



Security Council

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Letter dated 21 August 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 a copy of a briefing provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, 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 convened on Wednesday, 19 August 2020 on “The situation in the Middle East (Syria)”. A statement was also delivered by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 2 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/273), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the enclosed briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dian Triansyah **Djani**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria,
Geir Pedersen**

As I brief the Security Council today, I remain acutely conscious of the deep suffering of the Syrian people, who in this decade experienced death, injury, displacement, destruction, detention, torture, terror, indignities, instability, de-development and destitution on a massive scale, and who are now also grappling with coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and economic collapse.

It was with a heavy heart that I learned that many Syrians were among those killed or injured in the tragic explosion in Beirut. Many more Syrians in Lebanon have lost their livelihoods or been left homeless and hungry. The ramifications for Syria's humanitarian and economic supply chains and revenue from transit trade will doubtless be significant, given the already collapsing Syrian economy.

Let me take this opportunity to inform the Council, with deep sorrow, that, among the United Nations personnel injured in the explosion was Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar, who was on her way to Damascus as part of consultations to prepare the upcoming session of the Constitutional Committee. Fortunately, she is on the road to recovery. I am sure everyone will join me in extending to her our sincere good wishes for her full return to health and to the vigorous pursuit of our shared mission.

Also as I brief the Council today, preparations are being made to convene the third session of the small body of the Syrian-owned and -led, United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee in Geneva on Monday, 24 August. Convening the small body is obviously challenging, given the global COVID-19 pandemic. We have been closely monitoring the spread of the virus in Syria, Geneva and indeed across the globe. We have also been following the health advice of our host country, Switzerland, whose generous support I deeply appreciate, and the guidance from the United Nations Office at Geneva, where the Committee meetings take place.

In the light of all the information and expert advice available to us, barring any further developments in the coming days related to the pandemic, and with the agreement of the co-Chairs and the positive response of Committee members, we are planning to move ahead. We will remain in contact with the co-Chair nominated by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the co-Chair nominated by the opposition Syrian Negotiations Commission, as well as members of the middle third, to make the necessary arrangements. We will of course be implementing strict health and safety protocols to mitigate risk.

After a hiatus of nine months, due to differences over the agenda until March and then to COVID-19 restrictions, it is worth remembering that the Constitutional Committee meets on the basis of a Government and opposition agreement, which guides its work. We note that this was the first political agreement between the parties to begin to implement a key aspect of resolution 2254 (2015), which called for setting a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution.

That agreement reflects some key principles, including respect for the Charter of the United Nations, Security Council resolutions, Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, the Syrian-led and -owned nature of the process and the role of the United Nations as a facilitator. The agreement calls on the co-Chairs to promote gender mainstreaming in the work of the Constitutional Committee, which builds on the achievement of the representation of women at nearly 30 per cent. The agreement also recalls wider objectives: United Nations-supervised elections based on a new constitution, as envisaged in resolution 2254

(2015), and the need for a broader political process in order to implement resolution 2254 (2015). In addition, the agreement mandates the Committee, within the context of the United Nations-facilitated Geneva process, to

“prepare and draft for popular approval a constitutional reform as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).”

This is a momentous task — to establish a foundational act, a social contract for Syrians after a decade of conflict and amid deep divisions and mistrust. Constitutions express the sovereignty of nations and set out fundamental rights; political, cultural, social and economic rights; the rule of law and good governance; the people’s relationship with their Government; how political representatives are elected and what their powers and responsibilities are.

During and between sessions, I have been ready to support the co-Chairs and Committee members to help bridge differences by exercising my good offices, and I have sought to facilitate in a manner that ensures the Committee’s continuing credibility, balance and inclusivity, in accordance with my mandate and the agreement that brought the Committee to life.

The forthcoming session has been made possible by the co-Chairs agreeing on an agenda that is

“in line with the mandate, the Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Committee, discussing the national foundations and principles.”

I reiterate my appreciation to the co-Chairs for reaching this agreement. I recall the pragmatic and business-like way in which they chaired proceedings, particularly during the first session, when there was also an agreed agenda. I therefore look forward to meeting them on arrival in Geneva and to their positive chairing of the next session.

In the same spirit, I continue to encourage all Committee members to come to Geneva ready to engage in earnest in substantive talks on the basis of the agenda that the co-Chairs have agreed, without any preconditions.

Consistent with prudent pandemic-related mitigation measures, I believe we should work together now to move this process forward in a business-like manner, with a series of regular meetings in the months ahead, including an agenda for the next meeting. This is important, because millions of Syrians continue to face immense suffering and do not have the luxury of waiting for a political breakthrough.

Civil society interlocutors often tell us that they know a single meeting of the Constitutional Committee will not bring immediate changes on the ground. But substantial and serious engagement by all parties would give them hope that a meaningful process that could have a long-lasting and positive impact on the lives of the Syrian people is on the horizon.

Frustration with the lack of progress on the political process has been continuously impressed upon me by members of the Women’s Advisory Board, who continue to meet virtually and whom I look forward to consulting with later this week and again next week during the Constitutional Committee meeting. The Advisory Board is also working to support the constitutional process and promote gender and women’s rights. It continues to draw attention to the spread of COVID-19 in already vulnerable communities, the economic suffering of Syrians and the urgent humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable in society —female-headed households,

Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons and families struggling to cope with extreme poverty.

Our concern for the impact of the pandemic on the Syrian people remains acute and is growing. As of 18 August, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Syria is 2,114, including 1,844 confirmed by the Ministry of Health in Government-held areas, 51 cases in north-west Syria, including the first cases in two internally displaced persons camps, and 219 in the north-east.

Of course, overall testing capacity has increased but remains vastly insufficient. Therefore, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock told the Security Council late last month (S/2020/758, annex I), the true number of cases is probably much higher, and the pandemic's impact may be far more serious than these numbers suggest. We already see that all areas are experiencing significant shortages of medical and personal protective equipment and that there are concerns about the effect of COVID-19 on health workers.

The United Nations family is leading preparedness and mitigation measures across the country, but the needs are immense and the resources are insufficient. We need the Council's continued support, including in securing humanitarian access for all those in need of relief, in accordance with international humanitarian law. And we need to sustain the waivers of sanctions that can undermine the country's capacity to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and COVID-19 medical support in response to the pandemic.

We also need a complete, immediate nationwide ceasefire, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015), to enable an all-out effort to combat the pandemic. In the north-west, the calm brought about by Russian and Turkish efforts largely continues to hold. But the last month has seen reports of sustained mutual rocket attacks, artillery strikes, ground clashes and sporadic air strikes, including reports of civilians being injured and killed in these incidents. Meanwhile, earlier this week, the Turkish Ministry of Defence stated that an improvised explosive device (IED) targeted a joint Russian-Turkish patrol, damaging a Turkish vehicle. Subsequently, yesterday there was a brief uptick in pro-Government air strikes in northern Idlib.

Throughout August we have heard of both sides reinforcing or even establishing new military positions along front lines. We urge Turkey and Russia in particular to contain all escalatory incidents and dynamics, restore calm and continue cooperation. And we call on all relevant actors to ensure that any actions taken to address Security Council-listed terrorist groups are effective, targeted and in line with international humanitarian law, while ensuring the protection of civilians.

