to serve my country by doing so. I thank the Council for allowing me the opportunity to serve with the finest club, I believe, in the world. And I am forever grateful and will forever be watching and cheering the Council from the sidelines. And I just know that it will continue to make differences for people who do not have a voice.

**Annex 17****Statement by the Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Pham Hai Anh**

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their informative briefings. I would also like to welcome the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran to this meeting.

Let me begin our first statement of 2021 on this file by reaffirming our strong advocacy for a comprehensive political solution that is led and owned by Syrians themselves, facilitated by the United Nations and in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and which fully adheres to international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of Syria.

Ahead of the upcoming session in the framework of the Constitutional Committee, our delegation urges the parties concerned to engage constructively. We hope that the parties will also be able to agree on a timeline for further discussions in order to consolidate trust and confidence.

Even though sporadic insecurity incidents have been happening, we take note of the relatively calm situation on the ground as the ceasefire agreement in Idlib continues to hold. This is a favourable opportunity for the parties to invest in dialogue and negotiation in order to accelerate the broader political process, for the sake of peace, stability and development for all Syrian people.

Viet Nam will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations, the Special Envoy and all international partners in that regard. We call on all parties to the conflict to create the most favourable conditions for a peaceful solution in Syria by exercising maximum restraint and refraining from actions that could lead to further escalation.

With regard to the humanitarian aspect, we are concerned about the continuously deteriorating situation. Meanwhile, cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) keep increasing, putting further pressure on the already dire socioeconomic crisis. There is still no sign of improvement when it comes to the gravity of food insecurity and shortage of basic goods.

In the current crisis, the people who suffer the most are those in vulnerable groups — internally displaced persons (IDP), the elderly, women and children. It is reported that an additional 50 per cent of the children in the north-west are dropping out of schools because of impacts related to COVID-19. Many of them have to work in order to support their families. Millions of them are internally displaced and living in inadequate shelter conditions across the country.

We are also concerned over the impacts of fighting, improvised explosive devices, terrorist activities and so on, which are causing serious protection challenges in many regions, especially the north-west, the north-east and the south. Norms of international humanitarian law must be fully respected.

Against the backdrop of overwhelming humanitarian needs across Syria, we once again call for greater cooperation among the parties concerned in order to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access and to facilitate humanitarian response in all parts of the country. We call on the international community to continue its assistance to the Syrian people in response to those needs.

The current alarming humanitarian situation also necessitates sustainable solutions to address food and water insecurity as well as COVID-19 impacts,

especially in various IDP camps. It is also important to make sure that sanctions do not hamper the Syrian people's capacity to respond to the pandemic.

The one and only sustainable way to end the decade-long predicament of the Syrian people is through a political solution. To achieve that goal, the international community's unity in supporting Syria cannot be overemphasized. We sincerely hope that 2021 will bring about tangible results.

**Annex 18****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

I wish to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Lowcock for their briefings.

We reiterate our firm position that the crisis in Syria must be settled peacefully. In that context, we underline the importance and contribution of the Astana format to launching a political process, including through the establishment of the Constitutional Committee, which will hold its next session next week. We wish its participants success.

Iran supports the current United Nations activities in Syria. Our Special Envoy on Syria is working in close cooperation with Special Envoy Pedersen to support his efforts in facilitating the work of the Committee, which must continue its activities without any external interference or pressure or setting any artificial deadline for its conclusion.

Concurrent with the work of the Constitutional Committee, serious efforts must be made in other areas. The first and most important one is to continue fighting all terrorist groups, as their presence and criminal activities not only threaten the security and territorial integrity of Syria but also represent a threat to peace and security in the region.

While the protection of civilians must be a guiding principle in combating terrorist groups, they must not be allowed to consolidate their presence and conduct their atrocious activities uninterrupted.

Likewise, fighting terrorism must not be used as a pretext to support any separatist tendencies and illegitimate self-rule initiatives, or to violate Syrian sovereignty. In that context, through the occupation of parts of Syria, the United States continues to violate the territorial integrity of Syria. In fact, the United States is pursuing its illegitimate geopolitical interests, including by shielding and supporting certain terrorist groups. All such acts are in material breach of international law and must come to an end immediately.

