



Security Council

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Letter dated 23 December 2020 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 copies of the briefings provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany (on behalf of Belgium and Germany), Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, 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, 16 December 2020. 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 briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Jerry Matthews **Matjila**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

I will focus today on five areas: first, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19); secondly, the humanitarian impact of the economic crisis; thirdly, the protection of civilians; fourthly, humanitarian access; and, lastly, our assessment of the humanitarian situation as 2020 draws to a close.

The number of reported COVID-19 cases in Syria continues to rise, although limited testing in all parts of the country makes the extent of the outbreak impossible to assess with any certainty. Bed occupancy rates of 100 per cent are being reported in Sweida, Homs and other governorates, but we also know that many people who are sick are reluctant to seek in-patient treatment.

The number of reported cases in schools, which are often overcrowded and often suffer poor or damaged infrastructure, more than tripled during November. The World Health Organization and UNICEF are working with education providers to strengthen COVID-19 preventive actions in schools.

Beyond the immediate health impact, we are extremely worried about the secondary effects of the pandemic, including on access to education. An analysis recently by Save the Children found that an estimated two thirds of children in northern Syria are out of school. Apart from COVID-19, teachers say that children are dropping out because of rising poverty.

That brings me to my second point, which is the impact of the economic crisis. As my Deputy told the Security Council last month (see S/2020/1147, annex 1), even subsidized prices of essentials have surged. Prices of subsidized bread have doubled, and prices of subsidized diesel have more than doubled, since September. Both remain in short supply, and reports continue of long queues at bakeries and petrol stations.

The market price of a standard reference food basket is higher now than at any point since price monitoring by the World Food Programme (WFP) began in Syria in 2013. More than 80 per cent of displaced families across the country now say that their income does not cover their needs. Families in which women are the primary breadwinners are even worse off. They make 30 per cent less, on average, than other displaced families.

The impact on the most vulnerable is clear from the data. In the north-west, child stunting increased by 5 per cent this year. We estimate that 34 per cent of children in north-west Syria — more than one in three children under the age of five — suffer from stunting. In areas of displacement in the north-west, up to 37 per cent of mothers are also malnourished.

My next point is the protection of civilians from hostilities in recent weeks, putting civilians at risk in the north-west and increasingly in an area such as Ayn Issa. We all know the immediate and devastating human cost of military escalations in Syria. I echo the calls of the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy for a nationwide ceasefire.

Infrastructure that is indispensable to civilians' survival must also be protected. Allouk water station again stopped pumping water on 3 December as a result of a disruption in the power supply to the station. That is the fifteenth disruption this year, and it affects almost half a million people in Al-Hassakeh, forcing them to resort to potentially unsafe alternative sources of water.

Humanitarian organizations are trucking more than 2,000 cubic metres of water to the area every day and are working to scale up further, but that is neither enough nor sustainable. A solution therefore must be found to ensure an uninterrupted water supply from Allouk. In the meantime, safe access to water and electricity installations must continue for the technical teams.

In the north-west, water shortages also continue to be reported in Al-Bab city and surrounding areas, affecting 185,000 people. Electricity from Turkish providers last month increased pumping at local wells, but supply continues to fall short of needs. Water supply from the Ayn Al-Bayda pumping station to Al-Bab could meet those needs and should immediately resume.

My next point is humanitarian access. In October, a humanitarian organization delivering WFP food assistance in north-east Syria was instructed by the Syrian Government to stop distributing food aid to around 220,000 people in non-Government controlled areas of Raqqah governorate. Distributions to all areas were able to resume earlier this month after a two-month disruption.

Moreover, in the north-east, in late November, local authorities suspended operations of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) in Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps, which together accommodate some 65,000 people, which disrupted food distributions and waste management, as well as some health-care services. SARC activities resumed on 1 December.

Those incidents exemplify how vulnerable humanitarian operations in the north-east are to disruption. When aid is suspended, those most in need are the ones who suffer, and such suffering is needless. International humanitarian law requires that all parties allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.

In addition, three children died in a fire at the camp in Al-Hol last week, reportedly caused by a kerosene cooker. That tragic incident once again underscores the challenging conditions at Al-Hol. It is simply no place for children — tens of thousands of children — to grow up. Tent fires usually increase in the winter, as families try to keep warm with whatever means available to them. Unfortunately, we have to expect more such incidents in the coming months.

As another year comes to an end, families in Syria remain without respite after almost a decade of conflict. Millions have been displaced and impoverished. Millions have suffered trauma and deep personal loss. Even as active conflict in some areas has subsided, economic decay and the compounding impact of COVID-19 are driving deterioration in people's lives and experiences. Food insecurity and malnutrition are expected to rise significantly, as is the overall number of people in need of humanitarian assistance. An escalation of hostilities would be all the more devastating against that backdrop.

As we have briefed the Council for the past few months, one immediate concern is getting winter assistance to families, as temperatures are now dropping. Distributions are under way, with plans to reach more than 3 million people identified as those most in need. Current funding, however, will only allow us to reach 2.3 million of those 3 million people. I thank the donors who are supporting the effort, but more is needed.

Annex 2

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

Let me brief the Security Council today on the Constitutional Committee, the situation on the ground and the search for a wider process towards a political solution that implements resolution 2254 (2015).

As Council members know, the fourth session of the small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee convened in Geneva from 30 November to 4 December. Given the major challenges related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Switzerland, it took the dedication of Swiss authorities, United Nations staff and the Committee members themselves to hold the session safely, and I thank all for playing their part.

During the session, Committee members continued their dialogue on the agenda, which was in line with the mandate, terms of reference and core rules of procedure and focused on national foundations and principles. They discussed a wide range of topics and, towards the end of the week, the Government and opposition nominee positions were also reflected in overview presentations in writing.

The delegation nominated by the Syrian Government presented eight principles related to combating terrorism and condemning terrorist ideologies and support for terrorists; condemning unilateral coercive measures and the occupation of Syrian territory; rejecting separatism and separatist projects; supporting the Syrian Arab Army; promoting national identity; protecting cultural diversity; encouraging and guaranteeing refugee returns; and addressing humanitarian issues. They were presented as national foundations and principles and, as the delegation emphasized, were not explicitly linked to a future constitutional text.

The delegation nominated by the Syrian Negotiations Commission presented 23 points on a range of principles, including Syria's sovereignty; territorial integrity; international relations and commitment to international law; national identity; cultural diversity; democracy; political pluralism; the rule of law; the separation of powers; corruption; terrorism; citizenship; refugee returns; rights and freedoms; and social and economic principles.

Those 23 points were framed by the delegation as grounded in the 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles, which were affirmed in Sochi and in the Committee's mandate, and were presented by the delegation as points for development to form part of the basic principles within a new constitution.

Some civil society members of the middle third presented points on conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified refugee returns and related issues, such as the restitution of housing, land and property; restorative justice; and relevant independent and impartial constitutional mechanisms. Meanwhile, other members made interventions on a range of themes, such as the need to address terrorism, sanctions, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The impact of conflict on the lives of Syrian women and the importance of their role in political life and of ensuring equality between men and women were raised on many occasions during the session by members of all three delegations.

There were many stark differences among the positions and narratives presented within the Committee, and there were a few tense moments. I was not surprised by that, but it is positive that some positions were put forward concretely, and I was somewhat encouraged that members listened to each other's narratives with attentiveness and even respect, with fewer interruptions and points of order

than before and some genuine attempts to engage with each other's positions. My team and I listened carefully to all that was said and, in our opinion, it is possible to see potential common ground in the discussions — a potential that can be explored.

Consistent with the package agreed between the co-Chairs, they and the Committee members agreed that the fifth session of the small body will convene in Geneva from 25 to 29 January 2021, COVID-19 conditions permitting. Without any preconditions and as agreed, in line with the mandate, terms of reference and core rules of procedure, the agenda will focus on constitutional principles or basic principles of the Constitution.

I will engage both co-Chairs before the next session on how to ensure that the Committee moves, as its mandate states, from “preparing” a constitutional reform to “drafting” one. As the co-Chairs affirmed during the session, the Committee is mandated and empowered to do that by the agreement of the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission.

The Constitutional Committee, however, does need to improve its working methods. I would like to see the co-Chairs find a consensus on working methods that can promote the good functioning of the Committee and organize and structure its work, enabling it to consider specific constitutional items and draft provisions. In addition to a clear method for the fifth session, I believe that we also would need a workplan beyond that so that the Committee works expeditiously and continuously to produce results and continued progress, without foreign interference or externally imposed timelines.

I will continue to involve and consult Syrian women, and I met virtually with the Women's Advisory Board twice during the session of the Constitutional Committee. I continue to be impressed by their commitment to supporting the political process and arriving at inclusive proposals and solutions in the interest of all Syrians, both men and women. I am encouraged by their recent engagement with women's groups in different areas of Syria and the region to test some of their ideas on the constitution and to listen to the priorities and concerns of Syrian women.

This past month, I also continued to engage civil society through the Civil Society Support Room. Just yesterday, I resumed consultations with a diverse group of people who are experts in their respective fields. I did so using dedicated online virtual tools, allowing us to connect with a wide range of Syrian civil society actors from different parts of Syria and the diaspora.

I heard their strong concerns about what many feel is a lack of tangible political progress, including within the Constitutional Committee. They described the suffering in many parts of Syria, the economic meltdown and the impact of sanctions and growing criminality. They demanded progress on the detainee file and protection guarantees for refugees and their land and properties, and they called for greater civic space and protection for civil society. We will continue that dialogue. I will meet with them again tomorrow and continue to convey the voices and messages of civil society to the parties.

Those messages remind us that a credible constitutional process is important. They also remind us that there is a range of issues beyond the constitution that are of urgent concern to ordinary Syrians, as identified in resolution 2254 (2015), and need to be addressed.

Violent conflict and terrorism continue to be a stark reality for Syrians. Thanks to existing arrangements, including those involving Russia, Turkey and the United States, a fragile calm continues and there are ongoing efforts to address listed terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat

Tahrir Al-Sham. But that continues to fall well short of the nationwide ceasefire envisioned in resolution 2254 (2015). Shelling, air strikes and improvised explosive device attacks continue to kill and injure civilians. The dangers of renewed conflict are ever-present in the north-west, the south-west and even in the north-east, where there were troubling signs of tensions this month. Much more can and should be done to address terrorist groups in a manner that is consistent with international humanitarian law and ensures the protection of civilians.

With five international armies operating in Syria, the country remains a tinderbox for a major international incident, with potential implications across the region. Much more can be done to safeguard international peace and security, while also looking at practical and concrete ways to safeguard and restore Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity in the context of the resolution 2254 (2015) process. To achieve that, key players will need to be ready to come to the table together.

The humanitarian situation of millions of Syrians remains precarious and even catastrophic for some. As we have just heard from Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock and as he told the Council, much more must be done to ensure the necessary access and resources to meet their needs, with food insecurity a particular concern.

Indeed, Syrian civilians continue to suffer profound economic hardship, particularly with fresh currency depreciation and shortages of bread, fuel and medicine in the middle of what is set to be a hard winter, with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to spread. I continue to believe that more can and should be done to address those conditions, including by ensuring that any sanctions avoid aggravating the plight of Syrian civilians.