Meanwhile, attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant continue to grow in frequency and impact. The north-east has seen ongoing skirmishes and security incidents in and around Tall Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, resulting in civilian casualties, as well as protests in Deir ez-Zor, following the killing of prominent tribal figures there. Yesterday an IED targeted Russian forces in Deir ez-Zor, killing a Russian general and injuring two officers. Earlier this week, we also saw reports of an altercation between Syrian Government and United States forces. Syrian State media accused the United States of opening fire from the air and ground on a Syrian Government checkpoint, killing one soldier and injuring two others. The United States-led coalition says it had come under fire from individuals in the vicinity, responded in self-defence and denies that aircraft were used. This incident is another stark reminder of the need for a sustainable arrangement for the north-east that includes all actors and respects and ultimately restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The south-west has seen recurring tensions, as well as protests and several violent incidents, some resulting in fatalities. Geopolitical tensions also remain acute. Earlier this month, Israel stated that it carried out air strikes on military targets, killing four men who Israel claims were planting explosives at the perimeter of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The Syrian Government stated that these missiles caused “material damage”.

Some of these developments remind us that many of the tensions and incidents taking place across Syria are international in scope, that Syria’s sovereignty remains compromised and that the presence of five foreign armies creates a serious risk of threats to international peace and security. This is one reason that the Constitutional Committee’s work can be a door opener, but it cannot in and of itself resolve the conflict. There is a real need for constructive diplomacy among key international players if all aspects of my mandate, as enshrined in resolution 2254 (2015), are to see progress.

I hope that forthcoming opportunities for direct contacts among key players will enable them to deepen their conversations and bridge the often-significant gaps between their stated positions, as well as enable united support behind the United Nations effort. I see ample scope for key international players to make a difference, working together and with Syrians step by step on a range of issues critical to realizing my mandate pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015): ensuring the release of detainees and abductees and clarifying the fate of missing persons; creating a safe, calm and neutral environment in which refugees can return safely, voluntarily and with dignity; reaching a final political settlement that meets the Syrian people’s legitimate aspirations, built around a new Constitution and inclusive, free and fair elections under United Nations supervision; and addressing the presence of the five foreign armies and fully restoring Syria’s sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity. There are still other issues where there remains ample room for constructive diplomacy, such as sanctions and working towards Syria’s economic recovery and prosperity. But for now, for next week, let us focus on supporting the members of the Constitutional Committee in deepening their work and in building confidence in a political route out of the Syrian conflict.

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

I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We appreciate his relentless efforts and good offices in promoting the political process in Syria.

The Syrian crisis has entered its tenth year. The prolonged conflict has caused tremendous suffering for the Syrian people. It is incumbent on the international community to stop the crisis and endeavour to find a fundamental solution as early as possible.

It is China's consistent position that the Syrian issue must be addressed in a holistic way, taking into account political, security, counter-terrorism, economic and humanitarian factors in an integrated manner. In the current situation, I would like to remark on four priorities.

First, the political process must be accelerated. This is the only way to achieve lasting peace and stability in Syria. The parties concerned should actively and pragmatically participate in and advance the inclusive political dialogue within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We hope to see the parties concerned strive for an early solution that fits Syria's national conditions and takes into account the legitimate concerns of both sides. The United Nations should play its role as the main channel for mediation towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process while the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria are safeguarded.

Mr. Pedersen just briefed the Council on preparations for the third round of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. We call on all parties to demonstrate political will and bridge their differences through dialogue and consultation, so that the meeting can go smoothly and achieve positive results. China appreciates the active support of Russia and other countries for the United Nations-led process through their own efforts.

Secondly, the security situation in Syria should be substantially improved. There are still a large number of terrorists and extremists in the Idlib region, launching frequent attacks and harming civilians. All parties must stick to a unified standard and strengthen coordination in counter-terrorism actions. As Mr. Pedersen proposed, more effective, cooperative and targeted counter-terrorism actions must be in place to promote peace and stability in Syria and the region.

Russia and Turkey have conducted regular joint patrols along the M4 highway in recent months, in accordance with the relevant agreement, which has helped to maintain the overall ceasefire in north-western Syria. With regard to the recent air strikes against Syrian Government-controlled areas, the party concerned is called upon to exercise restraint and take no more such actions.

Thirdly, unilateral sanctions against Syria must be lifted immediately. Unilateral sanctions have seriously undermined the livelihoods of the Syrian people and caused great harm to innocent civilians, especially women and children. We urge relevant countries to heed the repeated appeals of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy. Instead of imposing new illegal sanctions, those countries should immediately lift existing unilateral sanctions against Syria and take concrete actions to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground.

China attaches great importance to the humanitarian situation in Syria and sympathizes with the sufferings of the Syrian people. Through bilateral and multilateral channels, we have provided a large amount of humanitarian assistance,

including medical supplies to combat the coronavirus disease, to people in Syria and refugees outside the country. China will continue to support and assist the Syrian people in accordance with their needs.

Fourthly, further efforts should be made to help Syria with economic reconstruction. This is the urgent need of the Syrian people and the foundation for sustainable development and durable peace of Syria. The international community should support the reconstruction efforts of the Syrian Government and people and help them to rebuild and recover as soon as possible in areas that have suitable conditions. China will assuredly make its contribution in this regard.

The future of Syria should be decided by the Syrian people themselves. China will continue to stand with the Syrian people and play a positive and constructive role in the political settlement of the Syrian issue.

Annex III**Statement by the Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, José Singer Weisinger**

Like others, we also would like to wish a speedy recovery for Deputy Special Envoy Matar.

We thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and, as always, we express the full support of the Dominican Republic for the political process in the Syrian Arab Republic with a view to helping Syrians to start building once and for all the hope, trust and confidence they need to emerge from this horrible conflict.

There is no military solution to the Syrian conflict. The only sustainable solution is one that will be based on the broad political process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) and on the will to achieve its full implementation. We hope the Syrian Government understands this.

We are pleased with the arrangements for the holding of new and hopefully revitalized talks among the parties in Geneva next week, within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. To achieve a successful outcome on these talks — an outcome that is conducive to a renewed commitment to the political process — all parties need to engage constructively, in good faith and with mutual respect.

We therefore encourage the members of the Constitutional Committee to direct all their efforts towards alleviating the precarious living conditions of the Syrian population and restoring their prospects for a life of peace and dignity in which their rights are protected and fully met. Again, the resurgence of hope and trust in the political process is at the core of the country's future reconciliation.

Women's voices must resonate louder than ever in all aspects of the broader political process, but especially in the Constitutional Committee, as a fundamental part of creating a new national configuration based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all citizens. We reiterate our call for the full, meaningful and equality-based participation of women at all stages of the constitutional talks.

Allow me to highlight a few points on reconciliation. For the Dominican Republic, reconciliation in Syria will be possible only if it is based on a credible political response to the legitimate aspirations of Syrians and if it is in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Reconciliation will be possible only if durable solutions are implemented for the entire civilian population, including the internally displaced persons and refugees spread across the region and beyond. These people need to be able to return to their homes or to wherever they choose to live in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner.

The families of detainees, abductees and missing persons need to know the fate of their loved ones. It is their right. We therefore request that Special Envoy Pedersen redouble his efforts and achieve greater results in this regard, including by listening to the families themselves and working with them to design ways for them to move forward. Mr. Pedersen has our full support in this endeavour, and we respectfully request that he provide more information on this matter at his next briefing.

In conclusion, we remain extremely concerned about the current compounding crises present in Syria. The impacts of the economic crisis as well as its potentially devastating inability to cope with a coronavirus disease outbreak threatens to throw the country into unforeseen and unprecedented despair. The Security Council has a

long-standing moral responsibility to alleviate the suffering of the people, starting with joining with efforts aimed at preventing increased suffering and at ensuring that mounting humanitarian needs are met in a principled, unhindered and sustained way. Let us join our forces together to achieve that end through solidarity, using our common humanity as a starting point.

