



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8493rd meeting

Wednesday, 27 March 2019, 10.25 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Delattre (France)

Members:

Belgium	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic	Mr. Trullols Yabra
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Ms. Goolab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director, Coordination Division, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: Earlier this month, the Syrian conflict entered its ninth year. There have been eight long, horrendous years of suffering by the Syrian people, and it seems far from over.

The Secretary-General has watched with great concern the deterioration of the situation in Idlib in recent weeks amid escalating violence. We have seen reports of exchanges of artillery and mortars and of air strikes, some reported to have hit civilian targets, causing civilian casualties and further displacement of tens of thousands. There are reports of rocket attacks in cross-line raids by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which have resulted in casualties among Government soldiers and civilians.

The United Nations is worried about the strain this escalation has placed on the memorandum of understanding between Russia and Turkey, which, since September 2018, has largely contained the scope of military operations in the area. We hope that the recently announced coordinated patrols by Russia and Turkey will help avoid further escalation in the north-west, urge them to uphold their agreed arrangements for Idlib, and press all concerned to halt violence and stabilize a dangerous situation.

We also call on the guarantors to work together to address the issue of Security Council-listed

terrorist groups in full compliance with international humanitarian law, which is essential to avoid mass displacement and yet another humanitarian catastrophe from unfolding. Last week, the Syrian Democratic Forces, backed by the United States-led international coalition, proclaimed the capture of Baghouz, the last remaining territory in Syria held by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is an important advance in combating terrorist groups that have inflicted untold misery on countless victims. However, much work remains to be done to fully address ISIL's threat.

Meanwhile, thousands, mostly women and children, are fleeing counter-ISIL operations in Deir ez-Zor and have found their way to the Al-Hol camp, in Hasakah governorate. More than 140 children have died on the road or shortly after arriving at Al-Hol camp. There is a desperate need to maintain and ramp up the response to meet the humanitarian and protection needs of some 72,000 people there, with thousands more expected to arrive.

In the north-east, the United Nations is strongly encouraging international diplomatic efforts to ensure military escalation is avoided at all costs. Any escalation in the north-east could lead to devastating consequences for civilians and create conditions conducive to ISIL's re-emergence. I reiterate the Secretary-General's reminder to the international community: counter-terrorism operations cannot override the responsibilities to protect civilians.

The Council will soon hear from my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, but I add my own call for sustained and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief to civilians throughout Syria, but in particular to Rukban, where the United Nations last delivered assistance in mid-February. We have had reports that other commercial routes have been cut, leaving the settlements' inhabitants in an even more vulnerable position. The United Nations is working with all parties to find a durable solution, including relocation of the settlements' residents to their areas of origin or of their choosing.

A durable solution can succeed only through a carefully planned principled approach that ensures respect for core protection standards. It requires constructive engagement and coordination by all parties involved: the Syrian Government, the armed opposition group present in the settlement, Russia, the United States and Jordan. Meanwhile, the United

Nations is awaiting approval from the Government for humanitarian access for a third convoy of life-saving assistance. I encourage all parties to cooperate with the sense of urgency that these humanitarian issues deserve.

Sustained de-escalation towards an eventual nationwide ceasefire and tangible improvements for Syrian lives are essential for a credible political process that can achieve the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

In that regard, Special Envoy Pedersen has been seeking to advance the five goals outlined to the Council on 28 February (see S/PV.8475). The goals are, first, to begin and deepen a sustained dialogue with the Syrian Government and the opposition on building trust and confidence towards a safe, calm and neutral environment; secondly, to see more concrete action on detainees, abductees and missing persons; thirdly, to engage and involve a wide range of Syrians in the political process; fourthly, to convene a credible, balanced and inclusive constitutional committee as soon as possible; and, fifthly, to help the international parties deepen their own dialogue towards the common purpose of a credible and sustainable political settlement of the Syrian conflict that can enjoy international legitimacy.

On the first goal, the Special Envoy held a second meeting with the Government of Syria in Damascus and a second meeting with the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission in Riyadh. Both consultations have gone into depth on the issues covered in resolution 2254 (2015). No subject has been off limits and both parties welcome a broad-ranging dialogue. That regular and deep engagement is necessary to identify concrete steps to build trust and confidence towards a safe, calm and neutral environment.

Our second goal — concrete action on the release of detainees, abductees and the clarification of the fate of missing persons — was also raised in depth with the Government and the opposition. On 18 March in Moscow, the Office of the Special Envoy put forth a number of concrete suggestions to the Working Group on the release of detainees/abductees and handover of the bodies as well as the identification of missing persons, of which the United Nations is a member, along with Iran, Russia and Turkey. A key United Nations request was to move beyond one-for-one exchanges and focus on the simultaneous release of unequal numbers, which was met with no objection from other members of the Working Group. However, details about the next

release operation, including the numbers of those to be released and the timing and monitoring of the release, still need to be worked out, in close cooperation with the Syrian parties. Furthermore, the United Nations has proposed that the Working Group meet in Geneva in the near future.

Ultimately, the Secretary-General wants these discussions to move from good words to good deeds, see the release of as many detained persons as possible and clarify the fate of missing persons. Progress on that file could build confidence that a new Syria is possible, especially for those who want to return. So many Syrian families have been affected, and they yearn to see the issue meaningfully addressed.

On the third goal, engagement continues to ensure that the priorities and voices of a broad range of Syrians, within Syria and across the diaspora, are included in the political process. Most recently, the United Nations heard the diverse voices of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and Syrian civil society during the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria. We heard about how the conflict has impacted their lives, but also about their strength and resilience in responding to the terrible needs created by the conflict. Such broad-based engagement with all the dimensions of Syrian society helps to strengthen Syrian ownership in shaping its future. Those necessary but difficult discussions are a microcosm of the meaningful engagement required from both of the negotiating parties. The issues affecting Syrians, including obstacles preventing voluntary, safe and dignified returns, must be addressed. A political settlement that meets their needs and legitimate aspirations would help to advance that.

On the constitutional committee, the fourth goal aimed at opening the door to a broader political process, the discussions so far, including with the Government and the opposition, have led to an agreement in principle that a viable launch of a constitutional committee would require a set of understandings to regulate its work. That would need to include understandings regarding the committee's mandate, structure, voting and sharing arrangements; the United Nations facilitation role and assurances regarding the safety and security of all constitutional committee participants. Discussions are also continuing to facilitate the finalization of the middle third list of committee members. There are no artificial deadlines, but the Special Envoy hopes now to be able to move forward as soon as possible to convene

a credible, balanced, inclusive and viable constitutional committee under United Nations auspices in Geneva. We must remain committed to seeking a minimum of 30 per cent women's representation on the committee.

The fifth goal is to improve international dialogue and cooperation on Syria. The situations in Idlib, Rukban and Al-Hol, the uncertainty over the north-east and the potential for regional escalation all underscore the need for such continuous cooperation. We must avoid misunderstandings and actions that could escalate matters.

In that regard, Secretary-General has taken note of the developments regarding the occupied Syrian Golan. The United Nations position is determined by the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on that issue. The efforts of the United Nations to facilitate a political process in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), will continue to fully uphold the principles of Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity.

Finally, we welcome the generosity expressed by the donors at the Brussels Conference and their record pledges to support the Syrian people and the wide expressions of support by all attendees for a political settlement for Syria under United Nations auspices. As the Secretary-General reminded us on the grim anniversary of the conflict, it is a moral obligation and a political imperative for the international community to support Syrians in uniting around a vision that addresses the root causes of the conflict and forges a negotiated political solution in accordance with the Council's own resolution 2254 (2015).

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: This month marks the eighth year since the Syrian crisis began — eight years of lives being uprooted; eight years of families being torn apart; eight years of children being needlessly exposed to traumatic violence.

Eight years on, the humanitarian crisis in Syria is far from over. United Nations assessments indicate that 11.7 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection inside the country in 2019. More than 5.6 million Syrians live as refugees across the region. And while violence has decreased in many locations, in

others, recent weeks have seen increasing numbers of civilians being killed and injured.

The situation in Idlib and surrounding areas in the north-west of Syria remains of grave concern. The agreement to establish a demilitarized zone, announced by the Russian Federation and Turkey on 17 September 2018, was followed by a reduction in violence across much of the north-west. But recent weeks have seen an alarming spike in civilian casualties and new displacement, with increased shelling along the front lines, an intensification of air strikes and a growing number of attacks involving improvised explosive devices in urban areas, including Idlib city. Residential areas in Aleppo city have also been targeted with mortar and sniper fire. Last month alone, 90 people were killed, of whom nearly half were children. At least 86,000 people have also reportedly been displaced by this latest upsurge of violence. Health facilities, including a hospital in Saraqib city, which had been deconflicted with the parties through established procedures and schools are reported to have been hit.