There has still been no meaningful action on detainees, abductees and missing persons, especially of late. Frankly, I am disappointed at where this file stands. It is not moving. Yet when we look at other examples in the region — take Yemen, for instance — it must be possible to unblock it. There is a need for meaningful action at scale, including access to prisons and detention facilities; the release of women, children, the sick and the elderly; and information on the missing. That is a humanitarian imperative and is also essential for building confidence and infusing the entire political process with much-needed hope.

The millions of Syrians who are refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not returning to their homes at any meaningful scale. I believe that much more can be done to address the range of conditions that should be in place for refugees and IDPs to return in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner.

Ultimately, following the adoption of a new Constitution and the creation of a safe, calm and neutral environment, resolution 2254 (2015) calls for free and fair elections, administered under United Nations supervision, to the highest standards of transparency and accountability and with the participation of all eligible Syrians, including the diaspora.

Let us be honest: after nearly a decade of conflict, the political process has not delivered for the Syrian people and they continue to suffer deeply, both inside and outside Syria. Only a political solution can end the suffering and prevent renewed conflict and instability, while protecting Syria's civilians and the region from further grave danger.

As we look back on 2020, we have two elements to build on — a relative calm with no shift in front lines since March 2020 and a Constitutional Committee. As we look to 2021, we need a deeper and broader process — a nationwide ceasefire,

substantive constitutional drafting and a wider effort to address the full range of issues, with actions to build confidence and movement, step for step. That will require a new form of international cooperation on Syria, with key players at the table and key issues on the table.

Given the deep divides in Syria, in the region and internationally, forging a consensus on exactly how to bring about mutual and reciprocal steps and a truly constructive Syria diplomacy is proving very difficult. But I am convinced it is possible and that there are common interests that make it so. I will continue to take stock — as I have started to do in recent weeks — by engaging the Syrian parties and key international stakeholders and seeking to identify new and additional ways to move the process forwards. Obviously, we cannot do that alone. We need the strong and united support of the Council in charting such a path towards the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). I count on the support of the Council.

Annex 3**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Philippe Kridelka**

[Original: French]

I align myself with the statement made by the representative of Germany (annex 8) on behalf of the co-penholders. I would now like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

I would 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 valuable briefings.

Approximately a year ago, on 20 December 2019, two Member States vetoed a draft resolution (S/2019/961) to renew cross-border access to Syria through the four crossing points that had been in place since 2014 (see S/PV.8697). Last summer, cross-border humanitarian access was further restricted, again after long and arduous negotiations.

As a co-penholder on the humanitarian situation in Syria for the past two years, Belgium has done its utmost to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria and in the region. Together with Germany, we have taken countless initiatives to that end. We have repeatedly called for the protection of civilians. We have reiterated the imperative for all parties to respect their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law. We have endeavoured to ensure full, neutral and unconditional humanitarian access to all Syrian territory. Our actions have been guided solely by the interests of Syrian children, women and men.

Indeed, as Belgium leaves the Security Council at the end of this month, the Syrian conflict continues to threaten regional and international peace and security. Even if the lines of the conflict inside Syria have not shifted recently, the plight of the Syrian people remains very worrisome. Eleven million people are still in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Millions of people remain internally displaced. Civilians and infrastructure have been deliberately targeted. Violations of international humanitarian law continue to occur. That cannot be tolerated. The responsibility for that situation lies largely with Damascus and its allies.

The vast majority of Member States around the table have shared our ongoing concerns and repeatedly supported our efforts. I would like to thank them for their consistency.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and his team in New York, as well as representatives of civil society for their advice. I would like to pay tribute to the humanitarian agencies and their partners that are on the front line every day.

Lastly, I would like to thank Ambassador Heusgen and his team for their collegiality in managing this very important issue. While our shared experience was very frustrating, taking on such an immense responsibility with a close neighbour made it easier.

My message today is also a call for peace. The conflict in Syria is in its tenth year. Over the past two years, like many of our partners in the international community, we had hoped that the establishment of the Constitutional Committee would open the door to a political solution. To date, those hopes have not been realized. However, the steps to be taken to achieve a political solution are relatively well known.

First, a ceasefire on the whole Syrian territory, controlled by the United Nations, should be put in place.

Secondly, all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, should engage fully, constructively and meaningfully with the Constitutional Committee. We therefore call on all parties with influence in Damascus to use it to that end.

Thirdly, concrete steps should be taken to implement the various elements of resolution 2254 (2015), the political road map the Council unanimously adopted in 2015. Only the lack of political will prevents Damascus from taking confidence-building measures, such as releasing political prisoners.

Fourthly, free and fair elections supervised by the United Nations should be held, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), in a secure and neutral environment, in which displaced persons, refugees and the diaspora should be able to participate. Any election not held under resolution 2254 (2015) would be a major step backwards and would undermine any prospects for peace.

Fifthly, those who have committed the most serious violations of international law must be held accountable, without delay. Belgium supports all initiatives to that end, including through the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as by referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Sixthly, no return of refugees and displaced persons should take place if not conducted in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner. International criteria are clear. It is up to Damascus to create those conditions.

Lastly, I reiterate my country's position on the issue of reconstruction. Belgium, alongside the European Union, will not assist in reconstruction efforts until concrete steps are taken towards a political solution.

For all the reasons I just listed, it is essential that monthly political briefings be maintained, along with monthly humanitarian briefings. Two parallel crises are at play. Although linked by the same intransigence demonstrated by the main political actors, they are separate. If a political solution to the conflict in Syria within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) is not found, they should be addressed in the Council every month, as called for by the relevant resolutions. The trend in recent months to merge the political and humanitarian formats into a single meeting only makes the two individual crises less visible and the suffering of the Syrian people more trivial.

It is our earnest wish that the Council will unite and fully assume its responsibility to act in the interest of peace and that it will redouble its efforts and work collectively to resolve the crisis. It is simply what the Syrian people deserve.

Annex 4**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

[Original: English and Chinese]

I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Pedersen, and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings. Consideration by the Security Council of both the political and humanitarian issues in Syria will help us tackle the Syrian issue in a comprehensive manner, while integrating political, security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian and other factors.

China welcomes the agreement between the Syrian parties on the time frame and agenda of the fourth and fifth sessions of the Constitutional Committee and is pleased that the fourth session was held smoothly. We look forward to the fifth session, scheduled for January. Those developments are encouraging. China appreciates the unremitting efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen. We hope that the Syrian parties will continue to maintain communication with the Special Envoy and deepen political dialogue on the basis of existing consensus. The international community should create favourable conditions to that end. The work of the Constitutional Committee must remain independent and free from foreign interference.

Since March this year, the situation has been generally calm in north-west Syria. We hope the Astana guarantors will strengthen interaction with the United Nations to maintain the ceasefire on the ground. All parties in Syria should actively respect the appeal by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a global ceasefire in order to stabilize the security situation in Syria. The main causes of the current security threat in Syria are foreign occupation and terrorist activities. The Syrian Government has the right to defend the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. The international community cannot stand idly by while terrorists find chances to wreak havoc. The international community should strengthen cooperation, adopt uniform standards and resolutely combat the scourge, in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions.

As noted by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, the Syrian people are facing very harsh conditions. In the past two months, the prices of fuel and bread have doubled, the Syrian pound has depreciated, people have lacked fuel to withstand the cold and 49 per cent of households report poor or borderline levels of food consumption, about which we are seriously concerned. For years, Syria has suffered from conflicts and illegal sanctions, compounded by economic and humanitarian crises. Effective actions must be taken to improve the living conditions of the Syrian people. We welcome the fact that the Syrian Government shoulders its responsibilities by actively advancing agricultural reform, promoting trade cooperation and reviving the domestic economy.

At the same time, we call on the international community to provide assistance to Syria to support the country in rebuilding infrastructure, while safeguarding people's livelihoods and fighting the coronavirus disease. China supports the United Nations in continuing humanitarian relief operations through cross-border and cross-line mechanisms, while engaging the participation of the Syrian Government. We have provided Syria with assistance worth approximately \$130 million through bilateral and multilateral channels and stand ready to continue to help and support the Syrian people.

Last month, China and four other members of the Security Council co-hosted an Arria Formula meeting on unilateral coercive measures. The Secretary General of the Syrian Red Crescent, Mr. Erksoussi, gave a briefing at the meeting. According to

him, unilateral coercive measures, especially the economic blockade, have severely hindered the resumption of work and production, the provision of medical supplies and humanitarian operations in Syria, resulting in an ever-larger number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, among whom women, children, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups suffer the most. We hope that the representatives of certain countries will watch the video of the meeting to learn about the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian people and determine whether the so-called humanitarian exemption is as effective as they boast. We hope that they can empathize with the Syrian people instead of turning a blind eye to their suffering. China again calls for the immediate lifting of the unilateral coercive measures against Syria to improve the living conditions of the Syrian people and ameliorate the humanitarian crisis.

/Annex 5**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

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

We are pleased to hear reports in the political arena of the consolidating rapprochement between the parties. We also welcome the convening of the fourth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee just a few weeks ago, as well as the provisions agreed for the next session, to be held in January 2021. We sincerely hope that session, at which constitutional discussions will begin in greater depth, will be held against a backdrop of cordiality, solidarity and shared responsibility among the parties, upon whom the future of millions of Syrians depends.

Turning now to the humanitarian situation in the country, I would like to focus our statement on the following points.

The unclear situation regarding the coronavirus disease pandemic in Syria is of great concern. Nonetheless, reports indicate an obvious increase in cases, as well as the country's limited capacity to respond to the medical needs of its population. We stress the high price being paid by thousands of health-care workers because of the virus. The effects of a prolonged conflict, due to the inability of its leaders to resolve it, have placed the people of Syria in a deplorable situation. An additional concern is the vulnerable situation of women in the country. They continue to be disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic, including by being subjected to clearly worsening gender-based violence.

Another aspect is the hunger situation. Indicators show a disturbing trend that places millions of Syrians very close to malnutrition. Fifty per cent of households report very low levels of food consumption. Food assistance to a record number of nearly 10 million people is needed today more than ever. We urge all relevant parties to refrain from taking any violent action that could undermine humanitarian assistance that would literally save lives. Let us not allow hunger to become yet another pandemic in Syria.

Education is another sector that has suffered the devastating effects of the various crises facing Syria. The conflict had already seriously affected access to education, and the pandemic has further exacerbated that reality. Now, in the midst of a profound economic crisis, many children have been forced to abandon their studies in order to work and help feed their families. No child should be put in such a situation. That in itself is a tragedy.

During the 10 years of conflict, we have witnessed flagrant violations of international humanitarian law rarely seen elsewhere, at an unimaginable cost to the civilian population. Attacks on civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure are violations for which the perpetrators must be held accountable. International humanitarian law was not created to be quoted and declared in statements. It is meant to be respected in order to ensure the protection of the lives and dignity of people who have been caught up in the interests of parties who have decided to resolve their differences with violence. We are starkly aware of the losses brought about by violence and unresolved conflict.

What have Syrian children, women or young people gained from this conflict? What about Syria's ordinary people, such as its bakers, teachers and nurses? What about the millions of refugees and displaced persons? What are we supposed to tell

the families of the reportedly almost 100,000 persons arbitrarily detained in Syria? Should they just give up, instead of continuing to wait in the dark for information about their loved ones? They need answers. They need justice.