The imposition of unilateral sanctions on the Syrian people is yet another unlawful act by the United States and some other countries. While the Syrians are seriously suffering from terrorists acts and the coronavirus disease pandemic, such inhumane sanctions are simply adding insult to injury, targeting the most vulnerable people the most. We totally reject the imposition of illegal and illegitimate unilateral sanctions and call for their immediate removal, as they prevent the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and obstruct the reconstruction process of this war-torn country.

Along the same lines, we strongly condemn Israel's continued aggressions against Syria. Such provocative military adventurism must stop now.

Iran will continue to support the people and the Government of Syria to overcome the threats of terrorism and foreign occupation, rebuild their country and ensure its unity and territorial integrity.

**Annex 19****Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

My delegation would like once again to express its thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your successful and outstanding management of the work of the Security Council this month. The Council's agenda this month featured important items and issues, including a panel discussion on the item entitled "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts", and the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1373 (2001) following the criminal and abhorrent terrorist bombings that targeted New York City on 11 September 2001.

At the time, we had hoped that the adoption of resolution 1373 (2001) would help to reorient our compass and point us towards the goal to which we all aspire, namely, strengthening coordinated international cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations and its mechanisms in order to counter terrorism and the financing thereof, and to combat extremist ideology and the distorted and false doctrines that promote terrorism. After adopting resolution 1373 (2001), the Security Council adopted several resolutions concerning counter-terrorism. The aim of those resolutions, as some believed, was to fill any gaps and address any deficiencies in the previous resolutions or the implementation thereof and to address such issues as preventing the payment of ransoms to terrorists, combating Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Nusra Front and the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters or "terrorists without borders", and countering the financing of terrorism, including by severing ties between terrorist organizations and transnational criminal networks.

Regrettably, it would later become evident that all those hopes were nothing but pipe dreams, because Western States have exploited counter-terrorism. On some occasions, they have used it to destroy States Members of the United Nations and to attempt to eliminate their economic and cultural achievements and plunder their wealth. On other occasions, they have used it to stigmatize Member States by falsely accusing them of supporting terrorism, along the lines of the spurious charges that were levelled against Cuba and Iran a few days ago. In yet other instances, Western States have exploited counter-terrorism to cover up their own demonstrated commitment to terrorism and the open sponsorship of terrorism by the Governments of well-known States.

Politicization, selectivity, multiple standards and support for terrorism have overshadowed this important issue, and the primary beneficiary of this have been the terrorist organizations and their leaders, who now boast of such monikers as "jihadists", "freedom fighters", "non-State moderate armed opposition" and the "caliphate", and who enjoy the support, patronage and free rein given them to kill, sow chaos and destruction, while purporting to bring democracy to many of our countries through such civilized methods as beheading, eating livers, destroying archaeological relics, branding people as apostates and demeaning religions and religious symbols.

We have repeatedly warned that those who seek to spread chaos and devastation, adopt inflammatory and hateful rhetoric and promote such slogans as "creative chaos", heralded by a former United States Secretary of State and later brought to fruition by her successor, will not escape the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, our warnings have been ignored, as confirmed by the recent events that transpired in the capital of the host country of our Organization. What

happened there was the embodiment of chaos as policy and the fruit of spreading havoc and inflaming tensions.

Of course, the terrorist acts recently perpetrated in Washington, D.C., would have been welcomed, supported and praised by the Governments of Western countries if they had transpired in one of the capitals of many of our Member States. They would have been called a “spring” or “colour revolutions” and characterized as “an expression of democracy” and “the exercise of freedoms in all its splendour”. However, because the events occurred in a prominent Western capital, they have been met with a torrent of condemnation and criticism, and a call for social media to condemn such behaviour and block the pages of those who endorse it. We do not object to such calls, nor do we condone chaos, demagoguery or violence anywhere. Nevertheless, we take notice of that selectivity and are astonished that Western extremist groups continue to exploit the same social media sites to foment strife and conflict, promote comparable subversive practices, violence and hatred, and encourage terrorism without borders to target many of our Member States, relying on hackneyed slogans devoid of moral substance.