Annex IV**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Gert Auväärt**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing, which highlighted the various challenges that the country is facing in its tenth year of war. We also join others in wishing quick recovery to Deputy Special Envoy Matar from her injuries.

Like many other Security Council members, we are looking closely at the situation in Syria. Despite the fact that the March ceasefire in Idlib is largely holding, we remain concerned about the sporadic clashes taking place in the area, such as the exchange of fire in the past weeks between Turkish and Syrian troops. Furthermore, terrorist threats persist. Just yesterday, a roadside bomb killed several people near Deir ez-Zor. Most likely it was extremists from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant who planted the improvised explosive device there. These and other similar incidents continue to undermine stability in the northern and eastern parts of Syria.

With regard to political developments, Estonia expresses hope that the new round of talks within the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva next week will accelerate the political process, which includes answering the legitimate concerns of the Syrian opposition. However, we note that a new Constitution alone is not enough for solving Syria's problems. National reconciliation requires much more, including the release of arbitrarily detained people and political prisoners, disclosure of the fates of disappeared and missing people, respect for human rights and free elections. Only after these basic criteria are fulfilled will the situation slowly start to normalize, and refugees will be able to return to the country. Unfortunately, we are still far from that point, as was highlighted by the various challenges described by the Special Envoy in his briefing today.

Estonia and the European Union remain committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Annex V**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Anne Gueguen**

[Original: French]

I would like to thank Geir Pedersen for his briefing and reiterate France's full support for his work. I would also ask him to convey to Ms. Khawla Matar my wishes for a speedy and complete recovery. I would now like to address four points.

First of all, with regard to the Constitutional Committee, whose drafting committee is meeting next week, it is a positive sign that that meeting is finally taking place. We call on the parties to participate in it in good faith and without conditions or delaying tactics.

France hopes that the work on the new Constitution, provided for in resolution 2254 (2015), will make real progress. We call in particular on those sponsoring the regime in those discussions to increase their efforts. We fully support the Special Envoy in that process, and we encourage him to continue in parallel his discussions with the Women's Advisory Board in order to enable the effective participation of women, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015).

Unfortunately, we have every reason to be pessimistic about future discussions. Last month's sham parliamentary elections show that the regime is locking itself into its dictatorial logic and following its own timetable, in defiance of resolution 2254 (2015). The lack of progress on the issue of detained and missing persons is another negative sign. How can one believe in the good faith of the regime when it refuses to allow innocent people to be reunited with their families?

Secondly, I would like to recall that a political solution to the Syrian crisis is not the mere discussion of a Constitution. Accordingly, it is crucial for the Special Envoy to engage in all aspects of the crisis, as provided for in resolution 2254 (2015). I am thinking in particular of the ceasefire. The truce concluded in the north-west a few months ago is fragile; violent clashes continue. A lasting and verifiable ceasefire agreement under the aegis of the United Nations is essential to allowing both the peaceful resumption of the political process and the smooth delivery of humanitarian aid, which has been critically restricted since the closure of the Bab Al-Salam border crossing point. I recall that the Security Council recently adopted resolution 2532 (2020), which, echoing the Secretary-General's appeal for a comprehensive ceasefire, calls for the cessation of hostilities in all countries on the Council's agenda.

Instability and violence continue to prevail, including in the territories taken over by the regime, with killings, kidnappings and unrest, of which civilians are the primary victims. In this regard, we recall that France continues to give its full support for the fight against impunity, including through international mechanisms. Crimes committed in Syria cannot go unpunished.

We are therefore still far from the secure and neutral environment necessary for a political transition and the organization of free and transparent elections, under the supervision of the United Nations, in which all Syrians, including refugees and displaced persons, would participate. We encourage the Special Envoy to continue efforts in that regard. He has a full mandate to explore practical conditions for the holding of elections, even if these must take place after the work of the Constitutional Committee.

Thirdly, I would like to say a word about the situation of the Syrian people, who are the primary victims of the war and the mismanagement of a corrupt regime. The Syrian people are now facing a major upsurge of the coronavirus disease in

Syria and a humanitarian disaster. At a time when humanitarian needs continue to increase and a large segment of the population is forced to live in exile, I reaffirm that France and its European Union partners stand firmly by the Syrian people, as evidenced by the commitments undertaken at the fourth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region.

I would like to conclude by saying that our positions on the lifting of sanctions, reconstruction and normalization remain unchanged. Our determination to contribute to finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis also remains the same.

Annex VI

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Günter Sautter

I would like to make four remarks — on the security situation, the political process, detainees and accountability.

On the security situation, we remain concerned about the fragile security situation throughout the country. In particular, we are worried that a new military offensive in or around Idlib would result only in more mass displacements and a humanitarian catastrophe. This should be avoided at all costs. We therefore continue to fully support the call of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for a complete, immediate and nationwide ceasefire.

On the political process, there is a clear way out. That view has been expressed by many delegations, and it is also the position of Germany. Under the auspices of the United Nations, we must pursue a political process that is in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In that context, I would like to make it very clear that only after a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way will Germany and the European Union (EU) assist in reconstruction.

In that connection, when the Syrian regime changes its brutal behaviour and ends its grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, there will also come a point for EU sanctions to be lifted. The issue of sanctions has been touched upon by previous speakers. I would like to make it very clear that the sanctions imposed by the European Union contain clear humanitarian exemptions, and we work very hard to make sure that such exemptions are implemented faithfully in a way that does not create humanitarian damage. In that context, let me add that much more humanitarian damage is done by closing border crossings into Syria.

To allow for progress on the political process, the third round of the Constitutional Committee, starting on 24 August, will be an important step. That will be another occasion for the Syrian regime to demonstrate that it is serious about the political process. We urge Russia to use its influence over Damascus in order to create the right spirit. We agree with Special Envoy Geir Pedersen that the Constitutional Committee alone will not suffice. We also need to see progress in the broader political process and the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

My third point is on detainees. Resolution 2254 (2015) calls for the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. But since its adoption, in December 2015, almost five years ago, there has been no progress. Three concrete points are crucial in that regard. First, we urge all parties, in particular the Syrian regime, which holds the overwhelming majority of detainees, to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, starting with the most vulnerable — women, children, the sick, wounded and elderly. Secondly, the Syrian regime must also allow immediate, unconditional and unhindered access for relevant humanitarian organizations to all its prisons and detention facilities. Thirdly, the Syrian regime must inform families of the fate and whereabouts of the tens of thousands missing and disappeared persons.

My fourth and last point is on accountability. We remain convinced that national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will be possible only once truth, justice and accountability are established for all crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict. In its latest report (A/HRC/45/31), the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic details human

rights violations and war crimes in Idlib. This report, as well as the findings of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations board of inquiry, demonstrate that the Syrian regime and its allies are responsible for indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in north-west Syria. There has not yet been appropriate follow-up to those findings. We must not tolerate impunity.

Russia and China have blocked the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). It is their responsibility that those who have committed and are still committing the most serious crimes in Syria cannot be brought to justice before the ICC. National jurisdictions are starting to at least fill some of the void in Germany and elsewhere. The message is clear: whoever commits crimes against humanity or war crimes cannot feel safe anywhere and will eventually be held accountable. We therefore call on all States to use all legal means at their disposal to prosecute the perpetrators and to initiate criminal proceedings under the principle of international universal jurisdiction. We call on the Council to finally live up to its responsibility, join the fight against impunity and ensure that those who commit the most serious crimes under international law are held accountable.