We reiterate that resolution 2254 (2015) and its full implementation can finally open the door to a promising future for Syria. We wish those who hold that sacred task in their hands every success. We hope, from the bottom of our hearts, that in the not too distant future, they can help to build a peace that has eluded us so many times but for which we must continue to strive.

Annex 6**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 the political and humanitarian situations in Syria.

We cautiously welcome the conclusion of the Syrian Constitutional Committee talks in Geneva at the beginning of this month. That process remains an important pillar in reaching a political agreement to end the war in Syria. We look forward to the next session of the Committee, to be held in January, which will finally concentrate on the constitution itself. We hope that in future that process will also pave the way for discussions on other confidence-building measures between the Government in Damascus and its legitimate opposition.

We remind the Syrian Government and its allies that the European Union will not support Syria's reconstruction or lift sanctions until a genuine political process is firmly in place. I would also like to stress that the current economic crisis in Syria is mostly a result of widespread corruption, warlordism and a lack of good governance.

At least 400,000 people have lost their lives during the conflict, while millions of others have been deprived of their homes and livelihoods. Unfortunately, the Security Council has not been able to take the necessary actions to end this tragedy. Instead, we continue to witness human rights violations, chemical attacks, air raids, torture and broken promises on the part of the Syrian regime. Here in New York, Russia makes sure that nothing meaningful passes through the Council to stop those atrocities.

We regret the double vetoes of Russia and China against the cross-border mechanism this summer (see S/PV.8697), which went directly against the wishes of other Council members and the interests of the Syrian people. Thirteen members were in favour and two against — we heard those words more than once last year.

The promises of replacing cross-border deliveries with cross-line aid have fallen short in their substance. Cross-line aid is dysfunctional, irregular and unreliable. That is a fact that cannot be overlooked. However, since Moscow does not believe in tears, humanitarians have been pushed to their limits, working tirelessly. Eight hundred trucks with vital aid are expected to enter Idlib from Turkey this month as winter preparations are conducted across the country. I thank the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its continued efforts to bring relief to millions on the ground.

Finally, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to the Syria humanitarian co-penholders, Germany and Belgium, for reminding the Council of the humanitarian principles it must uphold. I ask them not to forget that 11 of us followed them through the most critical moments and only two looked the other way. I am sure that they will keep working on Syria, even after leaving the Council as elected members. Once again, I thank them and their teams for their dedication and professionalism.

Annex 7**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

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

France takes note of the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee, held in Geneva, and calls for the fifth session, to be held on 25 January, as announced by the Special Envoy, on the basis of the agenda agreed upon by the stakeholders. It is indeed high time for the parties to finally begin substantive discussions on constitutional reform.

The Syrian regime should also fully respect the operating rules of the Constitutional Committee. France will remain vigilant against any attempt by the regime to undermine the process. We call on the Special Envoy to keep the Council informed of any hindrances and to clearly attribute responsibility for them.

Beyond the Constitutional Committee, there is an urgent need to relaunch a credible political process on the basis of all elements contained in resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has our full support in his work on the issue in conjunction with the main stakeholders. Concrete results must be achieved in particular with regard to the situation of detainees and missing persons.

It is essential that all Syrians, including those in the diaspora, finally be given a voice in preparations for the holding of elections in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and under United Nations supervision. France will not recognize the results of any elections that take place outside the Geneva political process.

France is concerned by the reports of increasing hostilities on the ground. We must work together on the implementation of a lasting and verifiable cessation of hostilities at the national level, as per the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy and in line with Council resolutions. We warn against any new offensive, whether in the north-west or the north-east of the country.

The Council should be deeply concerned by the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, where there are now 13 million people in need of humanitarian aid — almost 2 million more than a year ago. We deplore the methodical reduction of cross-border crossings for the delivery of aid, which is all the more worrisome given the current health crisis. Obstacles to humanitarian access, particularly by the Syrian regime, are unacceptable, especially in the context of the pandemic. I refer in particular to the province of Damascus, in southern Syria, as well as in the north-east, where the regime has impeded humanitarian access by refusing for two months to allow the delivery of food aid to more than 200,000 people in Raqqah.

The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, must remain a top priority. I recall that respect for international humanitarian law is of course something we all have an obligation to uphold. After 10 years of conflict, any attempt by the regime and its allies to have us believe in any normalization of the situation in Syria will fool no one. The figures from the High Commissioner for Refugees speak for themselves — of the 5.5 million Syrian refugees in the region, only 260,000 have chosen to return to their home country since 2016. They will not return so long as the regime continues to threaten their lives and deprive them of their property.

France is therefore working with all international actors, first and foremost the United Nations, to ensure that the right of refugees and displaced persons to a voluntary, safe and dignified return. However, we will not participate in campaigns to spread disinformation. Furthermore, France, along with its European Union partners, will not deviate from its position on normalization, sanctions or reconstruction in the absence of a credible political settlement. Those who believe that the time is ripe can already begin funding the reconstruction process.

Grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights cannot go unpunished. That is the rationale behind our support for the fight against impunity, in particular for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We are determined to ensure that the Mechanism is provided with the necessary budget to function properly.

Without a political solution to the conflict, there can be no lasting stabilization in Syria. It is high time for all members of the Council to hear that message and truly commit to discussions to end the crisis.

Annex 8

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

I make this statement on behalf of Belgium and Germany, the humanitarian co-penholders on Syria. We want to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Envoy Pedersen for their briefings today.

We wish to extend our gratitude to all humanitarian and medical workers in Syria. They are at the forefront of every humanitarian disaster; they are on the front lines in the fight against the pandemic; and they deserve all our respect, assistance and protection.

We all hope that this year will end without another meeting on humanitarian issues in Syria. We all hope that conditions on the ground will not require the Security Council to hold emergency meetings under the agenda item “Any other business” on the humanitarian situation in Syria in the foreseeable future.

Belgium and Germany have worked on the Syrian file during their membership in the Council since January 2019. The penholdership was joined by our friends from Kuwait in the first year. What has the Council achieved for the people of Syria in the past 24 months? How has the humanitarian situation developed over the past two years?

Allow me to quote the latest report of the Secretary-General:

“I remain gravely concerned by the complete absence of respite for civilians in the country ... None of the metrics point to improvement; on the contrary, humanitarian needs are deepening ... Wasting among children is expected to increase significantly in 2021 ... [T]he number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic is expected to rise by 1.9 million, reaching a staggering 13 million people in 2021” (*S/2020/1195, p. 14*).

That is three quarters of the total population of Syria. Those figures tell us that, in spite of what the Syrian Government and its allies contend, the crisis is far from over or getting better. The situation is far from normal, and 2021 will bring huge additional challenges.

As co-penholders, we lobbied for a humanitarian ceasefire in September 2019. We made a compelling humanitarian case for maintaining cross-border humanitarian access to north-east Syria exactly one year ago, and an equally compelling case for keeping two border crossings in north-west Syria in July. We followed the humanitarian imperative, we listened to the advice of the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies and we tried to create circumstances on the ground that were conducive to helping humanitarian actors help people in need.

But apparently others prefer to adhere to their political narrative and their veto power. We have experienced that extensively during the past two years. In a nutshell, two permanent members of the Council have consistently disregarded humanitarian principles and limited humanitarian cross-border access to one last choke point. They have prioritized their support for the Syrian authorities over the humanitarian imperative.

The co-penholders do not wish to use this final opportunity to speak in the Council to repeat ourselves by making the same appeals we have always made in our common statements. Instead, we prefer to give the floor to voices from the ground — voices that members should listen to carefully and remember when the Council has to draft new decisions on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Rose, a 13-year-old girl who lives in north-west Syria, told Save the Children:

“I used to go to a school at the southern end of my town, but it was destroyed during the ongoing conflict. I moved to another school that was in a basement, but it also was attacked and damaged and is no longer a place where we can learn. I have been displaced again, and now I go to a new school. I never told anyone I was afraid, but our teacher told us that it is OK to be afraid. Now I can tell you I am afraid that my school will be hit again.”

Layla Hasso, from Hurras Network, the Syrian Child Protection Network, stated:

“What we need today is to hope for a better future for the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of children out of education. We need the repetitive attacks on education to stop, to allow our children to learn safely and stay alive. For that, we need to maintain access. We need to make sure humanitarian organizations stay, or else we worry that we are forgotten about, left to fend for ourselves and children, and suffer the consequences of violence on our own.”

The Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations stated:

“In the conflict areas in north-west Syria, where local and displaced populations were exposed to heavy shelling, especially in the western countryside of Aleppo and all areas of Idlib governorate, in addition to the high number of internally displaced persons, the resources available are limited as compared to the high population density and the inability to meet the basic needs of the population with the near-complete destruction of basic infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and other social services. Ensuring unfettered access to these populations remains essential and life-saving.”

Those are the voices of people in need. Over two years, we have done everything to make those voices heard in the Council. Some people we contacted in preparing this statement, in fact, all of them in regime-held areas, asked us not to be quoted in the Council for fear of repercussions for their daily work. That is the sad reality of Syria in 2020. There is no doubt the humanitarian situation is extremely worrisome throughout the country.

Finally, only a political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can put Syria back on track towards peace. Germany and Belgium will remain committed to this file in New York, Geneva and other forums. We will remain committed to the people of Syria, fulfil our humanitarian pledges and closely follow the decisions of the Council in 2021. The eyes of the world, in particular of Syrians who are suffering in Syria and beyond, are on the Council. It must live up to its responsibilities.

Annex 9

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Christoph Heusgen

At the end of the two years that we have been in the Security Council, we have to be honest: the Security Council has let the Syrian people down. Yes, there is a relative calm, but the suffering of the Syrian people continues, and millions have fled the country, in many cases living in precarious situations. We heard today that right now there are 11 million people in need of humanitarian aid, and there is no end in sight.

When we speak about that conflict, we should remember how and why it began — when ordinary Syrians took to the streets in order to peacefully protest for change and reform. Let me stress: they were ordinary citizens, not terrorists. But the Syrian regime responded with more oppression, violence, torture and murder and by waging a brutal war against its own people.

I think we have to be very clear that even those who are here today bear a direct responsibility for the suffering of the of the people and for the fact that Al-Assad bombs his own people, including with chemical weapons. Nobody has disputed that fact. The Al-Assad regime continues until today to kill its own population, abduct and torture people and use sexual violence against people.

Two months ago, I quoted here in the Security Council a witness in the Koblenz trial of an Al-Assad official who was responsible for the torturing of Syrian people (see S/PV.8764). Council members may remember that the witness had to transport corpses — hundreds of corpses of killed, of tortured men, women and children — to mass graves in Damascus. The picture of a mother with a newborn in her arms whom he had to bury in a mass grave haunted the witness. I think that image should haunt us all.

I have stated here in the Security Council time and again: without accountability, amid impunity, there can be no reconciliation. There can be no reconstruction, either moral or physical, of the country. That is why we urgently need the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 to continue its work and to see to it that more people, more officials and more of those responsible for horrendous crimes actually face trial.

Russia has not only supported Al-Assad but has itself contributed to the suffering and killing of people. My Council member colleagues may remember that last year in the Security Council I quoted a Pulitzer Prize-winning story in *The New York Times* that described in great detail how Russian pilots bombed hospitals in Idlib (see S/PV.8645).