Last August, the Secretary-General spoke about the "growing risks of a humanitarian catastrophe in the event of a full-scale military operation in Idlib". Today, those risks continue to loom large. Humanitarian organizations continue to respond to needs in Idlib and to prepare for the possibility of further deterioration, but, as we have stated previously, a full-scale military onslaught in the area would overwhelm humanitarian response capacities. We therefore reiterate the Secretary-General's call on all parties to exercise restraint and to prioritize the protection of civilians. It is critical that respect for international humanitarian law and human rights be at the centre of the parties' military efforts to address the challenging situation on the ground in the north-west.

Tens of thousands of displaced people — the vast majority of whom are women and children — have continued to arrive at Al-Hol camp in Hasakah governorate from south-east Deir ez-Zor governorate. Most new arrivals are in extremely poor health, with many showing signs of distress and suffering from trauma injuries, malnutrition and fatigue. They have undergone a gruelling journey of hundreds of kilometres in open trucks, in many cases after an extended period of exposure to intense hostilities and after years of living in a situation of extreme deprivation and human rights abuse under the rule of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It is estimated that, since early

December, more than 140 people have died either on the way to Al-Hol or shortly after arrival in the camp; of those, some 80 per cent were children under the age of five.

The population of Al-Hol now exceeds 72,000 — an increase of more than 25,000 over the past month — with indications that more people could still be on the way. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners have rapidly mobilized a major relief operation and continue to scale up the response, in many cases redirecting capacities and stocks from other parts of the country.

Food, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, non-food items and health and protection services are now being provided for new arrivals. In line with humanitarian principles, needs-based assistance is also being provided to women and children from third countries, including family members of suspected foreign fighters. But the situation remains extremely challenging, with the rate of new arrivals far exceeding the capacity of the site. Expansion efforts are under way. It is critical that Member States continue to support humanitarian organizations impartially by providing life-saving assistance in Al-Hol.

The situation in Al-Hol and south-east Deir ez-Zor presents a number of complex protection challenges. Among them is the notable absence of adult males and adolescent boys over the age of 15 in the camp. The parties have clear obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to treat all persons within their power humanely and allow persons deprived of their liberty to communicate with their families. Special protections are also provided to all children under the age of 18, including those affiliated with fighters.

In Hajin, Baghouz and other areas most directly affected by counter-ISIL operations, the extensive destruction of homes and infrastructure is reported, and high levels of explosive hazard contamination will represent an additional serious obstacle to the safe return of the tens of thousands of civilians displaced from the area. The rapid mobilization of explosive hazard clearance capacities is needed, in line with the parties' obligations under international humanitarian law.

The United Nations welcomes efforts in support of durable solutions for the more than 41,000 people who remain stranded in the makeshift Rukban settlement. Some 95 per cent of people surveyed by United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent teams last month

expressed a desire to leave the settlement, although most also highlighted various protection concerns.

Movement out of Rukban has taken place in recent days. Some 362 people left the settlement on 23 March, passing through a Government checkpoint and transit site and arriving, on 24 March, at a collective shelter in Homs city, where they received humanitarian assistance from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, with United Nations support. Further gradual movement is expected in the coming weeks. Discussions are ongoing with the main parties involved, including the Government of Syria, the Russian Federation, the United States and the Government of Jordan, to further clarify the process and address the concerns that have been raised by people in Rukban.

The United Nations continues to reiterate the importance of a carefully planned, principled approach that ensures respect for core protection standards and does not expose vulnerable, and in many cases traumatized, displaced people to additional harm. All movements must be voluntary, safe, well-informed and dignified, with humanitarian access assured throughout.

In parallel, the United Nations also continues to strongly advocate for additional humanitarian assistance for those who remain in Rukban. The deployment of a third convoy has therefore been requested to allow essential needs to be met ahead of the Ramadan period, which begins in early May. Food, medicine and other life-saving supplies delivered in February are already running low, and the replenishment of stocks will become increasingly urgent over the coming weeks.

Earlier this month, the Secretary-General noted that “[a]s the conflict enters its ninth year, Syrians continue to suffer from one of the worst conflicts of our time”. The Secretary-General appealed for the protection of civilians in Idlib and broader respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, and highlighted the importance of continued improvements in sustained humanitarian access. The scale of the humanitarian challenges facing the people of Syria remains staggering by any measure. International support for efforts to respond to the needs of millions of Syrians remains critical.

At the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, on 14 March, international donors pledged a record \$7 billion to meet needs inside Syria and ensure support for refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries. The

Conference was a resounding demonstration of the international community's continued solidarity with the people of Syria and Syria's neighbours, who continue to host millions of refugees at great economic cost.

We reiterate our thanks to the donor community for the new funding announced in Brussels and the billions more that have been provided since the crisis began, saving countless lives. Close to \$2.2 billion were provided against the 2018 humanitarian response plan alone, covering 65 per cent of the requirements requested for operations inside Syria. We appeal for the pledges made in Brussels to be quickly converted into contributions for 2019.

We commend the Government of Turkey for its hospitality in hosting close to two-thirds of the total number of registered Syrian refugees and facilitating help to millions more inside Syria, including through cross-border operations authorized by the Security Council. In addition, we express our appreciation to the Governments and people of Jordan and Lebanon, which are hosting the highest numbers of refugees per capita in the world, as well as those of Iraq and Egypt, where efforts towards inclusive policies are making a huge difference to refugees' lives.

Humanitarian organizations have shown that they can deliver. An average of 5.5 million people were reached with assistance inside Syria each month last year, from Damascus and through cross-border channels. Continued international engagement and support will allow us to build on this in 2019, sustaining and further strengthening what is one of the largest and most complex aid operations ever implemented.

We remain firmly committed to implementing principled, needs-based humanitarian action across all areas of Syria, working with Syrian counterparts and communities. Protection, saving lives and restoring dignity will remain at the centre of our efforts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing.

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

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Director Rajasingham for their briefings today.

After eight years of the Syrian conflict, we would like to remind members of the Council that this war

started when the Al-Assad regime delivered the body of 13-year-old Hamza Al-Khateeb to his family — shot, burned and mutilated — after he had taken part in a peaceful protest in southern Syria. Unfortunately, Hamza's story foreshadowed the next eight years of suffering for the Syrians. The world will never forget the images of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi's corpse drifting to the shore in the Mediterranean; five-year-old Omran Daqneesh covered in dust and blood in Aleppo; and countless children and others gassed in Khan Shaykhun and Douma, and those starved in besieged eastern Ghouta.

The source of that suffering and the ultimate cause of the conflict is and has been the Al-Assad regime's violent crackdown on its own people. The Al-Assad regime and its allies must take concrete steps to de-escalate military operations and end forced disappearances, release innocent civilians held in detention and permit rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian agencies across Syria. Meanwhile, a future credible, legitimate and pluralistic constitutional committee should have the opportunity to invigorate a political transition to leadership that will protect, rather than harm, Syria's citizens.

As the Security Council, we should demand that the regime respect international humanitarian principles and human rights standards. We encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to finalize a political settlement by and through the Syrian people, and we must see the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), including a political settlement, a nationwide ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access.

In 2015, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015), calling for the drafting of a new constitution within six months and an election in 18 months. We fully support the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to revitalize the political process without any further delay.

A political process will be futile, however, unless hostilities end across Syria. Shelling and airstrikes have displaced more than 70,000 Syrians just since February. The United States is gravely concerned by the recent escalation and by the Russian Federation and Syrian regime's joint strikes in the demilitarized zone. These attacks on civilian infrastructure and innocent Syrians, including members of the White Helmets, must end immediately.

We have also heard from our United Nations colleagues that the food delivered to 42,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Rukban last month has already run out. The United States strongly supports the United Nations request for a third convoy to Rukban, and we call on the Russian Federation, as should the rest of the Council, to press the Syrian regime to allow humanitarian agencies access to vulnerable populations throughout Syria.

We reiterate that the United States and its local partners are not impeding departures from Rukban. Rather, for the past year, Syria's allies have obstructed the Council's efforts to ensure that the regime handles the issue of Rukban humanely and in a manner consistent with humanitarian principles. The United States appeals directly to the Russian Federation to work with us in finding a way to assist the Syrian people. We welcome increased coordination to facilitate the return of displaced persons, wherever they may be. However, such a process must be closely coordinated with the United Nations. IDPs should have access to accurate information as to what awaits them, including the availability of services, access to the civil registry, safe passage and physical safety at their destination. All Syrians seeking relocation must be protected from arbitrary detention.