Annex VII

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his detailed briefing.

Let me echo others in wishing Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar a speedy recovery.

My delegation is very pleased to hear from Mr. Pedersen that preparations for convening the third round of the Constitutional Committee are on track. We know that this is only the beginning of a long and challenging political process in Syria, but this progress is key for all the Syrian parties to move forward.

Many Security Council members have highlighted the current situation in the country, particularly the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak and the economic fragility that further exacerbate the humanitarian situation in Syria. There are around 2,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country, and it is likely to spread more in densely populated areas and among vulnerable internally displaced persons and refugees.

The Syrian people need the ongoing support of the international community, including the Council. They need progress, not only on the humanitarian situation but also on the political process. In the light of the above, I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, all Syrian parties must continue to engage in the Constitutional Committee process. The genuine and meaningful engagement of the Syrian parties is crucial to ensuring a productive and substantive round of talks among the Committee's members.

We hope that, with the support of key international stakeholders, next week's discussion in Geneva will be a constructive and successful session that eventually leads to a regular Committee agenda. It is important for all the relevant parties to maintain a calm and positive demeanour during the Constitutional Committee's meeting.

Let me reaffirm our strong support for the Syrian-led and -owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Indonesia appreciates the work of the Special Envoy and his team in facilitating the whole process.

Secondly, we share the Secretary-General's appeal for the waiver of sanctions that can undermine Syria's capacity to ensure access to food, vital health supplies and COVID-19 medical assistance to respond to the pandemic. This is indeed a time for solidarity, not exclusion.

Thirdly, we need sustained and meaningful action on the issue of detainees and missing persons. All Syrian parties must address this issue, as it is critical for the reconciliation process and for building trust and confidence among the parties. We hope to see significant progress on this file.

Before concluding, while the ceasefire agreement in north-west Syria is generally being respected, we wish to urge all key actors to maintain their commitment to the agreement and to ensuring sustained calm throughout Syria.

Let me once again emphasize my delegation's commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Annex VIII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Niandou Aougi**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his presentation. I would also like to welcome Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari, Permanent Representative of Syria, for joining us this morning.

The Niger reiterates its support for the calls by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria to enable an all-out effort against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

However, we remain very concerned about the humanitarian situation, as we are witnessing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Syria. Additionally, we heard from Mark Lowcock that the economic crisis is deepening poverty and pushing more people to need humanitarian aid.

The Niger commends the efforts of humanitarian agencies in delivering much-needed assistance to the most vulnerable population throughout Syria, as well as their ability to adapt to the shifting conditions on the ground.

As we have stated in previous meetings, there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The Russia and Turkey ceasefire agreement of 6 March, although fragile, is still holding and has helped reduce hostilities in north-west Syria.

The Niger reiterates its calls for Security Council members and Special Envoy Pedersen to build on this momentum in order to make progress towards a comprehensive ceasefire and on the political front, as mandated by resolution 2254 (2015).

The Niger remains convinced that the formula for ending the Syrian crisis must be inspired by Syrians themselves, in their various components, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We are therefore pleased to hear that the Constitutional Committee session is happening next week and that an agreement was reached on the agenda.

Although my delegation remains optimistic about the upcoming round of talks, we would like to reiterate our call for all parties to be more flexible during these rounds of negotiations in order to advance the political track and achieve lasting peace in Syria.

In the same vein, in an effort to help build confidence between the parties as the Constitutional Committee session convenes, the Niger calls on both sides to show empathy in these unprecedented times by proceeding with the release of detainees on both sides and clarifying the situation of missing persons.

In conclusion, the Niger recognizes the danger posed by terrorist groups in Syria. We believe that the Syrian Government, like any other State, has the right to fight terrorism in tandem with the fight against the pandemic, in compliance with international human rights and humanitarian obligations with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and the principle of proportionality.

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

First of all, we would like to wish a speedy recovery to Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar, who was injured in an unfortunate incident in Lebanon. We are glad to hear that she is on the way to recovery.

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing. We wish him and the Syrian delegation success in resuming the work of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, starting on 24 August. We hope that the epidemiological situation will not interfere with those plans. Together with Turkey and Iran, Russia will continue to provide the Special Envoy and the Syrians with the necessary support, including within the framework of the Astana format. At the same time, we note that this is a Syrian-owned and -led process that must be safeguarded from any external interference.

We consider it important to resume the political dialogue, which will facilitate the consolidation of Syrian people around a patriotic national platform and, accordingly, help to bolster the sovereignty and independence of the Syrian Arab Republic. The main obstacles to the normalization of the situation in Syria are well known — the presence of terrorists, foreign occupation of parts of the territory, attempts to overthrow the Government by means of sanctions and the playing of various ethno-confessional groups against each other.

In the Idlib de-escalation zone, terrorists are sabotaging joint Russian-Turkish patrols. The shelling of positions of Government forces and nearby settlements and attacks on the Khmeimim air base are increasing, as are provocations along the M4 highway. On 17 August, an explosive device was detonated along the patrol route, which damaged a Turkish vehicle.

Terrorists remain present in other parts of Syria as well. On 18 August, a Russian military convoy was attacked while it was carrying out a humanitarian operation to deliver aid to the Deir ez-Zor area. As a result, Major General Vyacheslav Gladkikh, of the Russian Armed Forces, and Syrian military representatives died. Two Russian soldiers were wounded. All attacks by militants will be resolutely suppressed. It is obvious that lasting calm in Idlib and other Syrian provinces is possible only if the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams (ISIS), Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and their affiliates are neutralized and their support from abroad is stopped.

The situation in Syria is further aggravated by the continued occupation by the United States of areas in the north-east. In addition to the problems in the United States-controlled areas related to the activities of ISIS and the dire humanitarian situation, those areas witnessed wide protests of the Arab population against the Kurdish authorities and the American occupation.

We again point to the illegal extraction and smuggling of Syrian oil, which poses a threat to the environment not only in Syria but also in Iraq. We took note of the contract signed by the American company Delta Crescent Energy for the production and processing of oil in the Kurdish regions, the fact of which was confirmed by Secretary of State Pompeo. We would like to have more information about this company from our American colleagues, as well as an explanation of how this agreement complies with international law and the sovereignty of Syria.

We deem this deal illegal. It is not only about the purposeful plunder of Syria's national natural resources, but also about undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. After all, we were reassured that the United States army would only protect oil from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. But it is

worth mentioning that, for the sake of trading oil from Syria, the United States made an exception to its own sanctions imposed on the Syrian oil and gas sector. It is a testimony for the whole world to see how those so-called humanitarian exemptions from sanctions work.

I read an article that recently appeared in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* with the characteristic and telling title, “The Pointless Cruelty of Trump’s New Syria Sanctions”. Indeed, the coercive measures have one goal: to strangle the Syrian economy and increase the suffering of ordinary Syrians with a view to inciting social protests. Humanitarian exemptions do not work, according to humanitarian non-governmental organizations themselves. We draw the attention of our Western colleagues — who speak of the need to implement resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2532 (2020) and the call of the Secretary-General for a ceasefire — to the fact that they are very picky about the statements of the Secretary-General. They remain deaf to calls to waive sanctions amid the coronavirus pandemic and refuse to include some provisions of resolution 2532 (2020) in the resolution on the extension of the mechanism for cross-border humanitarian supplies. But what sort of ceasefire is this, if the United States, which, again, illegally occupies parts of Syria, strikes at Government forces? On 17 August, United States troops fired at a Syrian army post near the settlement of Tel-Dahab in the Al-Hasakah governorate, killing and wounding Syrian soldiers.