On sanctions, I cannot hear that anymore. We have discussed it over and over again. The Arria Formula meeting that was just alluded to very clearly showed that all the European Union (EU) sanctions do not hamper the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We asked for examples. There was not one example given of EU sanctions preventing humanitarian aid from getting into the country. Actually, I can tell the Council very clearly what stops humanitarian aid. I think it is very cynical to deplore that humanitarian goods cannot get into the country when, at the same time, we here in July witnessed how Russia and China blocked humanitarian aid from entering the country and providing humanitarian goods to hundreds of thousands of children and other people. Instead of endlessly complaining about sanctions, Russia and China

should reconsider their decision and allow the opening of more crossing points so that people can actually get the food and medicine that they need.

We have heard again how difficult the situation is for the people. The Al-Assad regime is also complaining about sanctions, and we will hear that probably again after my intervention. But let us just be aware of what the Al-Assad regime is doing at the same time. In mid-November, just a couple of weeks ago, the Syrian Arab News Agency based in Damascus informed the world about the opening of the Bassel Al-Assad Museum, a lavish shrine for Bashar Al-Assad's elder brother in the city of Latakia —350 square metres of marble and fine woods and a splendid garden of 8,000 square metres. At the opening ceremony, the local Baath Party Secretary explained that, "This museum is a message of love to the world that Syria is a country of love and peace". How cynical can one get? While the world is feeding the Syrian population, the regime is feeding its own ambitions and lies.

The Council should not allow the regime to shift the blame for the plight of the Syrian people, which has been unnecessarily prolonged by the regime standing in the way of political solutions to that decade-long conflict. We owe it to the people of Syria that we keep that on the agenda, including the chemical track — and we heard again last week how Russia is undermining the Chemical Weapons Convention — the political track and the humanitarian track.

To Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, I wish good luck. I encourage him not to give in, to be loud and clear and to call a spade a spade. It is very good that he includes civil society and women. I would ask that he also include the impunity aspect in his work.

Germany will leave the Security Council. I would like to thank Belgium very much for its cooperation on the humanitarian file, as well as Kuwait, with whom we shared the file in the first year.

Germany will remain engaged. We continue to be a major donor of humanitarian aid, and we remain politically engaged. We owe it to the Syrian people. They are wonderful human beings, and many of them have found their home in Germany.

Annex 10**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani**

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

My delegation remains alarmed by the increasing number of coronavirus disease cases in Syria, in addition to the ongoing economic crisis and the deepening of humanitarian needs. As reported, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria is expected to reach 13 million in 2021, with more than 9 million people currently food insecure and around 2.2 million more at risk of becoming food insecure. Undoubtedly, redoubling our efforts to meet the urgent needs of those people is extremely crucial, and ensuring timely and unimpeded access for life-saving aid is also critical.

I wish to highlight the following points regarding humanitarian and political issues. First, humanitarian needs in Syria must be addressed as a matter of priority. We said that at the first meeting on this issue in January last year (see S/PV.8454), and today we wish to re-emphasize the urgency for all parties to prioritize addressing humanitarian concerns in the country.

All parties to the conflict shall enable the safe, immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to people throughout Syria by the United Nations and its partners, on the basis of United Nations assessments of need and without any political prejudices and purposes.

We take note that the cross-border delivery to the north-west through Bab Al-Hawa is continuing, and we thank the United Nations agencies for adjusting the work to overcome the operational challenges due to the reduction in border crossings. In that context, my delegation urges all relevant parties to agree on operational modalities for cross-line deliveries into the north-west.

We also wish to urge all parties to the conflict to find a sustainable solution regarding the Allouk water station and to ensure access to safe drinking water for half a million people in Al-Hasakah, including thousands of internally displaced persons in Al-Hol and Arisha camps.

On Rukban, we would like to underline the importance for all relevant parties to allow and facilitate immediate humanitarian access to people remaining at Rukban, since the last United Nations humanitarian convoy was in September 2019.

My second point refers to a complete nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria. That is indeed imperative and more necessary than ever. We support the appeal for a ceasefire made by the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy and urge all parties to fully respect the ceasefire agreements.

We are pleased to note that the ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation zone continues to hold; however, we are also concerned with the gradual increase in violations, including in other areas of the country. The hostilities must end permanently. We urge all relevant parties to protect civilians and fully respect international law and international humanitarian law. Again, avoiding the escalation of that unprecedented situation is key.

Thirdly, I turn to the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We are delighted that the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee was held in Geneva a few weeks ago and that the next session is scheduled for 25 January 2021. As my delegation stated at the first meeting with Special Envoy Pedersen in February of last

year (see S/PV.8475), the establishment of a Constitutional Committee is not an easy task but it is indeed doable.

I wish to underline the same thing today with regard to advancing the work of the Committee: it is challenging and may be a slow-moving process; however, with strong and genuine commitment from all parties, it is doable.

As Mr. Pedersen mentioned just now, we must be creative and find new and innovative ways to move the process forward.

I have noted that different narratives and positions were presented during the last meeting. However, that is to be expected — as Special Envoy Pedersen also mentioned. We all know that the process is not going to be easy.

There is also a need to improve the working methods, as Mr. Pedersen also said. But one important point, as I noted in his presentation, is that all three delegations underlined the impact of the conflict on the lives of Syrian women and the importance of their role in the political process. We should continue to build on that and ensure that there are more commonalities of interests and willingness so that they can forge peace in the country.

To conclude, I would like once again to reiterate our full support for Special Envoy Pedersen in implementing his important mandates, along with his able team. We are convinced that, thanks to his active engagement with all key stakeholders, there will be progress in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

We also thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and all humanitarian workers for their tireless efforts in meeting the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

Although this may be the last scheduled meeting on the Syrian file for my delegation, our commitment to supporting sustainable peace in Syria will remain the same, both inside and outside the Council.

My parting shot today is that it is our sincere hope that the Council will be more united next year on this file. What is at stake are the lives of the people of Syria, whom we love dearly.

Annex 11**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Aougui Niandou**

[Original: French]

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

The Niger welcomes the latest developments relating to the work of the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee, at which representatives of the Government and of the Syrian Negotiation Commission met with a view to agreeing on the agenda for the work of the Committee.

Although their positions have hardly changed, the atmosphere at that latest meeting gives room for hope that there will be some movement very soon, and we welcome the announcement that the fifth session will be held from 25 to 29 January 2021, as agreed with the co-Chairs, to focus on the fundamental texts.

In that regard, my delegation calls on the parties to actively engage in good faith in those long-awaited negotiations, which inspire such great hope, and to show openness so as to advance the political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The openness we are calling for from the parties would encompass the urgent need for progress on political prisoners and the disappeared. Indeed, it is high time to free arbitrarily detained persons and to share information with their families.

We also reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's call for an immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria with a view to facilitating the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is now spreading with alarming virulence in the country.

As winter aggravates the already difficult living conditions in overcrowded refugee and internally displaced person camps, so that social distancing remains impossible, we fear the spread of COVID-19 will increase exponentially.

In terms of the humanitarian situation just described by Mr. Lowcock, Syria must be able to access badly needed basic commodities and essential medical supplies, the lack of which is exacerbating the already extreme situation, with greater and more tragic consequences for the innocent Syrian population than for the authorities in power. We therefore once again call for the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Syria so that it may tackle the humanitarian situation.

In conclusion, the Niger once again recognizes the right of the Syrian Government to combat the dangers of terrorist groups, especially given the attempts by those criminal groups to take advantage of the prevailing health crisis to regroup and resume hostilities, as evidenced by increased attacks in north-west and south-east Syria.

Annex 12**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy**

[Original: Russian]

We thank Geir Pedersen and Mark Lowcock for this year's final briefing on the situation in Syria.

Two days from now, 18 December, will mark the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015). What results do we see to mark that date? What has been done by our Western colleagues to foster a political settlement in Syria?

Let us recall that in 2015 Western countries still pinned their hopes on the overthrow of the legitimate Syrian authorities by force, at the hands of bandits and terrorists. They were supplied with money, weapons, training and direct military support by external actors. They were taught how to wage media propaganda, film staged videos and do their own rebranding. Damascus endured the imposition of sanctions aimed at weakening the capacity of the Syrian military to repel the terrorist threat despite the fact that terrorism threatened the entire region with catastrophe. They literally sought to carve the country into pieces.

At the request of the Syrian Government, Russia joined the counter-terrorist efforts. Ultimately, the carcass of international terrorism in Syrian was destroyed. Today the terrorists have only one final stronghold, in Idlib, and also remain active in the north-east. Our Western colleagues are actively engaged in rebranding them, often trying to present the terrorists as a real political alternative to the Syrian State authorities.

The country has seen the ceasefire hold for the most part. Thanks to the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, it has been possible to stamp out intra-Syrian clashes. Therefore, with our support, the Syrian State and its entities have been preserved and continued to provide services to the population even in a situation of protracted conflict.

With the decisive contribution of Russia, Turkey and Iran as guarantors of the Astana format and on the basis of the decision of the 2018 Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, the Constitutional Committee was established. That is the only format for dialogue in which Syrians themselves discuss the future of their own country. We welcome the holding of the fourth round of its drafting committee. As the Special Envoy said, the Syrians have adopted a constructive approach and agreed on a time frame and agenda for the fifth session. That political dialogue itself could have started a year earlier had it not been for direct interference by a number of Western countries, which clearly showed that a peaceful settlement in Syria is not something they are interested in. Members of the Security Council are well aware of all the details of that saga.

What do we see today in terms of Western States? They still violate the very first provision of resolution 2254 (2015) — respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. After the failed attempt to overthrow by force yet another unwanted Government, our colleagues have moved on to tactics of financial and economic suffocation. However, since the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), those sanctions have actually been expanded. One can hardly consider that to be assisting the political process.

Another breach of resolution 2254 (2015) is the occupation by the United States of America of a part of Syrian territory and the attempt to conduct yet another ethnicity-based and religion-based separatist experiment in the Middle East.

The United States also bears direct responsibility for the deterioration of the environment through the plundering of Syrian national oil resources and for other problems. There has been an increase in diseases, including cancer, among people residing in oil-producing areas.

We are also seeing an upsurge in activity by terrorists emerging from sleeper cells of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Many Syrians have been suffering the most inhumane conditions for years on end in the Al-Hol and Rukban camps, in north-east and southern Syria, respectively. However, because of the position of the United States, those problems remain unsolved. Our colleagues the co-penholders on the humanitarian file, due to Euro-Atlantic solidarity, seem to be paying no attention to that human suffering.

Russia has done, and is doing, all it can to promote a peaceful settlement in Syria. However, at each step it encounters opposition from the West. Even the chemical weapons issue — on which unique success was achieved in the eradication of chemical stockpiles in Syria — has been turned in the hands of our colleagues into a tool for exerting pressure of the lawful authorities. That was confirmed by the recent Security Council meeting (see S/PV.8764) at which the former Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was not allowed to answer specific questions.

We are trying to reduce the politicization of humanitarian issues in Syria. Despite opposition from Western countries, we are striving to improve cooperation between the United Nations and Damascus so that all Syrians receive humanitarian assistance, once again in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Life in the liberated areas is returning to normal, which is prompting more Syrian refugees to return home. According to the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 860,000 people have returned to Syria since September 2015. It is also clear that a further 1.2 million Syrians have stated their desire to return home.

In November, with Russia's assistance, Damascus hosted an international conference on the return of refugees. Despite strong opposition and scare tactics by our Western colleagues, more than 20 countries and international organizations took part in the conference, confirming the importance of the international community concentrating efforts in that area.