We are also deeply concerned about the situation in Al-Hol camp, where 70,000 civilians currently reside, 90 per cent of whom are women and children. Humanitarians are working around the clock to respond but are constrained by capacity. We encourage countries to contribute to the response, as the United Nations recently outlined in its emergency appeal for Al-Hol.

Efforts to release the detainees held by the Al-Assad regime and Syrian opposition groups have stalled under the auspices of the Astana guarantors. Meanwhile, the regime continues to arbitrarily arrest, torture and execute detainees. The United States supports a United Nations-led approach to address detainee issues.

A key component of accountability is recognizing the rights of victims and transitional justice. That is why the United States recently announced its intention to provide \$2 million in support of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. We hope that fellow Member States will continue to support the important work of the Mechanism.

To end on a positive note, the liberation of the territory in Syria once held by the Islamic State in Iraq

and the Sham is now 100 per cent complete. Moreover, in an incredible display of commitment, 60 members of the international community came together this month to pledge \$7 billion to humanitarian aid to Syria. The extraordinary nature of pledges this month reflects the recognition of the fact that this conflict and its impact on the Syrian people are far from over.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I will deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Kuwait, Belgium and Germany. Let me thank Mr. Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for their comprehensive briefings.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude and deep respect to all humanitarian and medical workers throughout Syria, in the region and at Headquarters for their tireless efforts to care for the affected population.

The figures given by OCHA speak for themselves. With the Syrian conflict entering its ninth year, the humanitarian needs in Syria remain huge. Our response must be needs-based and comply fully with humanitarian principles. It must also include cross-line and cross-border assistance, as mandated by the Security Council. In areas of Syria that recently shifted control, continuity of services must be ensured. Humanitarian access must be provided in an unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained manner. The Syrian humanitarian crisis is at its core a protection crisis.

Today I would like to focus on the following aspects: the situation in the north of the country, that is, Idlib and the north-east; the protection of returnees and refugees; and the recent Brussels Conference.

First, concerning the situation in Idlib, we are gravely concerned at the recent increase in violence against civilians and their infrastructure. Shelling and air strikes have killed civilians, including women and children. We strongly condemn the loss of civilian lives as a result of these attacks. We remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law, including humanitarian principles, and human rights law that require them to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

As penholders, we would like to amplify OCHA's clear and repeated assessment that any military offensive would lead to an uncontrollable and unmanageable humanitarian disaster. A breakdown of existing support

pipelines would multiply the human suffering. There would be no winners.

The fight against terrorism must not impede impartial humanitarian action. We therefore reiterate our call for the continual and faithful implementation of the Russia-Turkey memorandum of understanding. We stand united in our call for a nationwide cessation of hostilities, in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018).

Secondly, with respect to the north-east, the displacement situation is particularly unsettling, with a new influx of displaced persons from Baghouz to Hasakah province. Camps for internally displaced persons are overcrowded, and the most important point of refuge, Al-Hol camp, is operating far beyond capacity. Ninety per cent of the people in Al-Hol are women and children, and many are in poor health. During the last week alone, 16 people died en route to or after arriving at Al-Hol.

The special needs of the most vulnerable, including the elderly and the disabled, must be urgently addressed. We call on all parties to the conflict to allow sustained access to displaced persons, including at screening sites. The United Nations and its partners must be in a position to provide needs-based assistance to all people in need without delay or bureaucratic impediment.

Thirdly, concerning the protection of returnees and refugees, the fragile situation in Rukban and other parts of the country shows why the Council needs to closely follow the security situation on the ground. All returns and relocations must be voluntary, safe, dignified and well-informed. Compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law is an obligation. Let us be clear: those who favour more and speedy relocations bear the burden of proof that the right conditions are in place. Family unity needs to be ensured during all phases. Key protection mechanisms such as proper monitoring along routes and at screening and reception centres must be in place at all times. People willing to return must receive reliable safety guarantees. The outcome of the intention surveys carried out in Rukban made it clear that concerns go beyond personal security. Other important factors are access to documents and property and confirmed information on amnesty and conscription procedures.

This burden of proof does not lie with the humanitarian community or donors. In the first instance, it is essential to provide regular, free and unimpeded access by the Office of the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees to returnees and refugees. That is the litmus test we are facing.

In the case of Rukban, additional assistance must be made available to the camp population as soon as possible. We cannot accept undue delays as in the past. That would raise serious questions as to the willingness of the parties concerned to help those in utter need and without protection. Reports point to urgent medical needs, in particular among children and young adults. The quest for long-term solutions cannot distract us from addressing the urgent needs that exist in the camp now.

Lastly, the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held under the leadership of High Representative Mogherini and Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock, sent an unambiguous sign of solidarity to the Syrian people. At more than \$9 billion, the pledges reached an unprecedented level. As penholders, we would like to thank all donors for their contributions, which will sustain a high level of humanitarian engagement in 2019. As penholders, we are committed to delivering on the pledges we announced at the conference. We kindly ask all donors to make their funding available as soon as possible.

The conference stressed the importance of adherence to international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict and put special emphasis on the urgent need for the improved protection of civilians and humanitarian access to all people in need inside Syria. The Conference renewed the strong commitment to the United Nations-led political process under the guidance of Special Envoy Pedersen. Obviously, there can be no sustainable peace without justice. True reconciliation in Syria requires a thorough investigation of breaches of international law and that perpetrators be held accountable. As a concrete step towards increased accountability, we support the strong call to release persons arbitrarily detained and underline that the utmost needs to be done in that regard. The Conference also acknowledged the extraordinary generosity of neighbouring countries and host communities in providing refuge and support for millions of displaced people. The international community remains committed to substantially supporting those efforts.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I also thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings today.

Let me start by welcoming the news that, over the weekend, the final tract of Da'esh-held territory was liberated by the Syrian Democratic Forces. That is a huge testament to the courage and commitment of the Forces and the work of the Global Coalition against Da'esh. The liberation of Da'esh-held areas is not the end of the fight against the group, however. Da'esh retains significant organizational and economic capability with which to pursue its dangerous and pervasive ideology. We remain committed to the enduring defeat of Da'esh in the region and globally.

Other serious challenge remain, including the huge humanitarian challenge faced by the Al-Hol camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) following the large influx of people displaced from Al-Baghouz. We commend United Nations efforts to scale up its response. The United Kingdom stands ready to provide further support. During this financial year, the United Kingdom has allocated more than £40 million to address basic life-saving needs across north-east Syria, where the Al-Hol camp is located. United Kingdom-funded partners are doing all that they can to support those affected by providing vital services, including health care and shelter. But the threat of a humanitarian disaster continues to loom in Idlib, where according to reports frequent shelling and air strikes by the regime and its backers have caused the deaths of more than 90 people and the displacement of 72,000 more since February.

We continue to support Turkey's ongoing efforts to prevent a reckless military offensive by the Syrian regime in north-west Syria. We call on Russia and Iran, as Astana guarantors, together with Turkey, to ensure that the ceasefire is respected. But the threat to the Syrian people and the stability of Syria is not just in the regime's actions. It is in its failure to take the steps needed to address the immense challenges to peace and stability.

The Syrian economy has shrunk by more than 60 per cent since the start of the conflict, while the Syrian pound has depreciated against the United States dollar by more than 90 per cent. Six out of 10 Syrians now live in extreme poverty. More than 13 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 11 million persons have been displaced, and approximately 400,000 have been killed. Up to 100,000 persons have been detained or have disappeared.

The conflict and the crisis in Syria will not end unless the root causes of the conflict are addressed. There will be no stability without the creation of a safe environment. Refugees will not return without credible assurances for their safety. Radicalization and unrest will not end without action being taken to resolve failures of governance, including the lack of provision of basic services, economic opportunity and representative institutions.

The Security Council unanimously set out a comprehensive mechanism in resolution 2254 (2015) to deliver an alternative, inclusive and representative way forward. Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and his team continue to command our full support in seeking to find a solution to the conflict. As has already been said today, the United Kingdom, together with others, remains committed to addressing the humanitarian needs of the people of Syria. At the Brussels Conference, the United Kingdom pledged £400 million—or \$530 million—and we have mobilized £2.81 billion to the Syrian crisis since 2012. That is more than \$3.7 billion and represents our largest humanitarian response ever. We and others have indicated on numerous occasions our readiness to assist Syria with reconstruction should there be a negotiated political settlement.