We are also concerned about the situation in the internally displaced persons camps, primarily in Al-Hol camp, where the first coronavirus cases were recorded. There are never-ending reports of riots in prisons and the escape of terrorists.

Drawing a conclusion from all this, we once again call for an early end to the foreign occupation of Syria and attempts to divide the country. The only way to bring peace to Syria is to return all its lands to the control of Damascus and promote a political settlement through a comprehensive and inclusive Syrian dialogue.

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

I thank Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing and for his tireless efforts aimed at facilitating Syria's political process. I would also like to welcome our new colleague, the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Ambassador Philippe Kridelka, with whom we look forward to working.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains in full support of achieving a political solution that is owned and led by the Syrian people and is in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore welcome next week's third session of the Constitutional Committee, which, it is our hope, will be characterized by constructive engagement by all parties.

Regarding the country's security situation, we are concerned by the continued reports of sporadic violence despite the March ceasefire agreement. We urge all parties to abide by the ceasefire and exercise maximum restraint, and we reiterate the call for a complete and immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities.

Furthermore, we remind parties to the conflict that military and counter-terrorism operations, although necessary for the protection of Syria and the region, must comply with the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Distinction, proportionality and precaution ought to guide all activities.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic compounds the urgency for lasting peace and stability in Syria. Unfortunately, there has been an upsurge in cases in recent weeks, and, due to limited testing capacity, we do not know the true number of persons affected. A widespread outbreak of COVID-19 would undoubtedly be devastating to the country, especially since the health-care system has been debilitated by conflict. Nationwide calm will allow for a more robust response to the pandemic.

The Syrian economy is in danger of collapse. A decade-long civil war has led to a precarious socioeconomic situation, and unilateral coercive measures have increased the burden. As always, we continue to call for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures, which are inconsistent with international law, frustrate efforts at stabilizing and revitalizing the economy and now have the potential to undermine Syria's pandemic response.

We remain troubled by the unresolved issues of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Meaningful action on these matters must be prioritized, especially in consideration of the pandemic. Furthermore, the effective resolution of these issues will certainly go a long way towards confidence-building and reconciliation, in furtherance of the political process.

Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be respected and should never be rejected in favour of acts of aggression and foreign occupation. The hope of the Syrian people lies within the actions of the international community. We must seek common ground, we must be pragmatic and principled and we must not fail them.

Before concluding, it is with profound sadness that we recall the devastating 4 August blasts in Beirut, Lebanon. We express our deepest condolences to the Lebanese people and to the families of the many Syrian refugees who also lost their lives in this terrible tragedy. We also wish Deputy Special Envoy Matar a speedy recovery.

Annex XI**Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

I would like to start out by adding our voice to those of other members in wishing Deputy Special Envoy Matar a speedy recovery and thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for the information about her situation. We also thank the Special Envoy for his briefing today on the situation in Syria.

South Africa fully supports the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen and his Office as he continues to work towards finding a lasting solution to the conflict in Syria, which would culminate in the drafting of a new Constitution, the conducting of free and fair elections and the restoration of Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence, territorial integrity and economic prosperity. In this regard, South Africa welcomes the upcoming session of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, and we commend the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen aimed at convening it. Long-awaited progress by the Constitutional Committee has indeed been an important step on the path to a Syrian-led and -owned political process. The Constitutional Committee plays an important role in fostering political discussion and trust among Syrians and in ensuring that the voices of all Syrians are heard.

We call on all the participants at the third session of the Constitutional Committee to actively engage in the substantive discussions on the Committee's agenda. The only way forward is through meaningful dialogue on how best to move Syria from a war-torn State to a peaceful and stable member of the international community. In order to achieve this, the people and the Government of Syria, represented in the Constitutional Committee, require the Security Council's full support and the continued backing of the United Nations as a whole.

In support of the Constitutional Committee process, the parties must ensure that violence and hostilities in the country come to an end. South Africa therefore supports the Special Envoy's call for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire, in line with the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. A permanent ceasefire would allow the political process to continue in an environment where an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue can take place.

Additionally, the parties should continue to engage in trust and confidence measures. Given the rapid spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria and the cramped conditions in detention centres with limited water and sanitation, we call on the parties to release detainees and political prisoners, especially women and children, as well as the sick and elderly, who are most susceptible to this virus.

South Africa welcomes the measures taken by the Syrian authorities to slow the spread of COVID-19 and the continued support of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners that have continued to work in challenging circumstances to provide the necessary assistance to those in need. The spread of the COVID-19 virus has made the need for this assistance even more urgent.

In order to aid in this effort, the international community must lift the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on the Syrian Government. These measures exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation, which has been further affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and place an additional burden on those who so desperately need humanitarian aid and assistance.

South Africa fully supports the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and reiterates its concern at the continued presence of foreign and armed forces in the country. External interference in Syria must come to an end, especially in terms of the support provided to these armed groups.

We are also concerned at the continued presence of terrorist groups operating in parts of the country. We reiterate that, while all States have the sovereign right to address the threat of terrorism in their own countries, actions to counter terrorism must comply with international human rights law and international humanitarian law responsibilities and obligations.

In conclusion, South Africa believes that the political and humanitarian tracks in Syria are interlinked, and we call on all stakeholders to promote progress on both tracks to ensure a sustainable and peaceful settlement to the conflict. As has been stated before on numerous occasions, there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. South Africa hopes that the discussions in Geneva next week are able to move the political process towards a peaceful, stable and secure Syria.

Annex XII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Kais Kabtani**

I thank United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Pedersen for his briefing.

I also wish the Deputy Special Envoy, Ms. Khawla Matar, a quick recovery. I also would like to welcome the new Permanent Representative of Belgium and wish him good luck.

As the Syrian Constitutional Committee is set to reconvene next week in Geneva, this is a timely opportunity for Council members to appraise where we stand in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and exchange views on the way forward.

The establishment of the Constitutional Committee a year ago was a significant development and a glimmer of hope, in that it was the first political agreement between Syrians — Government and opposition — to begin implementing a key aspect of resolution 2254 (2015), which is the setting of a schedule and a process for drafting a new constitution. This process has since been deadlocked by violence, terrorism and entrenched divisions, and subsequently delayed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

There is no panacea to the Syrian crisis. Only a just political solution within the terms of resolution 2254 (2015) that is formulated by and for the Syrians and facilitated by the United Nations would bring about lasting peace and restore Syrians' dignity and Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

Without a negotiated settlement backed by multi-stakeholder cooperation and support, this conflict will only bring further loss, destruction, human suffering and social unrest, and fan regional instability. Without a conducive environment of enduring calm, sustained humanitarian relief, economic recovery and confidence-building, inclusive peace and development will remain elusive and terrorism, militias, corruption, crime and COVID-19 will fill the vacuum.

It is therefore crucial for the Syrian parties to break the deadlock and rise to the critical moment Syria is going through today. We urge them to engage constructively and in good faith in the Constitutional Committee talks, seek common ground and put the good of their own people and their own country first. We express hope that this third round will identify in earnest concrete agreed steps for Syria's constitutional drafting, while we express support for Special Envoy Pedersen's facilitating efforts to this end.