We once again call for strengthening genuine, coordinated international cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations to combat and eradicate terrorism, and for support to be extended to the Syrian State and its allies in their effort to combat the ISIL and Al-Nusra Front terrorist organizations and related entities and individuals, entities that continue killing Syrians because the West continues to cover up their crimes. An example of this occurred a few days when terrorists attacked a bus in the Kabajib area on the road between Tadmur and Deir ez-Zor, and fuel tankers and civilian vehicles on the Athriya-Salamiyah road, killing dozens of civilians and military personnel. These terrorist attacks were carried out by ISIL members who had come from the area controlled by the occupying American forces in the occupied area of Tanf, where the Rukban camp is located. These are the same terrorists who have previously carried out bloody terrorist attacks on civilians in Suwayda’ Governorate and targeted the Syrian Arab Army and its allies, gas pipelines and power lines. It is no secret that the occupying American forces in north-eastern Syria also directed their proxies, the separatist so-called Syrian Democratic Forces militias, to release ISIL members in their custody, in order to revive that organization for use in Syria and Iraq. Hypocrisy has reached a heinous new low. The American Administration claims to have eliminated the ISIL terrorist organization, even as it is restructuring ISIL and deploying it to target my country.

In the north-west, terrorist entities, foremost among them the Levant Liberation Organization/Al-Nusra Front and affiliated groups, continue to control areas of Idlib Governorate and its environs, holding civilians hostage and using them as human shields. Over the past few years, I have sent you hundreds of official letters about the crimes of these terrorist organizations and those organizations’ sponsors and controllers. My most recent letter, dated 11 January and addressed to the Secretary-General and the Security Council, contained information on the terrorist groups operating under the auspices of and sponsored by the Turkish regime, namely, the Sultan Murad Brigade, the Hamzat Division and the Al-Mu’tasim Billah, Ahrar al-Sharqiyah and Hasakah Shield groups. These groups operate in the area of Ra’s al-Ayn and its countryside and as far as Tall Abyad and Ayn Isa in Al-Raqqa governorate. They continue to kill, plunder, impose Turkification, forcibly displace, smuggle, use chemical weapons and steal farmers’ wheat, barley and seed crops and transport them to Turkey through the Ra’s al-Ayn and Tall Abyad border crossings. This is in addition to the other crimes they have committed, all of which I cannot recount now because there is not sufficient time to do that. The Governments of well-known States have kept the Security Council from putting an end to those crimes and holding the perpetrators and their controllers accountable.

In spite of the global increase in coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases, and the catastrophic effects of the pandemic on the economies and vital sectors of the majority of States Members of the United Nations, the United States of America and the European Union continue to impose additional coercive measures on my country, Syria, and on other countries, ignoring the calls to put an end to these illegal measures that have been made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for Syria and dozens of senior representatives of the Organization. Meanwhile, the representatives of the Western States that are pursuing policies of siege and collective punishment of peoples continue to speak of alleged humanitarian and medical exemptions. Those are nothing more than claims, as proven by the facts on the ground.

At the Arria Formula meeting convened by the Security Council on 25 November 2020, you heard a briefing by the Secretary-General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, a non-governmental organization and the main partner of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and a number of other intergovernmental and non-governmental relief organizations. He explained that receiving funds from abroad to fund humanitarian work took months and entailed a huge volume of paperwork and correspondence as a result of coercive measures, hindering the purchase of medicines and humanitarian needs and the provision of food baskets to beneficiaries. He said that the fuel embargo made it difficult to operate humanitarian aid trucks and ambulances and deploy humanitarian workers and medical personnel and noted that the coercive measures made it impossible to secure many basic humanitarian supplies and manage warehouses. Instead of expanding and strengthening support for noble humanitarian action and the enormous effort of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which lost 65 of its volunteers during the current crisis, they chose to do harm to this venerable institution and tarnish its reputation.