Yet the Al-Assad regime continues to refuse to change its behaviour and follows the course of action that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. It continues to seize the assets and property of citizens and engage in widespread and arbitrary arrests. It continues to provide limited or no basic services to those in need and interfere with United Nations efforts to fill that gap, including by stalling desperately needed aid convoys to the Rukban IDP camp. The Syrian regime continues to spread lies and disinformation while failing to uphold its responsibilities under the Chemical Weapons Convention. It continues to refuse to engage in United Nations efforts under resolution 2254 (2015). No progress can be made without a change in attitude and behaviour by the Syrian regime. It is time for a Government in Syria that will do what is right for its people.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I express my thanks and gratitude to Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and to Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by Ambassador Christoph Heusgen on behalf of the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian dossier — Germany, Belgium and Kuwait. I would like to make the following points in my national capacity.

This month has witnessed important milestones and developments in the Syrian crisis. The most significant pertains to the fact that the crisis has unfortunately entered its ninth year. Another year has gone by, while the bloody conflict continues. It has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians and forced millions to flee the country. It is a reminder to all that the Security Council remains unable to carry out its responsibilities, maintain international peace and security, implement its resolutions and address the crisis in its various aspects, especially with regard to the political aspect. We support the Secretary-General in the implementation of the four measures he announced as the Syrian crisis entered its ninth year, namely, first, urging all parties to respect the ceasefire agreement in Idlib brokered by Russia and Turkey; secondly, respecting international humanitarian law and protecting human rights in all military operations; thirdly, enabling sustainable access to humanitarian assistance; and, fourthly, enhancing international support for a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, and supporting Special Envoy Geir Pedersen in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Another important milestone was the holding of the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. That was the seventh donor conference aimed at alleviating humanitarian suffering in Syria, following three conferences held in the State of Kuwait, one in London and three others in Brussels. The most recent Brussels Conference reminds us all that the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. Approximately 11.7 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance. We welcome the generous pledges made during the latest conference and call on all countries to honour their obligations. The State of Kuwait contributed \$300 million for the humanitarian response over the next three years as part of its efforts to alleviate the suffering of our brothers in Syria and improve the humanitarian situation in the country. Kuwait has provided about \$1.9 billion since the conflict began.

We have also closely followed the efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen this month. We reiterate our full

support for him in his efforts to revitalize the political process in Syria in order to achieve a fair Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political settlement facilitated by the United Nations through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That resolution sets out the steps for a political transition process that contains many milestones, including drafting a constitution and holding free and fair elections pursuant to that constitution under the supervision of the United Nations and in accordance with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with the participation of all Syrians, including those living abroad.

In his recent briefing to the Security Council, the Special Envoy spoke about five objectives that he is trying to implement in the next phase (see S/PV.8475). We believe that implementing those objectives will give momentum to the political process in Syria. All parties must support the Special Envoy so that he can fully carry out his mandate.

In March we also witnessed another important milestone in the war against terrorism. The terrorist group Da'esh lost the territories that were under its control in Syria. That is truly an important and major achievement in the war against terrorism and against that terrorist group, which has launched terrorist and criminal attacks against many countries, including my country, Kuwait. We must now work on preserving the military achievements of the international coalition against Da'esh and on maintaining the intensive international efforts to eradicate it and ensure that it does not return through the joint efforts of the international community to eliminate the financial, logistical, military, security and media networks of Da'esh.

As we mentioned yesterday during the Security Council meeting on the Middle East (see S/PV.8489), I would like to point out that Security Council resolutions on Syria, particularly in their preambles, always include a paragraph that stresses the commitment of the Council and the international community to respecting the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We therefore reiterate our regret that the United States decided to recognize the sovereignty of Israel over the occupied Syrian Arab Golan. International resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981), which was adopted unanimously, stipulate that the Security Council and the international community reject the annexation of territories by force and that the decision of Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its

laws, administration and sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and has no international legal effect. That resolution also emphasized that the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable to the occupied Syrian territories.

Ms. Goolab (South Africa): Allow me to begin by thanking Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their briefings on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria.

South Africa remains committed to protecting the fundamental interests of all Syrian people, maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East region, upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and preserving the basic norms governing international relations.

My delegation commends the efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, through his extensive consultations with all parties, to create a conducive environment for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and United Nations-facilitated process to establish credible and inclusive negotiations. As stated by the Special Envoy in his previous statement to the Security Council (see S/PV.8475), resolution 2254 (2015) is a comprehensive road map for ensuring a political settlement in Syria. We call for its full implementation.

South Africa believes that the only sustainable solution to the Syrian question remains the achievement of a political solution through an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue. In that regard, we welcome the Special Envoy's engagements with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and other stakeholders to ensure that all Syrian voices be given the opportunity to be heard and to contribute to the Syrian peace process. We also welcome the Special Envoy's continued efforts towards finalizing the establishment of the constitutional committee and its rules of procedure.

Turning to the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, South Africa is deeply concerned about the large numbers of civilians requiring assistance in various parts of Syria. The escalation of violence in recent weeks has only exacerbated that crisis. The situation in Al-Hol camp in northern Syria is of particular concern. In recent weeks, there has been a massive influx of people, mainly women and children, in various degrees of ill health, to the camp. We call on the international community to fully support the United Nations efforts in providing assistance to all those who require it.

My delegation believes that many Syrians would prefer to return to their homes and cities in due course. However, it is essential to ensure that the necessary conditions for their safe return be met. We support the Special Envoy in his belief that the return of Syrians to their homes must be voluntary, safe, dignified and well informed.

South Africa wishes to commend the United Nations and its implementing partners for the humanitarian and life-saving assistance that they continue to provide to millions of people throughout Syria. We mourn the deaths of hundreds of humanitarian workers who have been killed in this devastating war and call for the protection of all humanitarian personnel, in line with international humanitarian law.

In that regard, it is noted with concern that many Syrians do not receive the aid that they so desperately need. We therefore call for the full implementation of resolution 2449 (2018), which renewed the authorization for cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access to Syria. The recent convey to Rukban provided some relief to the people who remain isolated within the area. We call on the relevant stakeholders to ensure that the necessary approvals be granted for additional convoys of humanitarian aid.

It is essential that the international community support a political solution to the situation in Syria as a matter of priority and the United Nations as the main channel for mediation. South Africa reiterates that in a complex and diverse society such as Syria there can be no military solution to the conflict.

In conclusion, in 1967 the Security Council adopted resolution 242 (1967), which calls for the withdrawal of all troops from the occupied territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights. However, 40 years later, Israel continues to occupy the Golan Heights in violation of the Council's decisions. The annexation of territory seized through the use of force is a violation of international law and must be condemned. For long-term peace and security in the Middle East region, it is vital to ensure that international law be upheld.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Director Ramesh Rajasingham for their very comprehensive briefings.

The conflict in Syria has brought enormous and unspeakable suffering to the civilian population

of Syria. Almost 12 million people are in need of multisectoral humanitarian assistance. More than 6 million people are internally displaced, of whom an estimated 870,000 live in sites of last resort.

A glimpse of hope emerged from the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held in the middle of this month, as donors pledged a record amount to support people in need in Syria, as well as the refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries.

Let me be clear. There is no peace without justice and continuing impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law remains our grave concern. Any military operation should be fully in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law in order to prevent harm to thousands of civilians trapped in the middle of the fighting. The protection of civilians and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance are not a

choice but a legal obligation of all sides to the conflict; those who do not comply should be held accountable. In our opinion, the international community, especially the Security Council, should advocate more for their health and protection, especially in the case of women and children. In that context, the situation is extremely worrying in the north-eastern and north-western parts of Syria, just to mention the Al-Hol camp. Let me also underline the significance of the agreement between Russia and Turkey on the Idlib de-escalation zone as a crucial move towards avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe. All parties to the conflict should ensure the full implementation of the agreement.

The second convoy to Rukban delivered humanitarian assistance to 40,000 people at the beginning of February. The assistance provided life-saving support to people there. Nonetheless, it was only a temporary measure — sufficient for approximately one month. As we approach the end of March, it is clear that we desperately need a long-term, safe, voluntary and dignified solution for thousands of people, many of whom have been staying in the Rukban area for more than two years now. We feel encouraged by positive steps made recently by the Syrian authorities in that respect and expect them to swiftly authorize another inter-agency convoy to Rukban.

Let me conclude by underlining that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. A political agreement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the

Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) remains the only way to achieve peace. We look forward to the establishment of a constitutional committee, the first step towards a genuine political process under the supervision of the United Nations. Let me also underscore that we should pursue an intra-Syrian framework for political agreement in Syria. The Syrian authorities have a special role to play, and they should participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

Allow me to reiterate the European Union common position on the reconstruction of Syria. We think that it should commence once an inclusive political transition is firmly under way, as we need to support the safe return of millions of Syrian people who fled their homes. We believe that the main durable solution for Syrian refugees throughout the region will be their sustainable, safe, dignified and voluntary return to their country of origin, Syria, in accordance with international law and the principle of non-refoulement.