Tunisia expresses deep concern about the precarious security situation across Syria and the rise of the number of victims of violence among innocent civilians. Following overall improvement in recent months, there are presently foreboding signs of a relapse into large-scale violence, particularly in view of the repeated violations of the standing arrangements in northern Syria. Military reinforcements on the ground, tensions and military strikes registered in recent days highlight once again the fragility of a full and lasting stabilization of the de-escalation zone in Idlib.

We reiterate our appeal for a stepped-up role of the Special Envoy in mustering ceasefire efforts and making full use of his mandated prerogatives to ensure an enduring cessation of hostilities. We further reiterate our call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and take constant care to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The threat of terrorism and violent extremism has reached staggering levels in Syria. Tunisia is troubled by the growing resilience, sway and expansion, particularly

of listed terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

We are equally troubled by the continuing provocations of terrorist groups and extremists in Idlib. We condemn the second attack carried out against the joint Turkish-Russian patrol along the M4 highway earlier this week.

We recall the twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (see S/2020/717), dated 26 June, which details the critical terrorism reality in the levant as well as in Iraq, especially against the background of COVID-19.

We stress once again the crucial importance of joint and resolved efforts in order to address effectively the issue of terrorist and extremist groups in Idlib and beyond and to stymie their plans to exploit, spoil or defeat the peace process.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Political Coordinator of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Sonia Farrey**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing.

I would like to start by once again mourning the loss of life due to the tragic events in Lebanon on 4 August, which sadly included a large number of Syrian refugees and, as we have just heard, Deputy Special Envoy Matar. I would like to join others in wishing her a speedy recovery. All of this is a reminder of the magnitude of the Beirut tragedy, but also of how generous Lebanon has been in responding to the crisis in neighbouring Syria.

We are deeply concerned by the escalating coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation in Syria. There are now over 1,650 confirmed cases, with cases in regime-held areas more than doubling in the first 10 days of August and those in north-east Syria also growing rapidly. We understand the actual number of cases to be far greater. The Security Council has feared a dramatic rise in cases in Syria, and it appears now that such a rise may well have begun. It remains incumbent on all of us to ensure that the necessary medical and humanitarian assistance reaches all of those in need.

We are also deeply concerned at the fragile nature of the ceasefire in north-west Syria, particularly in the context of an increase in COVID-19 cases. We strongly supported the ceasefire agreed by the Presidents of Russia and Turkey on 5 March and welcomed the fact that it appeared to have been broadly holding. This granted millions of Syrians in Idlib some respite and allows hundreds of thousands to return to their homes. We are therefore concerned at the apparent erosion of the ceasefire in recent weeks, in particular an uptick in appalling attacks by extremist groups, notably on joint Russian-Turkish patrols, as well as repeated air strikes by Russian and regime forces.

As I said last month (S/2020/743, annex XIII), we know what the humanitarian impact of a breakdown in the ceasefire would be: the 7 July report of the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/44/61) found evidence of widespread indiscriminate attacks by regime and pro-regime forces on civilians, hospitals and schools, with reasonable grounds to believe that war crimes had been committed by the regime and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. The United Kingdom therefore calls for the immediate and sustained cessation of hostilities by all parties, in line with requests by the Secretary-General and the United Nations Special Envoy. Neither Syria nor the region can cope with another entirely unnecessary humanitarian disaster on top of a significant COVID-19 outbreak.

The Security Council is meeting just before the resumption of Constitutional Committee talks in Geneva. It is vital that all parties engage genuinely and properly with that process and that they refrain from reimposing unnecessary conditions like those pushed in November. The representatives of the regime and opposition and independent figures meeting in Geneva need to make progress on the real issues facing the country. All parties need to be driven by the urgency of the appalling situation in Syria. Ordinary Syrians, whether they are struggling at home or living difficult lives as refugees, do not have weeks, months or years to waste. They want the war to end and they want a negotiated political solution that enables reconciliation and reconstruction of the country.

We must also remember that the Constitutional Committee is just one part of the wider political process set out in resolution 2254 (2015). Progress in the

Constitutional Committee must be accompanied by immediate action on such other issues as the widespread release of political prisoners and vulnerable people; making medical care available for those in detention; and making progress in building the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Now is the time to seize this opportunity. We would also like to take this opportunity to remind all actors of the importance of ensuring the meaningful participation of women in the United Nations-facilitated political process for Syria, as the Security Council made clear in resolution 2254 (2015).

Finally, I would like to say a few words on sanctions. Our sanctions are targeted and impose asset freezes and travel bans against specific individuals and asset freezes on specific entities. Those targeted are responsible for human rights abuses against ordinary Syrians, such as repression, arbitrary detention and violence against demonstrators, and those who support or benefit from the Al-Assad regime, including by enriching themselves through luxury housing complexes built on land appropriated from Syrians who have fled, been arrested or killed. A separate European Union sanctions regime targets those involved in the proliferation of chemical weapons. In addition, we apply some trade and sectoral restrictions designed to limit the Al-Assad regime's ability to fund and wage war against its own people, including through the use of chemical and biological weapons.

These sanctions do not apply to food, medicine, medical equipment or medical assistance. Humanitarian exemptions apply to other equipment where this is needed, further mitigating the impact of sanctions on humanitarian programmes. We will continue to work with organizations and individuals to ensure that measures do not affect humanitarian operations in Syria and that organizations and individuals are able to import non-conflict-related goods.

It is not the case that our opposition to sanctions language in the recent cross-border resolution is evidence that sanctions are a problem. As we have repeatedly said, our sanctions on the Syrian regime have broad humanitarian exemptions. The reason we objected to such language in the cross-border resolution is because we do not accept any false equivalence between the disastrous effects of the regime's policies and the Chinese and Russian refusal to allow more than one cross-border crossing on the humanitarian situation in Syria and our targeted sanctions regime.

The reason that the Syrian people lack the humanitarian and medical aid they need is not because of our sanctions or because of any lack of generosity on the part of the United Kingdom and other international donors. It is, I am sad to say, because of the deliberate policies of the Syrian regime and its supporters to perpetuate the conflict rather than seek reconciliation, to limit humanitarian access, to cut cross-border assistance in order to make a political point, to make access to aid a political tool and to spend the State's resources not on improving the welfare of its people, but rather on waging war. To put it another way, the problem facing Syria's health sector is not sanctions but the fact that the regime is more intent on bombing hospitals than on building them.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. Before I begin my remarks, I would like to express our gratitude to him and to his deputy, Ms. Khawla Matar, and I wish her a speedy recovery from her injuries suffered during the 4 August explosion in Beirut.

Before I begin today, I want to take a moment to note the irony in discussing this issue after the results of last Friday's vote on renewing an arms embargo on Iran (see S/2020/803). Iran continues to engage in activity in Syria that is counter to the interests of the Syrian people, and yet many members of the Council voted on Friday to enable Iran to buy and sell even more deadly weapons. Iran's support for its proxies in Syria only helps to bolster the Al-Assad regime and undermine the United Nations process. How will giving Iran access to more weapons serve the interests of international peace and security? I hope that our colleagues who voted against or abstained in Friday's vote will explain to the Syrian people today how their support for the Iranian regime is helping to improve the lives of Syrians. The Syrian people deserve that from them.

On today's topic, the political situation in Syria, the United States remains encouraged and hopeful that the third meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva only five days from now will yield a clear path forward for the political process. The Syrian people are relying on every representative to the Constitutional Committee to make the 24 August meeting count. Now is the time for urgency, compromise and action. It is our hope that next week, the Committee, under Special Envoy Pedersen's facilitation, can achieve the following goals.