In that context, the issue of the provision of international assistance to rebuild Syria's destroyed infrastructure is extremely important. We have repeatedly heard the hard-line stance of our Western colleagues in the Security Council regarding conditions for providing such assistance. Specifically, that comprises the demand that the Syrian authorities remake the country's State structure to fit the mould of its donors. In other words, instead of easing the suffering of the most vulnerable among the population — namely, women and children — they are imposing a political bargain on Syria. In parallel, pressure caused by sanctions also continues to increase.

I would like to address that specific topic in more detail. On 10 December, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Ms. Douhan, issued an anti-sanctions guidance note for the period of the coronavirus disease pandemic. That document was the result of a two-day brainstorming exercise that Special Rapporteur Douhan held in October with 24 major humanitarian organizations. Allow me to quote some of the concerns of humanitarian workers about sanctions:

“Unilateral sanctions are the main obstacle to the delivery of aid, including medicine, medical equipment, personal protective equipment, food and other

essential goods. Unilateral sanctions are multi-layered and complicated, they are not transparent and they are not coordinated. Humanitarian exemptions are ineffective, inefficient and inadequate”.

I wonder how my Western colleagues would respond to the fact that their sanctions efforts seem to be completely immoral. As for their attempts to write off all Syrian problems as the shortcomings of the Al-Assad regime? They are hardly convincing.

We would like to stress that Russian military personnel are present in Syria at the request of the legitimate Government, provide food assistance on an almost daily basis and are involved in rebuilding civilian infrastructure. That work will continue.

In conclusion, let me once again raise the issue of a cross-line humanitarian convoy to be dispatched to Idlib. We deem it totally unacceptable that there has been no solution to that issue. We are not satisfied with the passive stance of the United Nations, the hackneyed talk about coronavirus and the eight-month-long negotiations to agree on modalities for the convoy. The silence of the proponents of the cross-border mechanism and the lack of appropriate discussion with those forces responsible for obstructing the convoy are also baffling. Reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria clearly show that Damascus is upholding its responsibility to deliver humanitarian assistance on a non-discriminatory basis across contact lines to all parts of the country. What kind of assistance is the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs referring to here? Some may not like it and continue to attempt to impose political conditions, but the facts speak for themselves: the situation in Syria has changed and will never revert to its conflict-ridden past.

I would like to take this opportunity to state very seriously the following: the lack of progress in establishing not one-off but regular cross-line humanitarian deliveries to Idlib will cause unjustified harm to the cross-border mechanism, which has been extended until 2021.

In response to the representative of Germany, before this meeting we had a little discussion as to how Ambassador Heusgen was most likely to behave during this meeting. We even placed bets on it. Some of my colleagues thought that Ambassador Heusgen would read out a statement on behalf of humanitarian co-penholders and that would be it. I thought otherwise, and so I won; I thank Mr. Heusgen.

In general, I agree with much of what he said. He said that the Security Council had failed Syria and that human suffering there continued. We do not argue with that. The Council has indeed failed Syria, and the reason for that is he and Western countries — their hypocritical position and their attempts to say that black is white. All of that continues with regard to Syria, and that is why people are still suffering. We completely agree with his conclusions and diagnosis, but we do not agree with his vision of why that is happening. That is all.

I would like to note that, as he continuously mentions the “Koblenz trial”, it has almost become his calling card. I realize that people who are in his country’s hands, from whom they may extract statements, can say much that is of interest because they want to save their own skins. That is why all those horrors and all that evidence that he refers to — and it is astounding — must be double-checked as to the sources of the information. At least, that is what we normally do.

This is a good opportunity to show that in Germany, as he was saying, no one goes unpunished. There is a magazine — though I do not know if he reads anything besides *The New York Times* — called *Der Spiegel*. We read it occasionally. Recently, that magazine published very alarming information that one of the leaders of the notorious “White Helmets”, Khaled Saleh, was transferred to Germany. That

man is a well-known terrorist; his reputation leaves no doubt. There is evidence of his affiliation with extremist activity and the killing of foreigners. That is why the German Ministry of Home Affairs, as we know, for quite a long time has been objecting to that man being admitted to Germany. But the Foreign Ministry insisted, and he was not just admitted to Germany; he was brought there onboard a Government aircraft as a guest of Germany. Incidentally, that reminds us of another very curious individual who was similarly transported to Germany recently. They may wish for political reasons to turn a blind eye to that man's crimes, but that will not work. We hope that they will investigate all the atrocities committed by him and by other "White Helmets", without any double standards. Otherwise, the situation is simply impossible.

I would like to thank Mr. Heusgen once again: he has made today's meeting his swansong, his legacy. We will remember him, and we will miss him personally. Everyone has come to know his manner of engaging in discussion and putting questions to briefers on every occasion, except in the case of Director-General Arias, when he asserted the contrary — that ostensibly it was not normal practice to put questions to a briever. We will also remember him as a very cynical man who promoted double standards in the Security Council and someone who regularly reads *The New York Times* and tries to draw conclusions based on the contents of that newspaper, which I reiterate frequents our rubbish bin. In that sense, we will definitely miss him.

In conclusion, I have to say that many of our colleagues at the United Nations received the news that Germany would be a non-permanent member of the Council with great anticipation. However, thanks to the Permanent Representative, they widely came to question whether the Council really needed so much dissent, division and negative emotion. Therefore, I understand from my contacts here that the number of those who welcomed Germany's tenure in the Council seems to have decreased dramatically. I think that draws a firm line under their presence here, thus I wish him all the best.

Annex 13**Statement by the Counsellor of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Diani Jamesha Prince**

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

We remain alarmed by Syria's dire humanitarian situation, which has been made worse by sporadic violence, the severe socioeconomic downturn, the challenges resulting from the coronavirus disease pandemic and the onset of the harsh winter months.

Humanitarian aid through the cross-border mechanism therefore continues to be a vital lifeline for millions of Syrians, who are plagued by food insecurity and lack of access to health care and basic commodities. While the mechanism is undoubtedly life-saving, it is not enough on its own to bridge the substantial gaps that exist. For that reason, the mechanism must be bolstered through the scaling-up and utilization of all available modalities to remedy access challenges and safeguard timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance, in line with humanitarian principles.

Even an optimal humanitarian response is unable to withstand the effects of sustained conflict. Hostilities severely impede humanitarian aid deliveries, destroy infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and injure and kill civilians. In that vein, we reiterate the Special Envoy's call for an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities, and we further appeal to parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint and fully respect the ceasefire in the north-west.

We recognize the threat posed by Security Council-designated terrorist entities to Syria's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We remind parties, however, that counter-terrorism and other military activities must comply with international law, particularly the fundamental principles of armed conflict.

In an effort to assist Syria's rapidly deteriorating economy, we yet again echo our appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on the country. Those measures further burden an economy struggling under the weight of hyperinflation and undermine the country's capacity to respond to the increasing humanitarian concerns.

The need for a sustainable solution to the issues surrounding the Allouk water station remains. The continuous interruptions leave thousands without its vital supply, including many in the overstretched and overcrowded Al-Hol camp. We appeal to all parties to work together to ensure the sustained flow to civilians in need, especially in consideration of the pandemic.

We must also address the increasingly worrisome issue of children's access to education. While the pandemic has obstructed that basic human right, efforts ought to be made, insofar as it is safely possible, to facilitate learning.

In addition, we reiterate our appeal to the international community to contribute to Syria's reconstruction. Restoring the country's infrastructure not only helps to cultivate conditions for the safe, voluntary, dignified and well-informed return of internally displaced persons and refugees, but it also assists in alleviating the overall humanitarian situation.

We cannot discuss Syria's humanitarian condition in isolation, as it is intimately intertwined with the country's political situation. Lack of progress on one track leads to stagnation and decline on the other, and it is therefore necessary to discuss both, employing a holistic and pragmatic approach.

Consequently, we are pleased to note the progress made during the recently concluded fourth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee, and we welcome the agreement on the agenda and the date for the fifth session. The Committee is still a relevant and important component in the wider political process, and we continue to urge all parties to negotiate in good faith for the benefit of all Syrians. We also commend and support the Special Envoy's continued efforts in that regard.

Urgently addressing the outstanding issues of detainees and missing persons is another important step in the wider political process. Meaningful action on those matters is critical to confidence-building and national reconciliation, and they must be given the priority they merit.

Discussions related to Syria must always place the Syrian people at the forefront. Geopolitical quarrels must therefore be set aside in favour of practical efforts towards peace and stability. The international community has an obligation to render all the necessary support to Syria in the pursuit of that objective.

Annex 14**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matthews Matjila**

Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

We would like to make the following four points: first, on the political situation; secondly, on the security situation; thirdly, on the humanitarian situation; and, fourthly, on the road ahead.

First, with regard to the political situation in Syria, I congratulate the members of the small body of the Constitutional Committee on the successful conclusion of the fourth round of talks in Geneva. Additionally, South Africa welcomes the Committee's agreement on the date and agenda of the fifth round of discussions.

Through South Africa's own experience with a constitutional process, we understand that progress requires compromise, and compromise is often achieved by discussing differences to find commonalities within positions and views. Confidence- and trust-building are also integral to that process, including through the release of detainees and political prisoners, especially women, children and the elderly, as a token of good faith and in support of the political process.

We know that is not an easy process, and it should not be when the lives of millions are at stake. As we have said before, only through an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue that is reflective of the will of the Syrian people can a long-term peaceful solution be achieved in Syria. That is the role of the Constitutional Committee: to ensure that the varied and diverse views of all Syrians be considered and discussed in efforts towards drafting a new Syrian constitution. We call on all parties to continue to build on that momentum and engage in a constructive manner towards a lasting political solution.

Allow me to come to my second point, on the security situation. South Africa remains concerned at the continuing levels of hostilities in the northern regions of Syria. The continued presence of foreign armed forces contributes to an increase in tensions and hostilities and must come to an end, including the external interference and particularly in terms of the support provided to those armed groups. However, we are encouraged, as highlighted by Mr. Pedersen, that there is relative calm across Syria, with no shifting in the front line.

While States have the sovereign right to address the threat of terrorism in their countries, any counter-terrorism activities must be undertaken in line with international human rights law and international humanitarian law obligations. True progress in the political process cannot be made if civilians remain in jeopardy and violence continues.

On my third point, relating to the humanitarian situation, I wish to express that South Africa also remains deeply concerned at the humanitarian situation in Syria. Almost a decade of war has thrown Syrians into a spiral of despair and destitution that keeps worsening, and they are now facing unprecedented levels of hunger, leaving millions of people acutely vulnerable. That has been further exacerbated by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease pandemic. The virus continues to spread, with limited testing capacity and a high degree of community transmission, indicating that the actual number of cases may far exceed the official count.

Coupled with that, the economic situation continues to deteriorate, requiring the United Nations, its agencies and partners to provide increased humanitarian assistance to respond to the increasing numbers of those in need. Reports of rising

food insecurity and inadequate food consumption in Syrian households are of grave concern, especially given the approaching winter, which brings on additional challenges in responding to the humanitarian situation.

In that regard, the imposition of unilateral economic sanctions has further exacerbated the dire economic and humanitarian situation in Syria. South Africa reiterates its request to the Secretary-General and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to include the direct and indirect impact of unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We therefore call for the lifting or easing of sanctions during this challenging time for the Syrian people, who are the ultimate victims of those measures.