Mr. Trullols Yabra (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefings today on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. As always, we take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation for the intense work of the United Nations and its partners towards achieving peace, development and the well-being of the Syrian people.

Alleviating the suffering of the more than 11 million people with humanitarian needs remains a global concern. That was apparent at the recently concluded Brussels Conference, where the international community expressed its willingness to help alleviate the plight of the Syrian people, including the 5.6 million refugees and the communities that host them. It is truly everyone's responsibility to improve the conditions of the people caught up in one of the longest and most heartbreaking conflicts of recent times.

Eight years of devastating clashes have left women and children disproportionately affected by the lack of security and stability, and 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. We therefore applaud the success of the Conference and hope to see a broad, accelerated, transparent and sustained implementation of the humanitarian response plan. We encourage the humanitarian actors involved to observe and uphold international humanitarian law, the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in each of their operations and in all circumstances, and to

keep the Syrian people at the centre of their plans and actions. With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to elaborate on the following points.

In view of the current situation in the country, where 5 million people have acute humanitarian needs, we believe that one of our main priorities is to work to increase the access of the United Nations to the communities where those people are found, throughout the country, in order to provide adequate assistance to enhance their own resilience.

With respect to the recent displacements recorded in north-eastern Syria, most ending up in the Al-Hol camp, we would like to highlight the extraordinary work to accommodate and attend to the more than 70,000 people — mainly women and children — who have arrived at the camp in recent months. We are particularly concerned about the malnourishment of the child population. We urgently need tools to provide medical and nutritional assistance to the most vulnerable. We call for additional financial support in order to expand those services.

We also highlight the conditions for humanitarian access to Rukban camp. We are very concerned that the provisions of the most recent convoy are about to run out and there is still no permission to return. That is why we call on the Syrian Government and the countries that can — in one way or another — make that possible to work together so that a new convoy can reach Rukban as soon as possible. We welcome the initiative to establish a coordination process with the Syrian Government on possible evacuations from the camp. We emphasize, however, that all returns must be voluntary decisions, based on reliable information and carried out in a safe and dignified manner. In addition, basic standards of protection must be met in the pursuit of durable solutions for Syrians.

I would like to add my voice to those who have spoken before me regarding the worrisome situation in Idlib and the hostilities that have taken place in recent weeks. This is a serious concern for the civilian population that resides there and creates major challenges in terms of protection, including for the thousands of displaced people. In that regard, we reiterate the need for full compliance with the Idlib ceasefire agreement in order to halt that escalation, which could have catastrophic humanitarian consequences and could jeopardize the political process under way.

That leads me to highlight a few points regarding that process, which we see as the only solution to this conflict. We reiterate our support for the five pillars of the Pedersen proposal for future peace in Syria. We applaud their inclusive yet ambitious approach and awareness of the realities on the ground and the lessons learned along the way. With that approach, and under the guidelines of resolution 2254 (2015), we believe it necessary to continue to work arduously and strategically towards revitalizing the political process with the creation of the constitutional committee. We call on the parties to continue a constructive and meaningful dialogue, facilitated by the United Nations, so that the committee can be established and meet at a not-too-distant date.

Finally, we reiterate that the pursuit of sustainable peace in Syria that will alleviate the suffering of its people and help to steer its course towards a new future must be carried out with the effective participation of all parts and segments of society, particularly that of women and young people as agents of change for peace, progress and the well-being of all.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation commends Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for their detailed briefings on the political process and the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, my country remains concerned about OCHA's alarming statistics showing that 11.7 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance in their own country as are about 5.7 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring States. Besides that, also according to OCHA, tens of thousands of internally displaced people, including women, children and the elderly, are in extreme distress. The number of internally displaced persons in the Al-Hol camp in the north-east, which is sheltering most of the people fleeing the last pocket of Islamic State resistance, went up from 9,721 in December to 70,480 on 20 March. As of 16 March, it was estimated that more than 130 people, of whom 80 per cent were children, had died in the camp or close to it. Approximately 200 deaths have been recorded in Idlib province since September 2018, 90 of them, including 40 children, in February alone.

With respect to the concerns that such statistics elicit, my country welcomed the third donor conference under the theme of supporting the future of Syria and the region, held in Brussels from 12 to 14 March. It raised \$7 billion of the \$8.8 billion needed to fund the humanitarian response plan coordinated by the United Nations and the regional refugee and resilience plan. It will undoubtedly be a boost for the people in distress in the Syrian Arab Republic and its neighbours. My country calls on all the parties involved in military operations throughout Syria to respect international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians and hospital infrastructure. I should point out that creating obstacles to the free movement of people and goods and violating the rights of displaced persons constitute serious violations of international law and are subject to prosecution.

Turning now to the political process, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the tireless efforts to reconcile the positions of the stakeholders that Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, has been making since taking up his post on 7 January. We fully support the five priorities he identified in his briefing to the Security Council on 28 February (see S/PV.8475). My delegation agrees with him that the dialogue with the Syrian Government, the opposition and civil society, particularly through the Syrian Negotiation Commission, should be deepened. That approach, which consists of direct meetings with all the parties, will help to build trust and bring Syrians back to the negotiating table. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the consultations that Mr. Pedersen's team has conducted over the past two months with more than 200 Syrian stakeholders from civil society and the diaspora. Similarly, his two visits to Damascus, most recently on 18 March, enabled him to exchange views with the Syrian authorities on establishing the constitutional committee responsible for drafting a new Constitution.

The military defeat of Da'esh that has been announced gives the parties to the conflict a window of opportunity to silence their guns for good and engage resolutely in the political settlement of the crisis through constructive dialogue, while building on the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and the complementary Astana and Sochi processes.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire once again calls on the warring parties to maintain the ceasefire in the Idlib demilitarized zone in order to allow the unimpeded

delivery of aid to Syrians in need, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Lastly, we urge the Syrian parties to agree on the definite establishment of the constitutional committee to draft the new Constitution, with a view to holding free and fair elections.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Mr. Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings.

There have been major changes recently in the military and political situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Thanks to the fact that the terrorist threat has been crushed in most of the country, the authority of the legitimate Government has been restored and the level of violence has significantly decreased. Active efforts are under way to rebuild ruined infrastructure and restore normal life to the liberated areas. Needless to say, it would be premature to speak of an end to the Syrian conflict, as a number of serious issues have to be resolved first.

First of all, we must continue to work intensively in support of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen's efforts to give new impetus to the political settlement in Syria. The Astana troika is facilitating his work and making its own contribution to the political track. The work of launching the constitutional committee and getting the political process going is only one of the elements in our joint push to settle the Syrian conflict. It will be important to continue taking steps to combat the terrorist threat and expand de-escalation throughout Syria. In that context, we should be careful not to lose sight of two points.

First, with regard to the situation in Idlib, we are committed to implementing all the provisions of the Russian-Turkish memorandum of September 2018. We understand the concerns about the threats to civilians there. Nonetheless, it is obvious to everyone that the situation in that part of Syria is heading in a dangerous direction. The Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorist group now controls almost 90 per cent of the province. Terrorists continue their provocative raids against Government forces. There have been 460 such incidents since the beginning of the year, claiming the lives of 30 people and injured around 100. We are seriously concerned about new information showing

that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham fighters, with the assistance of the infamous White Helmets, are preparing to stage new scenarios using toxic substances. On 23 March, we received information that extremists were firing shells filled with chemical substances at villages in northern Hama, and several people were injured.

This status quo is unsustainable. If we do nothing but observe, Idlib will become a source of constant terrorist threats for Syria, its neighbours in the region and other States. Pretending that the Al-Nusra Front has suddenly become part of the moderate opposition will not work either. We should not forget that a decent-sized skeleton of international terrorism is still out there in the provinces. Incidentally, many speakers today expressed concern about the escalation of tensions in Idlib, while completely forgetting the fact that at the same time civilians are dying as a result of coalition strikes in Baghouz, in Deir ez-Zor governorate. We have not heard anyone calling for the situation in that area to be frozen, despite the fact that what brought people to the Al-Hol camp cannot be called anything other than a large-scale humanitarian disaster. It is time to drop the double standards. Is there any difference between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front? Anyone who thinks so is seriously deluded.