First, it is important that the parties move beyond previous discussions of first principles and instead directly address constitutional reforms. We encourage the United Nations facilitators to push back against attempts by any delegation to stall the substantive work of the Committee and, if necessary, publicly challenge any attempts to obstruct the proceedings.

Secondly, we hope that the Committee members are willing to remain in Geneva for weeks, if possible, and engage in substantive discussions on future constitutional reforms for more than just a day or two.

Thirdly, we encourage the parties to agree to a schedule of future rounds of Constitutional Committee meetings throughout the autumn to show that all parties are committed to advancing the political process.

The 10-month gap between the second and third round of Constitutional Committee meetings sapped the hard-earned positive momentum that the Council had helped generate for the parties to successfully launch the Constitutional Committee in October 2019. A schedule for future meetings will advance trust among the parties and, most importantly, show the Syrian people that progress is being made with regard to building a new, inclusive Syrian constitution that will pave the way for new United Nations-monitored elections as soon as possible.

The Trump Administration extends its full support to Special Envoy Pedersen for his efforts to facilitate the Committee's work towards the drafting of a new constitution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Next week, the United States Special Envoy for Syria, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, and Special Envoy Joel Rayburn will travel to Geneva to underline United States support for the United Nations-led political process and to ensure the success of the Constitutional Committee. It is absolutely critical that this next round of meetings be constructive. They must

help to chart a path forward for future meetings and progress in creating a truly representative constitution in order to make up for time lost due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The key to achieving a credible, long-lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict is a permanent, nationwide ceasefire. The Council must remain united in its shared commitment to there being only one way forward to bring about a just and lasting peace, namely, that the Al-Assad regime must pursue a direct, negotiated political solution with the Syrian opposition, facilitated by the United Nations. We call upon the Al-Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian enablers to commit to that political process by halting all further attacks, including the killing of civilians and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure.

We note the disturbing, yet unsurprising, trend of the increase in COVID-19 cases in Syria. The risk of COVID-19 is especially great for the more than 100,000 Syrians who remain in arbitrary detention in putrid, overcrowded regime prisons. Those detainees must be released immediately and without preconditions, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), to ensure their safety and to lay the groundwork for progress towards a political solution. We reiterate our position that there will be no reconstruction, no diplomatic recognition and no sanctions relief until a political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is irreversibly under way.

The United States' policy of maximum diplomatic and economic pressure on the Al-Assad regime and its backers is focused on using every tool in our toolbox to protect civilians from further violence and to bring the Al-Assad regime back to the negotiating table in order to fully implement resolution 2254 (2015). There is much work ahead to achieve the reforms necessary to facilitate Syria's political transition from a Government at war with its own people to a Government that serves the Syrian people. A legitimate political process facilitated by the United Nations will form the backbone of a new, post-war Syria, together with a new constitution, a nationwide ceasefire and United Nations-monitored elections that represent the Syrian people.

It is time for Al-Assad's needless brutal war and rampant corruption to come to an end. The regime must heed the calls of Secretary-General Guterres and Special Envoy Pedersen to agree and adhere to a nationwide ceasefire, provide all Syrians with access to humanitarian aid, which has been generously provided by many of those on the Council, and engage meaningfully on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). A political solution is the only solution that can truly protect the Syrian people and chart a course for a better future. We ask each member of the Council to work with us in support of the political process so as to ensure that the legitimate aspirations of Syrians from all corners of the country and the diaspora are fulfilled.

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

I join others in extending our deepest condolences to the Syrians who lost family members in the Beirut explosion, as well as to the Russian Federation for the loss of a major general in eastern Syria yesterday. Let me convey my best wishes to Deputy Special Envoy Matar for a speedy recovery. I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing. I would like to welcome the new Permanent Representative of Belgium, Mr. Philippe Kridelka, to the United Nations family and the Security Council, and I wish him best of luck. I would also like to welcome the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Bashar Ja'afari, to this meeting.

It is only a few days until the next session of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. As progress has been insufficient for months, we all have long been waiting for the reconvening of the Committee. My delegation therefore encourages the members of the Committee to show goodwill and actively engage in constructive dialogue. A productive session will subsequently serve as a good basis to facilitate the broader political process.

Like other Council members, Viet Nam remains a strong supporter of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the United Nations, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), in full compliance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations and with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and non-interference in its internal affairs. That is the only way to bring about long-term peace and stability, thereby ending the untold suffering of the Syrian people.

We would also like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the Special Envoy and his team to bring the parties together. We will continue to support their important work. While there is hope for progress on the political track, the overall situation on the ground remains a source of concern.

Regarding the security situation, while Viet Nam is pleased to see that the ceasefire agreement in Idlib continues to generally hold and commends the efforts of the parties concerned to that end, there has not been any reduction in the number of worrisome security incidents in that area. We are also troubled by the reported resurgence of terrorist activities in different parts of Syria.

We would like to reiterate our call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from violence. Ensuring a sustained period of calm is of vital importance to unlocking progress in the political domain. It is also critical to continuing efforts to eradicate terrorism, in line with responsibilities under international law, including international humanitarian law.

In addition, the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation are regrettably becoming increasingly volatile. While people are struggling with their daily lives due to the impact of the severe economic crisis, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is hitting that country harder day after day. It is alarming to witness that the number of COVID-19 cases has increased by more than 60 per cent in north-eastern Syria in just one week. Controlling the spread of the virus and minimizing its impact on the Syrian people are now among the most important tasks. It is particularly relevant to ensure that sanctions do not undermine the capacity of the Syrian people to ensure their basic daily needs, especially in terms of food and health care during the brutal pandemic.

We reiterate our call on the international community to provide unwavering support for Syrians in all areas by all means, especially during this challenging time. It is of critical importance that we should not let the situation deteriorate. Syria cannot afford that at the moment.

Annex XVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari**

[Original: English and Arabic]

I congratulate you, Mr. President, and the friendly Republic of Indonesia on presiding over the Security Council for the current month. I also extend my deep condolences to my colleague, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, and his friendly country for the painful incident that occurred yesterday, causing the death of a major general and the injury of two soldiers of the Russian army by an explosive device planted by terrorists as their convoy was targeted after its return from a humanitarian mission in Syria's Deir-ez-Zor governorate.

Since the Security Council endorsed the political process as a basis for resolving the crisis in my country, some Permanent Members of the Council have endeavoured to undermine that approach day after day, month after month and year after year to the extent that those same members have, unfortunately, started misusing the Council to practically support the terrorist war on Syria and to justify their occupation of its lands and their unbridled investment in terrorism.

Every time we have submitted a complaint to the Security Council or informed it of facts about acts of support for terrorism, aggression, occupation, plunder and destruction of the resources of my country, the more Western pressure increased to deflect the efforts of the Council and prevent it from carrying out its role in upholding the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and ensuring respect for the content of its own resolutions relevant to the situation in Syria, foremost of which is ensuring full commitment to its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

That only raises numerous questions. What has the Security Council done to end the American occupation of parts of my country? What has it done to put an end to the Turkish occupation and the practices of the terrorism-sponsoring Erdoğan regime? What steps have been taken by the Security Council to support the efforts of the Syrian State and its allies in combating terrorism, confronting the tens of thousands of terrorists without borders, also known in United Nations language as foreign terrorist fighters, and holding the Governments recruiting, funding and supporting them accountable?