For that reason, the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism is of vital importance. In that regard, it remains imperative that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners make every effort to ensure that such assistance is provided. In addition, South Africa reiterates the call for the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to all who require it, in line with the provisions of international humanitarian law, while using all available methods of aid delivery, including cross-border and cross-line assistance.

We commend the United Nations, its agencies and the Syrian Government for their cooperation in providing humanitarian assistance. That cooperation should be increased to ensure that the levels of cross-line humanitarian aid is intensified in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

For my fourth and final point, I will highlight South Africa's view on the road ahead. As South Africa concludes its last meeting on the situation in Syria as a non-permanent member of the Council, we reiterate that the conflict can be resolved only through negotiation, dialogue and the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we call on all parties to put the people of Syria first, cease all violence and hostilities, fully commit to the political process and start building towards long-term peace, stability and prosperity for all Syrians.

In conclusion, South Africa agrees with, and reinforces the views of, Mr. Pedersen that the Security Council and the international community should agree on a way forward in Syria as we begin in 2021 the second decade of the Syrian crisis, by building on the relative calm across Syria and the work, agreed agenda and scheduled meetings of the Constitutional Committee.

The journey towards a hopeful Syria has begun. Syrians are talking. Syrians are listening. Syrians are debating their future. Let us hope we will soon see, more often than not, Syrians sitting around the same table in the same room. Let us play our role and support them in realizing their long-term peace and prosperity in 2021 and beyond.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Tarek Ladeb**

[Original: Arabic]

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 of the work of the Constitutional Committee, which held its fourth session earlier this month in Geneva and agreed to hold a fifth round of talks on 25 January 2021 to address constitutional principles. We trust that the next round will spur the Committee and its small body to sustain the pace of their work and lay the foundations for constitutional reform. In that connection, we urge the Syrian parties to engage constructively in that process, be flexible and seek common ground in order to facilitate the creation of a solid and consensual basis for the constitution.

We reiterate that the work of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva must be accompanied by confidence-building measures that are aimed at strengthening the expanded political process and ultimately lead to the organization of free and fair elections under the auspices of the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and with a view to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains a matter of concern, in particular now that winter has begun and given that the Organization is projecting that the number of Syrians who will need humanitarian aid will increase to 13 million next year. We are concerned about the continued deterioration of food and water security for Syrians, as that will exacerbate the threat posed by fragility, shortages and the resumption of conflict, as well as impede efforts to contain the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its effects.

Continued instability, increased tension and violence in northern and southern Syria, along with the ongoing serious threat that terrorist organizations pose to security and stability, are hindering efforts to establish the conditions required to improve the humanitarian situation and create the secure and impartial environment needed to advance the political process.

We reiterate the need to restore calm by establishing an enduring ceasefire throughout Syria, in accordance with the call made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy and in implementation of resolution 2532 (2020). We also reiterate that it is vital for all parties to adhere to international law and international humanitarian law and that they must strive to ensure that civilians, civilian and medical facilities and medical and humanitarian workers be protected.

Efforts to provide basic life-saving assistance throughout Syria must continue and be expanded using the various access routes available, in order to meet growing needs and address vulnerability and fragility, which have been exacerbated by the worsening economic situation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

We reaffirm that all parties must ensure that assistance can be delivered safely, rapidly and without hinderance or discrimination to those in need, and that they must find a definitive solution to the protracted and worsening water shortages in north-east Syria.

It would be helpful if the United Nations, its specialized agencies and its partners in Syria were to expand the scope of their operations to include the

maintenance of damaged hospitals, schools and roads, the water and electricity supply and sanitation. Moreover, they should be involved in efforts to provide decent livelihoods for the most affected and vulnerable groups, with a view to enhancing the comprehensive humanitarian response to the crisis.

In conclusion, we reiterate our firm position that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The only solution is 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 Syrians, 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 16**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Barbara Woodward**

I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing today and his ongoing efforts to facilitate a sustainable resolution to the conflict through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has the United Kingdom's full support. We take note of the session of the Constitutional Committee. Any United Nations-facilitated meeting is an important opportunity for dialogue and building trust between the parties.

However, almost five years after the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), and after four sessions of the Committee, it is past time to start addressing the substance and the drafting of a new constitution. We urge the parties to engage constructively on substantive issues during the next session, in January. For without a new constitution free and fair elections that involve all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, cannot take place as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015). Elections that do not meet those requirements would deny millions of Syrians the opportunity to take part in deciding the future of Syria and share in ownership of the political process as endorsed by the Security Council.

Beyond the Constitutional Committee, parallel progress needs to be made on other aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome the Special Envoy's engagement with Syrian women and civil society. Ceasefires in the north-west and north-east have averted the devastating levels of violence that we saw this time last year. But violence and hostilities continue, causing the needless deaths of civilians and others, including Turkish soldiers. It is the responsibility of all parties to ensure that ceasefires are observed. Counter-terrorism efforts should be coordinated and targeted and should be pursued in compliance with international law, as set out in paragraph 13 of resolution 2254 (2015). As the Special Envoy emphasized, any return of refugees to Syria should also be in accordance with international law and should be safe, dignified and voluntary. If the Syrian regime wants refugees to return, it will need to convince them that they will not return to the status quo that led to and has sustained that conflict. If the regime changes its behaviour and engages genuinely in the political process, that will open the door to full resolution of the conflict.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. Resolution 2254 (2015) is also clear on the importance of unfettered humanitarian access in Syria.

Earlier this month, the United Nations *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* showed that 13 million Syrians now require humanitarian assistance. As we heard, that is nearly 75 per cent of the Syrian population and an increase of nearly 2 million people over the past year. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has warned that a protection crisis remains, with needs resulting from hostilities, widespread explosive hazard contamination, psychological trauma, gender-based violence and family separation, among other things.

As winter takes hold, as we heard from Mr. Lowcock, there are continued gaps in aid delivery. The coronavirus disease continues to spread, and food insecurity continues to make life desperate. As the *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* sets out, more and more families are being forced to make unacceptable trade-offs to survive, including skipping meals, taking on unsustainable levels of debt and, at great personal risk in freezing conditions, travelling to areas where assistance is more assured.

It is clear that efficient and effective cross-border and cross-line access is essential to meeting the needs of those 13 million Syrians. As the Emergency Relief Coordinator has said on multiple occasions, cross-border access is an essential element of the humanitarian response. With the loss of three border crossings over the course of 2020, the system is running at a much-reduced capacity. Aid entering through Bab Al-Hawa has never been more important.

We are therefore concerned to see OCHA reporting in December that violence delayed the delivery of aid to 12,000 people in the north-west and prevented an agreement on cross-line delivery there. The regime also denied access to a humanitarian delivery partner that tried to deliver food to 220,000 people in the north-east. While that suspension was lifted this month, it should not have taken high-level interventions to allow humanitarian workers to deliver food to those in need without fear of injury or harm. The regime needs to acknowledge the scale and severity of the crisis and allow humanitarians to undertake their vital work. Any impediment is unacceptable.

With regard to the comments of my Russian colleague earlier (annex 12), Russia and Syria have consistently provided interpretations of the conflict that are not supported by the independent reports of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

On sanctions, I refer to our statement at the political meeting on 19 August (S/2020/823, annex XIII). 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 regime must heed the calls of its population and engage seriously with Special Envoy Pedersen and the United Nations-led political process to achieve a peaceful end to the conflict.

Finally, ahead of their departure from the Council, I want to thank our humanitarian co-penholders, Belgium and Germany, for their tireless efforts with regard to Syria, for convening discussions when violence escalated, for trying to secure a ceasefire resolution on Idlib and for securing at least some vital cross-border access for aid into northern Syria. As we look to 2021, we should remain resolute in our collective efforts to resolve the crisis in Syria in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their critical updates. We appreciate their efforts this year to try to end the daily suffering of the Syrian people.

As 2020 comes to a close, there is little to celebrate in Syria and much to mourn. More than 9 million Syrians need food assistance, the largest number since the outbreak of the conflict nearly a decade ago. We must not forget that it was Russia and China that forced the Security Council to slash the United Nations cross-border humanitarian access in half amid a global pandemic. The Al-Assad regime's use of barrel bombs, air strikes and shelling in north-western Syria, arbitrary detention and torture have killed and injured thousands of Syrian civilians. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) has been weakened but remains a threat.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues its uncontrolled spread, in particular among those already displaced by the regime's violence. Sadly, this month marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) and five years with little meaningful progress towards a political solution that would end the conflict and create the foundation for a sustainable and peaceful future.

Despite the grim reality, the Al-Assad regime and its enablers seek to convince the Council that the situation is improving. Unfortunately, for the people of Syria that is far from the truth. We have said many times and will say it again — there is no military solution to this conflict. Even if the guns are silenced, the social and political wounds from this decade-long horror story will fester.

The only way forward for peace and stability in Syria is for the Al-Assad regime to support the political road map outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). The United States will continue to oppose any attempts by the Al-Assad regime and its allies to bypass resolution 2254 (2015).

We take note of the fourth round of the Constitutional Committee earlier this month and welcome the Special Envoy's plans to convene a fifth round in January. But the Al-Assad regime must meaningfully participate in the process and stop putting up new roadblocks. We urge the Al-Assad regime and Russia to ensure that the January round produces immediate progress towards the drafting of a new Syrian constitution. We underscore Special Envoy Pedersen's authority to take the measures that he deems appropriate in facilitating the parties' efforts to begin work on the new constitution itself.

It is increasingly apparent that the Al-Assad regime is delaying the Committee's work to buy time as it prepares to carry out a sham presidential election in 2021 and wash its hands of the United Nations-facilitated political process. Syrian elections will not be recognized as legitimate by the United States and the international community if they are not in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The international community will not allow the Al-Assad regime to impose a military victory on the Syrian people with an illegitimate presidential election and no political reforms.

While the Constitutional Committee process is under way, the United Nations and the Council must also redouble efforts to make progress on the other elements of resolution 2254 (2015). The United States supports the Special Envoy's call for a nationwide ceasefire. Moreover, we call on the Special Envoy and the United Nations to press the Al-Assad regime for the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons and for the regime to provide the families of the more than 100,000 missing Syrians with information on the whereabouts of their loved ones.

In the new year, the Syrian people need to see the United Nations-facilitated political process achieve tangible results to implement resolution 2254 (2015). Without that, millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons will not return to Syria; the United States and the international community will withhold reconstruction and development funding to the regime, in keeping with the principles and parameters of the United Nations; and the United States will continue to sanction the regime and its supporters for obstructing the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people for a political solution.

One essential element for lasting peace is to promote accountability for those who have committed atrocities in Syria. We express our strong support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 as a means to gather evidence of the atrocities that the Al-Assad regime and ISIS have perpetrated, which will pave the way for a legitimate political solution. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism should be fully funded by the General Assembly and should not be attacked by those Member States that may be held accountable for the crimes they perpetrated against the Syrian people.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, the recent practice of combining the Council's monthly meetings on the political and humanitarian situations is short-sighted and sends a dangerous signal to the Syrian people that the Council does not care and will not act to alleviate their suffering.