The second point is that as history has shown, the most intensive normalization in Syria is going on where the legitimate Government's authority has been restored. In that context, the illegal occupation of various parts of the country, including the north-east and in the area of Al-Tanf, is not only not conducive to a settlement but undermines the prospects for it. I have discussed Al-Tanf previously, and I want to emphasize that the situation in southern Syrian in the area of the Rukban camp, remains very difficult. In response to humanitarian appeals, the Syrian Government gave its consent to two humanitarian convoys, but the reality is that keeping tens of thousands in a temporary camp on a humanitarian drip is simply inhumane. A survey of the residents of Rukban showed that an overwhelming majority of them want to leave the camp but cannot. Since May 2018 about 800 Syrians have managed to get out of Rukban and return home, and each of them paid \$300 to the Maghawir Al-Thawra group for their freedom. The most sustainable solution is resettlement. In that regard, we have opened two humanitarian corridors to get people out, and the Government of Syria has also prepared six columns of comfortable buses ready to go to straight to Rukban at any moment

in order to evacuate 2,400 people at once to places of their choosing. The conditions in Latakia, Khalidiya, Al-Amara, Homs, Mkhin, Al-Qaryatayn, Palmyra and the Damascus and Aleppo suburbs can decently accommodate more than 35,000 people.

On 26 March, the Russian military forces initiated a coordinated discussion at the Jleb checkpoint to develop gradual measures for moving people out of Rukban, together with representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Syrian Red Crescent Society and Syrian authorities. Sheikhs from tribes in the camps also participated. We invited our American colleagues, but they refused to come or to allow the meeting participants into the so-called security zone around Al-Tanf. Nonetheless, we intend to continue our dialogue on Rukban with all interested parties, including the United Nations, the United States and Jordan, without preconditions and without politicizing the humanitarian aspects of the issue. We believe that the legal right of all Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes must be ensured and implemented.

As a matter of principle, the paradigm of humanitarian assistance in Syria itself should be reviewed. The Brussels III conference was important in terms of collecting financial resources, but without the participation of the Syrian Government it will be impossible to solve the country's humanitarian problems. We urge the organizers to reconsider their approach. We emphasize the importance of putting a definitive end to anti-regime projects whatever format they are promoted in. We once again call on everyone to recognize how damaging the unilateral sanctions that a number of Western countries have imposed on Damascus are, since they only worsen the humanitarian situation in Syria and make ordinary people suffer. Furthermore, these policies run counter to the logic of humanitarian work. The result is that while one hand is helping, the other is blocking the possibilities for exploiting and strengthening the country's national capacity to help the Syrian people. We could start by freeing up funds allocated for Syrian development needs through the major international financial institutions.

It is time to stop speculating about the refugees. Their return must be voluntary. We all know that most Syrians want to go back to their homeland. The Syrian Government is ready to extend the necessary assurances. The flow of Syrian refugees returning

to their permanent homes in Syria is constantly growing. At the beginning of March a delegation led by Mr. Filippo Grandi, the High Commissioner for Refugees, visited Syria. Besides meeting with the Syrian leadership in Damascus, the United Nations representatives were able to visit places to which Syrians had returned in Homs and Hama governorates. It is notable that during this first-hand opportunity for conversations with Syrians, the United Nations people saw for themselves that returnees are living in normal conditions and have expressed no complaints about the conditions of their return.

We propose engaging in an honest joint effort to restore stability to Syria, not only by countering the threat of terrorism but by rebuilding the country's economy. Russia is making its contribution. With our assistance, more than 31,000 homes, 148 medical facilities and 836 educational institutions have been rebuilt, and more than 1,000 kilometres of road repaired. Together we can bring the hostilities to an end and focus on moving the political process forward, which will enable national reconciliation to begin in Syria.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the presidency for convening today's meeting, and Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their comprehensive briefings, in which they have described for us a scenario that requires the urgent attention of the Security Council. Peru recognizes the valuable efforts that both briefers are making in their respective remits to put an end to the devastating conflict in Syria and to alleviate human suffering.

The armed conflict in Syria has entered its ninth year, and Peru can only strongly condemn the serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country and the deliberate attacks on civilians, which have caused more than 400,000 fatalities and the displacement of 11 million people inside and outside Syria. We note with concern that the change in the balance of forces we have observed in recent months has not yet been reflected in a sustained cessation of hostilities, while the much-needed humanitarian assistance on which 13 million Syrians depend continues to be provided in a restricted manner. We note with alarm the prospect of a further escalation of violence in north-west Syria, particularly in Idlib, as a result of the actions of terrorist organizations present there and the intensification of air strikes, which do not discriminate between combatants and the civilian population.

In those circumstances, we call on the Syrian Government and all those involved in the conflict to prevent further deterioration, which basically means preserving the ceasefire agreed by Turkey and Russia last September. We also want to focus attention on the east of the country, where tens of thousands of civilians have had to flee the heat of the clashes against the remnants of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

At this time, we emphasize the urgency of meeting the humanitarian needs of the more than 70,000 internally displaced persons who have been living at the Al-Hol camp and of providing them with the financial means required to adapt their needs. Similarly, we encourage new and sustained deployments by the United Nations and other humanitarian actors in Rukban to provide assistance and conduct comprehensive humanitarian-needs assessments. We urge that, in parallel and with the utmost urgency, comprehensive solutions be promoted that address the willingness of 95 per cent of its people to return home in a safe and dignified manner. We would also like to welcome the generous contributions from donor countries at the recent Brussels Conference, which should substantially help to alleviate the shortages that have caused much suffering to the Syrian population and contribute to the urgently needed reconstruction of the country.

However, we must bear in mind that only the achievement of a political solution that lays the foundations for sustainable peace in Syria will make it possible to overcome the humanitarian disaster that continues to affect its population. Such a solution must respect Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. We therefore note with satisfaction the constructive tenor of the meetings held in recent weeks between the Special Envoy and relevant stakeholders, which we hope will be reflected in substantive progress in the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Finally, we consider it essential to achieve concrete results soon with regard to the establishment of an inclusive and representative constitutional committee, as well as with regard to the release of prisoners and the identification of missing persons and the return of corpses, as important confidence-building and reconciliation measures for achieving peace in Syria.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Director Rajasingham for their briefings. My delegation also

wishes to congratulate Ms. Khawla Matar on her appointment as the Deputy Special Envoy for Syria. We wish her every success in carrying out her mandate.

Indonesia is pleased to hear the continuing discussions and engagement between Special Envoy Pedersen and the relevant parties to the conflict. As stated last month by Ambassador Pedersen in this Chamber (see S/PV.8475), building confidence and trust with the parties is indeed key. My delegation therefore fully supports the Special Envoy's approach in developing a sustained dialogue. For Indonesia, it is a *sine qua non* for any future progress.

As the conflict enters its ninth year, it is more crucial than ever to move the political process forward, pursuant to the Geneva communiqué (S/2013/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). Indonesia believes that a negotiated political solution is the only way to achieve lasting peace in Syria. The absence of a political solution will continue to deteriorate the humanitarian situation in Syria. My delegation wishes to share three pertinent points: the need to respect Syria's sovereignty, the need for strong political commitment and the urgency of addressing the humanitarian situation in Al-Hol camp, Rukban and Idlib.

First, Indonesia urges the international community to fully respect and reaffirm its commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. That is a basic foundation that is needed to be able to effectively assist the Syrian people. That is also a necessity, not an option. Moreover, a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process is not merely a slogan, it is a process that would lead to a lasting political settlement of the crisis. We are fully aware of the complexity of the crisis, and ignoring the principled elements of sovereignty and territorial integrity will complicate the situation. In that context, let me reiterate Indonesia's strong rejection of the recognition of Golan Heights as part of Israel by the United States, as elaborated by our Vice-Minister at yesterday's meeting (see S/PV.8489).

Secondly, a strong political commitment is greatly needed by all parties to work together and gradually begin the political process. Indonesia is of the view that the establishment of a credible, balanced and inclusive constitutional committee is an important phase of the process, but my delegation also believes that a measured and careful process is necessary to lay a firm groundwork. We support the Special Envoy's work in facilitating the finalization of the rules of procedure

and the composition of the committee. Again, that is not an easy task, but it is doable.

Thirdly, Indonesia is deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria and stresses the urgent need to promptly address and alleviate the suffering of millions of people in need. More than 70,000 displaced people reside in Al-Hol camp, of whom 90 per cent are women and children. The majority of the people suffer from malnutrition, with no adequate medical assistance. In the four months since December 2018, there have been approximately 60,000 arrivals in Al-Hol, and the camp has exceeded its capacity. We hope to see the establishment of 4,000 additional shelters and other responses related to food security, water and sanitation, as well as health services.