This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the repercussions of coercive measures on the lives of all Syrians. Do we believe the accounts of my Western colleagues about the alleged exemptions, or do we believe the tangible realities that we observe on a daily basis?

Some are now warning that the economic harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will limit aid and funding for the humanitarian response, thereby reducing the number of recipients of food aid. Meanwhile, certain Western Governments continue to pursue policies that are based on domination, occupation and the plunder of the livelihoods and resources of peoples, instead of taking action to overcome such a monumental challenge, one that could cause human suffering in many countries and drive more of their nationals to emigrate and seek asylum. This is still see happening, as the occupying American forces continue to loot my country's oil, gas, archaeological relics and agricultural crops, burning and destroying what they cannot steal. These crimes are also being committed in coordination with the Turkish occupiers in parts of the north and north-west of my country All of this is being done in partnership with terrorist organizations and entities and proxy separatist militias, as I just mentioned. What do Mr. Lowcock and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs make of that? Is it not more appropriate, better and fairer for the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter by putting an end to occupation and preventing the resources of peoples from being plundered and their development capacities and gains from being destroyed? Is that not preferable to allowing certain parties to loot that wealth and then to cover up their crimes by praising them for generously financing your so-called humanitarian efforts and allowing your cross-border convoys?

Today marks the end of a presidential term in the United States that was characterized by extremism, aggression, sanctions, withdrawal from United Nations system organizations and disavowal of international treaty obligations. We hope

---

that the new administration will be wise and realize that its status as a permanent member of the Security Council is, above all else, a great responsibility that requires it to fulfil its commitment to maintain international peace and security and uphold the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. That responsibility also requires it to refrain from attacking and occupying my country and plundering its wealth and obliges it to withdraw its occupying forces and stop backing separatist militias, illegitimate entities and attempts to threaten the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The fifth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee will take place in a few days. As has been repeatedly stressed, the Constitution, which is the country's supreme law, is a purely national, Syrian affair. Likewise, shaping the future of Syria is a purely national, Syrian affair. Consequently, my delegation reaffirms that the political process facilitated by the United Nations is Syrian-owned and Syrian-led. We stress that, in order for the Committee's work to succeed, its agreed rules of procedure must be respected, and any external interference in its work must be rejected, as must any attempts by certain Governments to dictate the outcome of or impose artificial timetables on the Committee's work.

**Annex 20****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting. I also thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings.

At the outset, I would like to join other colleagues and pay tribute to Ambassador Kelly Craft for her personal dedication to highlighting the plight of the Syrian people. I applaud her for walking the talk in advocating the rights of all Syrians, including those who sought refuge in Turkey, as well as her personal efforts for extending the United Nations cross-border mechanism, which is lifeline for millions of Syrians.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains extremely worrisome. The Syrian people are caught between violence, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and harsh winter conditions. People are suffering due to limited access to health-care services, water and food. There are urgent needs for shelter and other basic necessities.

In the north-west, with its indiscriminate military campaign, the regime has rendered health services unprepared for the global health crisis. Recently, the number of positive COVID-19 cases has risen steadily in north-west Syria, reaching record levels.

While access to health and adequate sanitation in the context of continuous displacement remains challenging, humanitarian organizations actively operate to deliver life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable. We are in close contact with United Nations agencies on vaccination planning for these people. Three million internally displaced persons living in the north-west are in acute need of humanitarian assistance and depend upon the aid channelled from Turkey.

The United Nations cross-border mechanism continues to be the only instrument to meet the humanitarian needs. Since the adoption of the resolution 2533 (2020), around 4.000 convoys have channelled humanitarian assistance into the region through the single crossing point of Bab Al-Hawa. We also continue to deliver pandemic-related items in accordance with the recent trilateral agreement among the Turkish Red Crescent, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization.