That tactical manoeuvre, orchestrated by the Russian Federation and followed by its supporters, protects Bashar Al-Assad. Combined meetings further politicize the Council's discussions on Syria and leave little opportunity to truly address Syria's worsening humanitarian situation. Going forward, the United States supports separate monthly briefings to ensure that the Council remains focused on the needs of the Syrian people, not on what best serves the political narratives of Moscow and Damascus.

The Al-Assad regime's failed economic policies are also inflicting a worsening toll on the Syrian people. Decades of corruption and mismanagement, coupled with years of waging war against the Syrian people, are responsible for the devastating economic conditions.

The United States has imposed sanctions with robust humanitarian exemptions. I repeat — there are humanitarian exemptions designed to address any concerns. The sanctions promote accountability for the Al-Assad regime's violence and destruction, which have killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. The United States will continue to apply economic pressure against those who are robbing the Syrian people of their livelihoods through corruption, intimidation and violence.

We would like to commend Belgium and Germany for their principled leadership over the past two years as humanitarian co-penholders. They have worked tirelessly to keep the Council focused on its core responsibility — helping to ensure that life-saving humanitarian aid reaches Syrians in need. The United States is determined to see the Council renew the vital cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism that is sustaining millions of desperate Syrians next year. The reauthorization of resolution 2533 (2020) is necessary to keep civilians alive. Bab Al-Hawa must therefore remain operational.

Yet it is clear that one crossing point is insufficient to meet the growing needs, as evidenced by the current shortages of critical supplies, longer delivery times and the higher cost. In the midst of a pandemic, north-eastern Syria continues to face critical shortages of medical equipment due to the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah

crossing almost a year ago. Al-Yarubiyah should be reopened, and the United Nations must be allowed full and unhindered access to Syria so that the humanitarian needs of every Syrian can be addressed.

The regime's humanitarian blockade of Rukban also demands the attention of the Council. It has been 15 months since the Al-Assad regime allowed the last humanitarian delivery to Rukban, and the people in the camp have been without medical aid for just as long. We demand that the Al-Assad regime and Russia immediately allow unhindered access to the camp, including humanitarian delivery convoys. That kind of politicizing and weaponizing of aid cannot continue without outrage from the Council.

Over the past 10 years, the Syrian regime has destroyed much of the country's health infrastructure, killed health-care workers and blocked the ability of civilians in opposition-held areas to seek medical treatment. That has resulted in a health-care system that was unable to meet basic needs even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With COVID-19 now taking hold throughout the country, the regime is prioritizing health care in loyalist areas, leaving regions such as Dar'a, where the Syrian uprising began, with a shortage of medical professionals and supplies and very little humanitarian access. The pandemic has allowed the regime to continue its inhumane siege tactics to break the spirits of the Syrian people. We call on the Syrian regime to provide medical services equitably in all areas under its control and to allow humanitarian actors to deliver the needed supplies.

In conclusion, I would like to speak directly to the Syrian people. The United States will never stop supporting their legitimate aspirations for an immediate and just end to this conflict. As the largest humanitarian donor to Syria, the American people have given more than \$12 billion in assistance since this tragic conflict began. They can trust that we will continue to do everything in our power to deliver the aid that they need to survive this upcoming winter and keep COVID-19 at bay. Let us renew our hopes and redouble our efforts for peace in this new year.

Annex 18

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy

Let me begin by expressing our thanks to Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for their informative briefings, and our deep appreciation to all humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel working on the ground during this very challenging time. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in today's meeting.

On the political front, towards the end of 2020, we have been witnessing certain movements within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We understand that the decade-long conflict has driven the parties far apart and, of course, there remains profound disagreement on various issues. However, we are delighted to see that discussions have been renewed in the past months, even with the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). That shows that breakthroughs on the constitutional track, as well as in the broader political process, are not unachievable.

In that regard, we encourage the parties to actively engage in constructive dialogue with a view to consolidating trust and confidence. The best interests of all the Syrian people should be the number one priority. In order to achieve a tangible and lasting solution, the efforts of the Syrian parties should be coupled with the assistance of the international community. Viet Nam will continue to support the tremendous efforts of the United Nations and the Special Envoy, as well as any viable diplomatic engagements in that regard.

To facilitate the search for a political solution, it is also crucial that a calm security situation on the ground be preserved. We therefore urge all parties to the conflict to exercise restraint and refrain from further escalation. Efforts to counter terrorism should also be in line with obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

On the humanitarian situation in Syria, I would once again like to voice our serious concern over the suffering of the Syrian people, who are affected daily by instability and the mounting economic crisis. Unfortunately, the impacts of COVID-19 during 2020 are putting Syria on the brink of a further disaster.

It is distressing to see that the prices of food and other essential goods are at their highest point since the beginning of the crisis. At the same time, that situation further exacerbates the vulnerability of more than 11 million people in need of assistance and 9.3 million others facing food insecurity across the country. On top of that, harsh winter conditions aggravate the suffering of the people and may further impede humanitarian efforts.

On a positive note, our delegation welcomes the efforts made by the United Nations and the parties concerned to sustain humanitarian assistance to those in need, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/1195). We note with encouragement that efforts are continually being increased to overcome operational challenges and establish cross-line access into the north-west. We also note that the United Nations and its partners are doing their best to maintain aid delivery to the north-east.

Taking into consideration certain difficulties in terms of access and the remaining gaps in certain parts of Syria, our delegation would like to reiterate our call for further cooperation between the parties concerned in order to ensure timely, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access and facilitate the humanitarian response in all parts of Syria. We call for the continued and generous support of the international

community, with particular focus on COVID-19 response capability, food security and sustained delivery during the winter.

In the light of the COVID-19 impact, sustainable solutions are needed to address the situation in various internally displaced person camps and the water shortages occasioned by the closure of the Allouk water station. It is also relevant to make sure that sanctions do not undermine the Syrian people's capacity to respond to the pandemic.

The predicament of millions of Syrians can end only with a comprehensive political solution that is in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and fully adheres to international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and non-interference in its internal affairs.

Finally, let me also take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to Belgium and Germany for their hard work as co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file over the last two years.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to contributing to a political solution to the Syrian crisis. This is a message that the Iranian President and other high-ranking officials of our country conveyed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria during the latter's recent visit to Tehran, during which a broad range of issues, including ways and means of preserving Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity and reducing the suffering of the Syrian people, were discussed extensively. Similarly, the latest developments in the political process were discussed in recent consultations between Iran's Special Envoy on Syria and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pedersen, who briefed the Iranian side on the outcome of the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee. They also exchanged views on facilitating the successful convening of the Committee's next session. The Committee must continue its work and operate without any external interference or pressure and without setting any artificial deadline for the conclusion of its work. The only objective of the political process must be to enable the Syrian people to determine the future of their country by themselves.

Furthermore, the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all. Separatist agendas and illegitimate self-rule initiatives must be rejected, and all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian Government, particularly the forces of the United States of America, which are following a hidden agenda, must leave the country. Places like Idlib must not turn into a safe haven for terrorist groups; accordingly, while every effort should be made to protect the lives of civilians, efforts must be continued to combat terrorism until that threat is fully removed.

Facilitating Syria's reconstruction and the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their original places of residence in Syria need to be part of an overall solution to the current conflict in the country. The interests of millions of Syrian refugees must not be held hostage to the political ambitions of certain Powers. Delaying their return will only prolong their suffering.

Along the same lines, unilateral sanctions, particularly those imposed by the United States, target the most vulnerable people the most, adding to their suffering. That inhumane practice must come to an end. We will continue to support the people and the Government of Syria in their struggle to overcome the threats of terrorism and foreign occupation.

Annex 20**Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari**

[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.

This meeting will be the last for several non-permanent Security Council members, whose terms will end in a few days. In addition, this statement might be the last that I deliver with regard to the political and humanitarian situations before I take up my post as Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates in my country. I would therefore like to address the role that the Council has played over the past several years and what it has done after certain Western and Arab Governments embroiled it in the situation in my country and dragged it into efforts to repeat catastrophic scenarios that have been played out in other countries under misleading titles and terminology, as well as the devastating effects that have been confirmed by events.

As the end of the year approaches and the holidays are upon us, the Syrian State and people had been hoping that they would hear a more mature political and diplomatic discourse today from Western colleagues in the Council. For 10 years, the meetings of the Council on the political and humanitarian situations in my country, Syria, have been marked by the use of stilted language. Perhaps the time has come to admit that Western policies have led to grave mistakes, not only in Syria but in our entire region. Those mistakes have directly resulted in much bloodshed, pain and frustration.

Politics should be an empirical science that is subject to periodic assessment, not a series of absurd, quixotic adventures in which one tilts at windmills meeting after meeting.

The great Russian writer Maxim Gorky said that, when work is pleasure, life is a joy. However, if work is an obligation, then it becomes slavery.

We are not new to the Security Council. We know it well and are familiar with its working methods and dynamics. Moreover, we are neither delusional nor one of those who imagines that the Council is part of Plato's Utopia. Syria is a founding member of the United Nations and was one of the 50 countries that signed the Charter of the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference. It has held a non-permanent seat in the Council four times, most recently in 2002 and 2003, and is fully aware of the true state of affairs.

In addition, my country, Syria, has witnessed, over several decades, the failure of the Security Council to address many threats to international peace and security in our region and around the world, the most significant of which are the occupation by Israel of Arab territory in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, the Balkan wars, the partition of Yugoslavia, the Rwanda massacres, African affairs, the invasion of Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom, the destruction of Libya by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and countless others threats.

That is why my country, from the start of what has been labelled the Syrian crisis, has opposed the attempts by certain Western Governments and their proxies in our region to internationalize the crisis and resisted their desperate efforts to use

the Security Council in order to turn the Syrian State into an enemy and defame it, and to create justifications for external intervention and aggression.

Of course, everyone is aware that we have made determined efforts to resolve the crisis — and to do so without outside assistance. However, that did not satisfy the whims of the Governments of those States that are hostile to Syria. Accordingly, the laboratories of their deep States concocted what has been called the “Arab Spring”, which they used destabilize Syria, erode its security, undermine its achievements in respect of culture and development and disparage the choices that it has made as a nation.

The Governments of those States have supported terrorism, recruited, financed and armed transnational terrorists, launched unilateral and tripartite acts of aggression, formed illegal alliances outside the aegis of the United Nations, occupied territory, caused death, destruction and displacement, looted antiquities, oil, gas and agricultural crops and robbed the wealth of the Syrian State and the property of Syrians. The rest of the story is known to all.

Over the 10 years of the crisis and during the 14 years that I have served as the Permanent Representative of my country in New York, I have delivered nearly 1,000 statements before various United Nations bodies and at various United Nations meetings and events. In those statements, I tried to draw attention to violations of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter that occurred around the world, as well as to efforts to enshrine the law of the jungle and put the law of power above the power of the law.

When the Council began to discuss the situation in my country nine years ago, we called upon members to uphold the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter, respect the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of my country, support efforts to arrive at a solution based on intra-Syrian national dialogue and local reconciliation, implement rigorously and seriously the counter-terrorism instruments and establish an international coalition under the aegis of the United Nations to combat terrorism and support the efforts of the Syrian State and its allies in that regard. However, as everyone here knows, some members exhorted their political, economic and media proxies to promote their allegations, cover up their crimes, fabricate accusations and suppress our appeals and demands.