On Rukban, we are encouraged by the second humanitarian assistance convoy delivered in February and look forward to the next delivery to thousands of refugees in Rukban. With regard to potential Rukban evacuees, and based on the results of the survey of intentions, Indonesia wishes to underline that it is important to accommodate a safe and voluntary return for refugees and displaced persons. All parties should work together in rebuilding Syria through a steady reconstruction process. Indonesia would also like to emphasize the need to maintain and respect the ceasefire agreement in Idlib in order to prevent another humanitarian tragedy. My delegation takes note of the pledges made during the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region and underlines the importance of ensuring the proper distribution of the funding to those in need.

In conclusion, Indonesia shares the Secretary-General's view, expressed in his statement of 15 March, that it is indeed a moral obligation for the international community to support Syrians in uniting around a vision for their future. It is also the Council's obligation to support all Syrians in deciding their own future — a future that is stable and peaceful.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express my delegation's thanks to Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for providing us with updates on the most recent developments with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic. We are aware that

their efforts and the work they do together with their respective teams are fully working towards a lasting resolution of the conflict.

With regard to the political process, the Government of Equatorial Guinea has not changed its position on the need to comply with resolution 2254 (2015) and will continue to support the current negotiating process led by the Syrian people under the auspices of the United Nations. We are aware that it continues to be difficult to specify the dates for the formation of the constitutional committee and for the commencement of the committee's work. We therefore urge the parties, especially the Syrian authorities, to take all the measures necessary and give priority to their cooperation with the Special Envoy and very actively expedite the conclusion of that process.

As we have recently stated, it is necessary for all parties to move into an active phase of the peace negotiations. There should be no further delays in the formation of the constitutional committee, and the stalemate in the Geneva negotiations should not lead to the collapse of the Astana process. We again encourage the Special Envoy to continue to explore all opportunities to overcome obstacles to the formation of the committee, so that its first meeting can be convened without further delay. While we hope that the next meeting on Syria in Astana, scheduled for April, contributes, in the framework of detailed consultations with the Special Envoy, to advancing the negotiations on the composition of the middle third list of members, Equatorial Guinea will continue to maintain its full commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015).

With regard to the humanitarian situation, my Government believes that it is essential to keep Syria at the top of the international agenda and to generate financial support for that country, where nearly 12 million innocent people have suffered from atrocities and other collateral effects of war for the past eight years. We also welcome the holding of the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, which succeeded in raising approximately \$7 billion in assistance to finance the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Syria and the region.

In the face of the bloody offensive in Baghouz, the last bastion of the Islamic State in Syria, Equatorial Guinea, can only call on the parties to exercise restraint and prioritize the protection of civilians in

accordance with international humanitarian law. We must underscore that this offensive, one of the longest and most deadly of the conflict, has killed thousands of people — not only fighters, but also many civilians. In that regard, we stress the need for collective action and the assistance of international humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies to prevent the situation in the country from deteriorating.

While we appreciate the efforts under way to ensure that a third humanitarian convoy reaches Rukban camp, we continue to insist on the need to evacuate the more than 40,000 people who live there under appalling conditions. We also remain concerned about the situation in Idlib, which is why we are calling for a resumption of hostilities to be avoided at all costs and for the laying of the foundation for the safe and voluntary return of refugees to Syria. All parties to the conflict must ensure full humanitarian access to all segments of the population and respect international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, we reiterate once again that we are aware that the military situation on the ground may evolve in one direction or another, but what is clear to everyone is that a political process led by the Syrians under the auspices of the United Nations is necessary to achieve peace.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Mr. Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their enlightening briefings.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, I refer to the statement made by Germany on behalf of the three co-penholders. I will therefore limit myself to a few brief remarks on the political situation and the situation on the ground.

First, as the Syrian conflict enters its ninth year, we lend our support to Special Envoy Pedersen in his efforts to implement his five objectives, as he outlined in his first briefing to the Security Council (see S/PV.8475). We welcome his work on the various dimensions of resolution 2254 (2015). As I mentioned in my statement last month, in Belgium's view, the only lasting solution will be based on the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the full implementation of the resolution. We underline the role of the Special Envoy in Sochi and support his efforts to bring together, as

soon as possible, a credible, balanced, inclusive and representative constitutional committee that follows clear procedures and working methods.

We note that the common denominator of the Special Envoy's objectives is to build trust and deepen dialogue in order to move the process forward. However, trust among the parties to the conflict will not be possible without looking through the lens of justice. As a concrete measure, we call on all parties to exercise their influence for the release of those who have been detained arbitrarily.

The Special Envoy also indicated that the entire Syrian population must engage and participate in efforts to build trust and seek peace. The third Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held in Brussels in March, underscored the essential role of civil society. An active civil society that is recognized at the political level and illustrates its right to assemble and exercise the freedom of expression constitutes the backbone of any community. The third Conference also placed particular emphasis on Syrian women. While welcoming the Special Envoy's recent meeting with the Women's Advisory Board, we stress the need for the meaningful participation of Syrian women to the extent of at least a 30 per-cent representation in all decision-making bodies.

We call for a national cessation of hostilities in order to ensure the protection of civilians. As others before me have highlighted, Belgium is also seriously concerned about the upsurge in violence in Idlib. It is imperative that all parties, including the Astana guarantors, remain fully committed to the agreement that was signed in September. In Deir ez-Zor, the last battle against Da'esh has just ended. But the end of Da'esh as a terrorist organization with a territorial base does not mean the end of the threat that that group poses. It is essential that the international community remain vigilant in order to avoid its resurgence.

Lastly, I would like to say a few words on reconstruction. Belgium fully supports the European Union's position. We will be ready to assist in reconstruction only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué, is firmly under way.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and

Mr. Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings.

We commend the efforts made by the United Nations and relevant parties to facilitate a political solution and improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. Years of conflict in Syria have brought about untold misery for Syria and its people. The Syrian people yearn for peace to be achieved as soon as possible so that they can return, rebuild and resume their lives in tranquillity. In order to help the Syrian Government and people achieve those goals, the international community should focus on the following issues.

First, the international community should continue to push for a political process in Syria. The United Nations should enhance its coordination with the Syrian Government to facilitate the early formation of a constitutional committee that is representative and acceptable to the parties concerned. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the legitimate concerns of the relevant parties, including the Syrian Government, in a balanced manner, with a view to setting in motion a viable, sustainable political process. Security Council members should maintain unity and speak with one voice in support of the work of the United Nations and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

Secondly, the international community should continue the fight against terrorist forces. It should strengthen cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts and adopt a unified standard to combat all Council-listed terrorist organizations so as to prevent their return, which would jeopardize the hard-won security gains achieved on the ground. In Idlib, there are signs pointing to a resurgence of terrorist organizations that would threaten the security and stability of Syria; we must not turn a blind eye. China supports the efforts by the parties concerned to find a proper solution to the situation in Idlib.

Thirdly, the international community should continue efforts to improve the humanitarian situation. It should enhance its assistance to the country on the basis of humanitarian needs on the ground. Relevant operations should be carried out in strict conformity with relevant resolutions and on the basis of respect for Syrian sovereignty. China pays close attention to the humanitarian issue in Syria — through bilateral and multilateral channels, it has provided the Syrian people, including Syrian refugees beyond Syria's borders, with

emergency humanitarian supplies and cash assistance in the amount of RMB770 million.

Fourthly, the international community should find a proper solution to the question of refugees and move forward with reconstruction. A fundamental improvement of the humanitarian situation in Syria requires that the international community lend active support to the Syrian Government and people in their economic and social reconstruction in order to create appropriate conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and to help the Syrian people rebuild their confidence and resume a normal life. The return of Syrian refugees would also help to ease the pressure faced by their host countries.

China supports the efforts of the United Nations in its role as a principal mediator to facilitate the engagement of the Syrian parties in an inclusive political process in order to arrive at a settlement that is acceptable to the parties concerned and conforms with the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned principle and the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015). The sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be upheld throughout that entire process. China has consistently supported a political solution to the Syrian question and stands ready to enhance its communication and coordination with the relevant parties, including the United Nations, in order to play a positive and constructive role in moving the political process forward.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their especially insightful briefings. For my part, I would like to come back to the three points of consensus that bring us together — first, the fight against terrorism; secondly, the need to protect civilians; and, thirdly, the implementation of a political solution.

First, our common priority is to continue to pool our efforts against terrorism in Syria and ensure respect for the front lines with a view to achieving a national ceasefire.

The territorial defeat of Da'esh in Syria, announced on 23 March, marks, after the retaking of Raqqa and the fall of the caliphate in Iraq in late 2017, a new and important stage in the combat against that terrorist group. Once again, we would like to pay

tribute to the courage and determination of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Let us make no mistake. Just as it would be a serious political mistake to think that the Syrian tragedy is behind us, similarly it would be a serious misapprehension to think that the fight against Da'esh is over and that we can move on to other things.