At a time when members of the Security Council pledged, at the outset of their resolutions relevant to the situation in my country, a strong commitment to respecting the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, the United States occupation forces, in full view of the United Nations and the international community, took a new step to plunder Syria's natural resources, including Syrian oil and gas. Recently, the United States company Crescent Delta Energy, with the sponsorship and support of the United States Administration, has entered into a contract with the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) separatist militia, an agent of the United States occupation forces in north-eastern Syria, with the aim of stealing Syrian oil and depriving the Syrian State and Syrian people of the basic revenues necessary to improve the humanitarian situation, provide for livelihood needs and reconstruction. Imagine an unknown company born out of nowhere, headed by former United States Ambassador to Denmark James Cain, a retired American Delta Force officer named James Reese, and an oil expert, all with the blessing of the American Administration, which has actually established this company.

This hostile American behaviour towards Syria, which violates international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Security Council's resolutions, did not

come as a surprise, as the United States Administration had facilitated the possession and trafficking of the terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) with looted Syrian oil and its smuggling to Turkey in cooperation with the terrorism-sponsoring Erdogan Regime. Furthermore, the United States Administration has continued, through its illegal alliance, to launch repeated attacks on the Syrian Arab Army forces to prevent them from liberating the areas occupied by the terrorist organization ISIS in north-eastern Syria.

Just two days ago, two American military helicopters attacked a checkpoint of the Syrian Arab Army south-east of Qamishli, killing one soldier and wounding two others.

We all remember the sinful attack by the American occupation forces on the sites of the Syrian Arab Army on Mount Tharda in Deir ez-Zor, on 17 September 2016, to enable the terrorist organization ISIS to control those sites.

Furthermore, United States President Donald Trump previously announced, on 27 October 2019, that he “intends to conclude a deal with an American company to go to Syria and obtain its share of Syrian oil”. Trump reaffirmed his endeavour on 1 November 2019 by announcing his intention to keep Syrian oil because he “loves oil”.

It is well known to all that the United States Administration has allowed United States oil companies, whose work was supervised by former United States Vice President Dick Cheney, to extract Syrian oil from the occupied Syrian Golan in flagrant violation of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In that regard, we ask: Does this express the respect of the United States — the host country of United Nations Headquarters and a permanent member of the Security Council, which is entrusted with contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security — for international law, the Charter of the United Nations and a political solution in Syria?

The recent period has also seen the American company Creative Associates International conclude a cooperation agreement with the so-called Civil Council in Deir ez-Zor, which operates under the umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces militias. These are the same militias that issued, a few days ago, the so-called protection and management of absentee property law, which is aimed at looting the property of Syrians who were displaced by the concerted efforts of ISIS and SDF to change the demographic composition of those areas.

Is this agreement, sponsored by the American Administration and its occupying forces, consistent with the commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of my country? The shameful record of the United States of America against dozens of States Members of the Organization answers this question and reveals the lack of belief of American Administrations in the principles and purposes of this international Organization.

My country, the Syrian Arab Republic, condemns these practices and any similar acts or suspicious deals that take place with proxy militias and terrorist entities or artificial bodies that do not have any legal capacity or status. Syria affirms that these practices are null and void and have no legal effect, as they constitute a shameless assault against the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and the resources of its people. The late international law must be turning in its grave now, lamenting such behaviour.

For its part, the Turkish regime continues its practices aimed at strengthening its occupation of parts of my country. The Turkish regime is trying to change the legal, demographic, economic and financial character of those occupied territories

by the Turkification and displacement of inhabitants, plundering their real estate and property, imposing the use of Turkish currency, and naming squares and streets after Turkish and Ottoman figures. The Turkish regime even uses Ottoman names for the terrorist organizations and entities that it supervises, operates and invests in for its foreign wars in Libya and elsewhere. These terrorist groups with historic Ottoman names include the Sultan Murad Brigade, the Sultan Muhammad Al Fateh Brigade and the Nur al-Din al-Zanki movement and others.

These are the tip of the iceberg of the crimes perpetrated by the Erdoğan regime, which has never respected its pledges under the Astana agreements and the Sochi understandings and has committed every single prescribed crime, such as supporting terrorism, facilitating the infiltration of foreign terrorist fighters into Syria, supplying terrorist organizations with toxic chemicals to use against civilians and fabricating accusations against the Syrian Government. The Turkish Regime has launched acts of aggression and occupation, including the aggression against the city of Kessab and the so-called Operation Peace Spring and the Turkish military incursion into north and north-western Syria, looting the factories and property of the Syrians in Aleppo and its countryside, and burning or looting agricultural crops, and trading with ISIS and terrorist organizations in oil and looted antiquities, and others.

At the time this session is being held, more than a million Syrians from Hasakah and its countryside live without drinking water in intense heat and fear of the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This is all a result of the Security Council's silence on the Turkish regime's continued use of water as a weapon of war against civilians, by cutting drinking water off at Allouk station more than 15 times for periods ranging from two to ten days and by reducing its production capacity to its minimum levels. How long will the Security Council remain silent in the face of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Erdoğan? Do members have an answer?

The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that the presence of the Turkish military forces on Syrian territory is an act of aggression, occupation and a gross violation of the principles of international law, the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of friendly relations and good neighbourliness between adjacent countries. My country also affirms that the Turkish regime's confiscation and annexation of swaths of Syrian lands and its construction of a so-called separation wall on them will not change the legal status of those lands or the fact that they belong to the Syrian Arab Republic, nor will it in any way affect the legal and sovereign rights of the Syrian Arab Republic or be a precursor to any future binary demarcation. The use by the Turkish regime of its NATO membership as a shield in order to antagonize the neighbouring countries and violate the sovereign rights of these countries increases the responsibility of this alliance for the absence of stability in the entire Mediterranean region and escalates tensions to unprecedented levels.

The national delegation continues its preparations to participate in the next round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee, which will be held in Geneva a few days later. We reaffirm that this process is and must always be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, without any external interference, and that the foundations that have been agreed upon and the terms of reference that have been reached must be upheld and respected and not allowed to be manipulated to divert it from its assigned tasks and goals under any pretext.

Yes, we say over and over again that the solution is political and exclusively Syrian-owned without any foreign interference — a solution whose parameters are set by Syrians themselves in order to protect their country from vultures lurking in

it, not according to criteria set by the American Administration and Erdoğan, who attack Syria and occupy its precious territories.

It seems from the statement of my colleague, the American Permanent Representative, that her Administration's policy towards my country is based on settling scores with any country standing with my country against the conspiracy targeting Syria and those same countries. Therefore, it is not strange that the American representative would start her statement speaking about Iran as if the subject of today's meeting were the predicament of the American Administration after its withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The Syrian Arab Republic again reiterates its demand that the Secretary-General and the Security Council take urgent action in response to the complaint submitted on 31 May, condemning the acts of aggression, occupation and external interference in the internal affairs of Syria, as well as the disastrous effects of unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United State Administration and the European Union, despite the pleas of the Secretary-General, the Special Envoy and many others. These measures prevent the Syrians from meeting their basic need for food, medicine and medical equipment, especially in the light of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its dire impacts. They also represent a crime of deliberate killing of the people of the countries affected by those sanctions.

A final friendly word for the Special Envoy Mr. Pederson. I heard him describe in his statement the American occupation forces as "the International Coalition forces". Naturally, the defunct international law, the martyred Charter of the United Nations, the Envoy himself, the Security Council and I — all of us — know that the presence of American forces in my country is illegitimate and a mere occupation. Therefore, I call upon my friend Mr. Pederson to reconsider the use of that term.