Let me repeat once again that there is no alternative that can match the scale and scope of the United Nations cross-border operations. It is deplorable that the Security Council failed to re-authorize the Bab Al-Salam crossing point, leaving hundreds of thousands of people at the mercy of the Al-Assad regime. I am obliged to remind the Council of the urgent need to reopen that gate, and I request the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility in accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/193, on the human rights situation in Syria.

I have voiced in previous meetings that shelter is the most critical need in the north-west. I am pleased to inform the Council that, as part of the ongoing national project to alleviate shelter needs in Idlib, Turkey finalized the construction of more than 27,000 housing units. Our aim is to provide shelter to more than 52,000 families in the coming weeks. It is crucial that all international stakeholders and donors prioritize funding such projects.

For more than a year now, electricity disruptions hindering the proper functioning of the Allouk water station have been an issue of concern. As I have explained on numerous occasions, deliberate interruptions by the Kurdish Workers

Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) terrorist organization continue to put half a million innocent lives at risk and impede efforts to effectively combat the pandemic. Although we have repeated our calls to all interested parties and actively contributed to the efforts to restore the water supply, the problem remains unsolved. And — no surprise — together with the PKK/YPG, the regime is also doing its part, by grounding circuit interrupters on power lines to the Allouk water system. We all know the perpetrators and their quest for tactical gains by not ensuring the sustainability of the system and the provision of water to Al-Hassakeh in full capacity.

Let me also touch upon the political situation. As the sole functioning mechanism within the political process, the Constitutional Committee should advance its work in an accelerated and productive manner. To that end, Turkey will continue its collaboration with the United Nations and other relevant actors, as well as its coordination within the Astana framework.

During the fifth round of meetings, scheduled for 25 to 29 January, the Committee should focus on the constitutional principles, with a view to yielding concrete results. That is critical for the effective functioning of the Committee. The Syrian sides should be advised and warned accordingly. It is imperative to fend off attempts at stonewalling. We support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts towards advancing the political process.

We attach importance to the Astana process as a critical element of the overall efforts at finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We are working on rescheduling the fifteenth meeting of the Astana process in the coming weeks, which had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

Preserving the ceasefire in Idlib is crucial for protection of civilians and preventing new migration waves. Having said that, the regime continues its ceasefire violations. In line with our efforts to maintain the ceasefire, and within the framework of the 5 March additional protocol, we continue our technical engagement with the Russian Federation.

Turkey also continues its resolute fight against terrorist organizations on the ground. Thanks to our counter-terrorism efforts against Da'esh and the PKK/YPG, 420,000 Syrians have voluntarily returned to the Syrian territories cleared of terrorist threats. The PKK/YPG continues to carry out terrorist attacks targeting civilians in northern Syria. Since October 2019 alone, the PKK/YPG has launched over 300 terrorist attacks.

Most recently, the bomb attack it carried out in a marketplace in Rasulayn on 2 January resulted in the deaths of six people, including two children, and injured 11 people. Another terrorist attack carried out by the PKK/YPG with a bomb-laden vehicle three days ago in a marketplace in Azaz killed at least one civilian, while injuring several others.

Such bloody terrorist attacks continue to be largely ignored. The international community must unequivocally condemn them and expose their perpetrators. A collective fight must be waged against this terrorist organization. Otherwise, the PKK/YPG will not cease its separatist actions against the territorial integrity of Syria, or its heinous attacks against civilians.

It is time to end this ambivalent approach and call a spade a spade. The international community must refrain from actions that would violate international law and serve the separatist agenda of the PKK/YPG hiding behind the name of so-called "Syrian Democratic Forces". Turkey will continue to stand against the PKK/YPG's attempts to gain legitimacy and its efforts to consolidate its totalitarian grip over the north-east through oppression and economic incentives.

Let me conclude by reiterating our strong determination to address the plight of the Syrian people and actively contribute to a political settlement that will meet their legitimate aspirations.

As to the previous speaker, I will not honour him with a reply. As I have stated many times, I do not consider him as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

---