Everyone remembers that, for years, some members of the Security Council made statements in which they denied that there was transnational terrorism in Syria. In fact, some went so far as to deny that the terrorist group the Islamic State in Iraq and the Leant (ISIL) was present in my country and used the term “moderate armed Syrian opposition” to refer to foreign terrorists.

Today, nearly 10 years after the Council intervened and began discussing the situation in my country, the United States occupies parts of north-east Syria and is supporting terrorist entities, separatist militias and illegal administrative bodies. The United States also occupies the Tanf area and the Rukban camp, near the border between Syria, Jordan and Iraq, and American forces provide support for ISIL, the Revolutionary Commandos and other terrorist organizations in that area.

Turkey occupies parts of north and north-west Syria, and the Turkish regime, which has delusions of reviving the Ottoman Empire, supports terrorism and recruits mercenaries and sells them in the marketplace of international war. Moreover, the Turkish regime and its proxies have targeted Syria and the Syrian people, committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of terrorism and murder in Syria, causing displacement and demographic change, looting, stealing and burning crops and cutting off drinking water.

I should now like to dwell for a moment on the suffering being endured by 1 million Syrians in Hasakah, whom the Erdoğan regime is victimizing for the seventeenth time through its use of water as a weapon of war, having cut off the supply of water from the Allouk station for nearly 20 days. The plant has been out of service since 30 November 2020. The interruption in service has caused tremendous suffering, and we are thankful to the Secretary-General for having used his good offices nearly two months ago to ameliorate the situation.

In addition, the Erdoğan regime and its mercenaries have dismantled and stolen electricity poles in several villages in Hasakah governorate and transferred them to the warehouses of the Turkish occupiers in preparation for sale to Turkish brokers. Naturally, the countries of NATO, which support Erdoğan's criminality, have reneged on their humanitarian slogans and claims and remained silent in the face of such crimes and theft.

In the south of Syria, the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan continues, and the occupying authorities continue to systematically commit crimes against our people there. Most recently, the occupying Israeli forces closed the main entrance to several villages in the occupied Syrian Golan and attacked the Syrian Arab residents of the Golan and prevented them from reaching their agricultural lands, which the occupiers are seeking to confiscate in order to install wind turbines for generating electricity.

In addition, Israel has repeatedly attacked my country's territory. Those actions all occur under the cover provided by the current United States Administration, which has been evading its international responsibilities, shirking its obligations under Security Council resolutions and international law and attempting to change the political, legal and geographical status of the Golan, which is occupied Syrian territory that will be restored, sooner or later, to its motherland, Syria.

What have the Western States members of the Security Council done to enable it to fulfil its obligations and carry out the task that we gave it to end the American, Turkish and Israeli occupation of my country's territory? What have those States done to express the strong commitment of the Council to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, a phrase that appears in all Security Council resolutions concerning the situation in my country? How many resolutions, presidential statements, press releases and press elements have the delegations of the Western States submitted to Council in pursuit of that aim? None. Zero.

What have the Western States members of the Security Council done to enable it to play an active role in the fight against terrorism and ISIL, the Al-Nusra Front and associated terrorist groups, which commit the most heinous crimes in my country and use civilians as human shields, loot their property and rob them of their livelihoods and even the humanitarian assistance that we deliver to them? What have the Western States members done to uphold the resolutions of the Council concerning counter-terrorism and to hold accountable the Governments of known State sponsors of terrorism? What have they done to ensure that the Council acts to prevent terrorists from using chemical weapons, fabricating incidents and directing accusations against the Syrian Government? They have done nothing, zero, other than to keep the issue open in order to politically coerce the Syrian State.

Since we are on the subject of terrorism, what have the Western States members of the Security Council done to enable it to improve the humanitarian situation and put right the outcomes of their actions by standing up to economic terrorism and the collective punishment of peoples, including the imposition of unilateral coercive measures against my country, Syria, and other countries such as Cuba, Venezuela,

Belarus, North Korea and Zimbabwe, which have had a devastating impact on Syrian civilians and deprived them of food, medicine, fuel, electricity, basic daily needs and essential medical care? Nothing, zero, other than to allow the suffering to continue for the purpose of political coercion.

The only thing that the delegations of the permanent and non-permanent Western States members have done is to exacerbate, complicate and prolong the Syrian crisis and obstruct efforts to resolve it, just as they have done with many other issues, some of which have been on the agenda of the Security Council for decades.

We wholeheartedly support the role that the United Nations and the Security Council play in maintaining international peace and security, and we regret the efforts of certain Western Governments to obstruct the work of the Council and their attempts to divert it from its mandate under the Charter — which is our common denominator and our point of reference — and to turn into a tool to serve their political agendas and another platform that NATO can use to transform certain States into enemies and target, isolate and defame them.

My country's delegation once again calls upon the Governments of the six permanent and non-permanent Western States members to abandon this approach and instead uphold the mandate of the Security Council, which is based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations, and stop efforts aimed at undermining the United Nations, just as the League of Nations before it was undermined.

The fourth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee was held a few days ago, and the Syrian national delegation played a positive role in facilitating the Committee's work. We had hoped that the other side would do likewise, but the dominance of certain Powers over it prevented that from happening. Preparations are currently under way for the fifth round, which will be held next month.

My delegation reaffirms that the political process being facilitated by the United Nations must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led. It also reaffirms that the Committee's agreed-upon rules of procedure must be respected if the Committee is to succeed in its work. Any outside intervention in its work or any attempts by certain Governments to impose artificial timetables must be rejected. The Constitutional Committee is autonomous, and only the Syrian people have the exclusive right to determine its future.

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

First, I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings.

The situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate due to the despicable war by the regime against the people and the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in the country. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization report that the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the country have been detected in the north-west. This is not surprising given the densely populated settlements for internally displaced persons and a devastated health system in the region owing to relentless aggression imposed on the population.

Since we discussed the humanitarian situation in Syria last month (see S/2020/1147), approximately 300 convoys have channelled aid items from Turkey through the single crossing point at Bab Al-Hawa into the north-west. We continue to facilitate and fully support United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance. Yet it is clear that the current restricted humanitarian space in the north-west results from the failure of the Security Council to maintain the Bab Al-Salam crossing point in the cross-border mechanism.

The General Assembly today adopted the Third Committee draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Syria and urged the Security Council to re-authorize Bab Al-Salam for cross-border humanitarian operations. We join that call and request the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility as a matter of priority by re-opening that gate before the humanitarian crisis turns into a tragedy threatening the whole region and beyond.

Last week, the Allouk water station once again faced disruption challenges with the electricity power being deliberately cut by the Kurdish Workers Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) terrorist organization. Despite our repeated initiatives before all interested parties and the constructive approach displayed by the Syrian opposition and Turkey, the problem remains to be solved. It is unacceptable that terrorists continue to exploit water and electricity for their separatist agenda.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the need for electricity in the region to a critical level, these repeated power cuts have serious repercussions on health services in the region. Urgent steps must be taken to put an end to this inhumane practice and ensure the resumption of electric power to the water station and the whole region.

Let us also not forget about the serious shortages of potable and agricultural water supply in Al-Bab and surrounding areas, affecting around 200,000 people. Due to the ongoing and deliberate blockage by the regime of the water supply lines, sanitation services are undermined and the public health is seriously compromised, at a time when an effective response to the COVID-19 is most crucial.

On the political track, the Constitutional Committee is currently the sole functioning mechanism. In the period ahead, its work should be advanced in an accelerated and productive manner. We will continue our efforts to that end, within the Astana framework and in collaboration and coordination with the United Nations and other relevant actors. In that regard, we welcome the convening of the fourth round of the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva two weeks ago.

We believe that meeting was useful in enabling the Syrian parties to express their views and expectations under the agenda item “National foundations and principles”.

With the fifth round scheduled for January, we expect the Committee to start focusing on the constitutional principles, entering a phase of results-oriented substantial work. We would like to once again underline the importance of complying with the Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Committee.

The Astana process is a critical element of overall efforts for finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict. Our joint work within that framework towards resolving the conflict on the basis of Syria’s unity and territorial integrity continues despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The 5 March additional protocol plays a crucial role for preserving the calm on the ground. The ceasefire in Idlib enabled return of hundreds of thousands of Syrians to their homes. Having said that, the regime continues its ceasefire violations. Those violations and attacks against civilians, coupled with winter conditions, could unleash a new humanitarian crisis and yet another wave of migration. In line with the additional protocol and previous agreements, we continue our technical engagement with the Russian Federation, as well as our efforts to overcome the obstacles to a lasting ceasefire.

Determined to counter all terrorist threats emanating from Syria, Turkey continues its resolute fight against Da’esh on the ground. Turkish armed forces, which have eliminated 4,000 Da’esh elements in Syria and Iraq to date, neutralized 29 Da’esh members in Syria during only the course of the past month.

The PKK/YPG constitutes another major threat to the security of Syria. The deplorable terrorist attack carried out by the PKK/YPG on 10 December in Ras Al-Ayn resulted in the deaths of two Turkish soldiers and injured eight others. We thank our friends and allies who extended messages of condolences. We call on everyone to explicitly state the obvious perpetrators of this heinous terrorist attack.

Ayn Issa and Tal Tamar, east of the Euphrates River, and Manbij and Tal Rifat, on its west, have become PKK/YPG launching pads for their planned attacks against innocent Syrian civilians, our country, our security forces in Syria and the Syrian national army, as well as for their infiltration and harassment activities. Turkey will not compromise on its steadfast fight against the PKK/YPG, which launched over 300 terrorist attacks in just the past 12 months.

Turkey maintains its firm stance against attempts by the PKK/YPG to gain legitimacy under the guise of so-called “Syrian Democratic Forces” (SDF) and its efforts to consolidate its domination over the north-east through oppression and economic incentives. The international community should refrain from actions that would violate international law and serve the separatist agenda of the PKK/YPG hiding behind the name of so-called “SDF”.

This illegitimate entity east of the Euphrates has been releasing Da’esh members and their families, as well as suspected affiliates when it serves its interests. It is reported that this terrorist entity is also working on illegally trying Da’esh members with the help of some countries and civil society organizations. This is a very worrisome development for the unity and territorial integrity of Syria. Clearly, such a brazen act constitutes an egregious violation of international law. We reiterate our strong call to the international community to be vigilant and not to become accessory to this terrorist propaganda.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the importance of education and bringing safety to children in Syria, who will be the ones to redesign their country. It is estimated that half of the children who were going to school in northern Syria

before the pandemic have now dropped out. While more than 750,000 of the over 1 million school-age Syrian children in Turkey are enrolled in education, we need to create opportunities for children in Syria as well to avoid the risk of a lost generation that could blight Syria's chances of recovery for years to come.

The brutal war launched by the Al-Assad regime has displaced millions and killed thousands of children. The Secretary-General reports that shelling by the regime on 4 November caused damage and killed children in schools located in Arihah and Kafriya, in the north-west. We should not let Syrian children down.

The Al-Assad regime continues to pursue medieval tactics such as "starve and surrender" and hurls false accusations at those standing by the Syrian people. The regime still aims at military victory. We will not let this happen. And we will hold them accountable for the war crimes and crimes against humanity they have committed throughout Syria.

As to the statement made by the Syrian regime's representative (annex 20), I repeat: I do not consider him as my legitimate counterpart; His presence here is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the regime. I will therefore not honour his delusional remarks with a response.