This territorial victory should not make us forget the scope of the challenges we are facing in our efforts to prevent the resurgence of Da'esh in one form or another. That terrorist group, which, although it has been driven underground, continues to have considerable financial reserves and remains a threat. It is therefore vital to maintain a robust capacity for action against it and to continue with our efforts to stabilize the entire region in order to consolidate the conditions for a lasting victory.

In that regard, the announcement that an American military contingent will remain in the north-eastern part of the country is good news. We hold that the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist group has on almost all of the Idlib de-escalation zone also remains a serious source of concern, as mentioned by several of my colleagues. We must jointly reflect on the issue in order to respond to the threat in a coordinated manner, while maintaining the ceasefire agreement arrived at by Russia and Turkey and endorsed by the Istanbul Summit. A new offensive would have tragic human consequences and cause the fighters involved to disperse, which would pose a threat to the security of us all.

The recent resurgence of bombings by the regime and its supporters in violation of these agreements is in this regard very worrisome, and we call for them to cease. In that same vein, France wishes to reiterate here the importance of a nationwide ceasefire, in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015). Any military action that would call into question the current front lines would imperil the peace process, destabilize Syria and the region, and risk jeopardizing the gains made in the fight against terrorism. The Syrian people would once again be the primary victims.

The second priority is a humanitarian one, as the situation in Syria in this respect remains disastrous. We once again call on all of the parties to honour their commitments under international humanitarian law, which, I would recall, is not negotiable. Here I am referring to two absolute priorities: on the one hand, the imperative need to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and, on the other,

the need to guarantee immediate, safe, comprehensive, unimpeded and sustainable access to all of the Syrian territory, in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and international humanitarian law. To cite but a few examples, it is unacceptable for the regime to continue to deliberately impede humanitarian access to eastern Ghouta and the south-west so as to punish the people of that area. Likewise, it is urgent that a new assistance convoy be deployed to Rukban camp; that is an immediate and vital priority.

We call on all influential actors to bring pressure to bear on the regime to authorize such a convoy and guarantee safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to the areas it has retaken. It is vital also to ensure that the return of those who were displaced from Rukban takes place in line with international humanitarian law and in close coordination with the United Nations. It is also imperative to ramp up the humanitarian response in the north-eastern part of the country so as to handle the inflow of displaced persons. France is fully playing its part in this effort and has released considerable emergency funding in order to support the humanitarian response in the region.

Support for the Syrian people and those countries hosting refugees requires the continuing mobilization of all actors. In that respect, the commitments undertaken during the third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region must be implemented without delay. Nationally speaking, France has announced a contribution of more than €1 billion for the period 2019-2021.

In that context, the third central priority is a political one. Only a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) can lead to the sustainable stability of Syria and the region. We have underlined on several occasions that the constitutional committee, provided that agreement is reached on its composition and its rules of procedure, could make a useful contribution to the political process.

More generally speaking, the Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen, has our full support in undertaking initiatives on the implementation of all aspects of the road map. This will include three elements: a nationwide ceasefire; the implementation of confidence-building measures conducive to the creation of the safe and neutral environment required by the Geneva communiqué; and the holding of free and transparent elections.

In that regard, the Special Envoy's resolve to work on the issues of detained and disappeared persons seems particularly relevant to us and requires our full support. The United Nations is the only body that can ensure that real strides are made in these priority areas. Similarly, it is clear to all that only tangible advances in the aforementioned areas will make it possible for refugees to consider returning home. The political and security situation is not yet conducive to the voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees to Syria under safe and dignified conditions, under the auspices of the United Nations.

France is very concerned by reports of arbitrary arrests of returning refugees by the Syrian security services. In the areas retaken by the regime in particular, such practices violate the relevant agreements. We would point to the responsibility of Russia, as guarantor of these agreements, to bring pressure to bear on the regime to ensure that the provisions thereof are respected.

Irreversible and credible advances towards a political solution will be vital to the rebuilding of the country, the normalization of relations with the regime and the lifting of sanctions. It is essential and urgent for the Syrian regime to commit itself in good faith to that goal.

Beyond the very real differences that persist among Council members, today's exchanges also show that is a strong convergence of views among us on the three priorities of the combat against terrorism, the humanitarian imperative and the quest for an inclusive political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015).

On behalf of France, I wish to launch an urgent appeal: let us switch off the automatic pilot and work tirelessly together in order to build on this convergence and move together towards peace. This is no longer a mission impossible. Our conviction is that today, possibly for the first time in eight years, we have a narrow window of opportunity to put an end to the Syrian conflict. So let us together take this opportunity, despite the immense difficulties ahead; we do not have a moment to lose.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to say a few words in French.

I wish to recall for Council members quotations from a former director of the Louvre museum, André Parrot, and the famous French archaeologist Charles Virolleaud. Why do I refer to those two persons? It is because both of them said something of great importance about Syria a long time ago that should nevertheless be recalled by all today. Charles Virolleaud was the first archaeologist to decipher the Ugaritic alphabet — the first alphabet in the world — discovered in the ancient port of Ugarit next to the city of Latakia on the Syrian coast, which inspired the following pronouncement by André Parrot:

“Every civilized person has two homelands — their own and Syria”.

That leads me to another quote attributed to Diderot, who purportedly said:

“Politics is not a frivolous anecdote but rather a responsibility”.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

My colleagues in the Security Council will perhaps remember that, from the first day of this terrorist war led by the Governments of certain countries against my country, we have been saying that its main goal was to ensure the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and its perpetuation, based on the plan set forth by the United States. The latest decision by the United States President to recognize what he termed, “Israeli sovereignty” over the occupied Syrian Golan justifies what we have been saying. That sheds light on the plan that targets my country in particular, and the entire region in general. It is a criminal plan for which the United States Government and its allies have used every tool at their disposal to carry out. They used all immoral and illegitimate tools to ensure the spread of chaos, in and the destruction of, our region so as to divide it along religious and ethnic lines in order to create a new reality like that which was imposed by colonists under the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. All of that is adorned with the ideas and theories that certain politicians have repeated, such as creative chaos and the new Middle East.

Those States of the new occupation plans have spared no effort to implement them. They have used every weapon in their arsenal at their disposal. They have defamed religion. They have encouraged radical,

extremist and takfirist movements. They have applied political pressure. They have spread disinformation. All of that has been accompanied by support for terrorists and foreign fighters in their various groupings, names and allegiances, the most prominent of which are the terrorists of Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front, which have waged systematic attacks against Syria, its sovereignty and territorial integrity. They have done so through individual acts of aggression and through collective acts of aggression, as well as within the framework of an illegal international coalition which committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in my country. In addition, that illegal coalition waged economic terrorism against Syria by using unilateral coercive measures intended to bring down the Syrian Government and its legitimate institutions.

The illegal coalition that invaded Baghdad in 2003 led to the rise of Al-Zarqawi, who was the head of Al-Qaida in Iraq, followed by Al-Baghdadi, who was the leader of the terrorist Da'esh group. The illegal coalition against my country has given birth to yet another terrorist personality — Al-Julani — who heads the Al-Nusra Front, and quite clearly neither Baghdad nor the Golan have anything to do with those terrorists and those who share their obscurantist and takfirist ideology. Someone named Al-Baghdadi, a native of Baghdad, extended his influence to attack Baghdad. Today a new personality — Al-Julani — a native of the Golan, has been created to attack Syria and the Syrian Golan. There is no coincidence regarding those names. The Pentagon invented Al-Baghdadi and Al-Julani.

They did not stop there, however. The enemy Governments of my country have used the humanitarian situation and the untold suffering of our people to undermine the credibility of the Syrian Government, its reputation and the significant efforts that it has made to support Syrians in overcoming this deplorable situation. We see the relentlessness of such practices in the fact that the United States forces and the terrorist organizations supporting them have taken thousands of unarmed civilians hostages in the Rukban camp in the area of Al-Tanf for 1,791 days, without any consideration for the suffering and disastrous living conditions that the United Nations itself has observed. In that regard, we recall that the representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said, when the second United Nations convoy arrived in the area, that a survey was taken among the Al-Tanf refugees, according to which the United Nations realized that

95 per cent of them wanted to return to their villages and cities — 95 per cent of those in Rukban camp. I ask the Council: Why are the Americans keeping them there?

In that regard, we note that the Syrian Government has taken all the necessary measures to free those persons detained in that camp and end their suffering. We call on the Security Council and the international community to call upon all illegal forces to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from the Syrian territories. We also call on them to apply pressure on the Americans so that those living in the camp can move freely and unhindered, guarantee the security of humanitarian convoys to end their suffering and dismantle the camp.

I stress today before the Council to Israel, the occupying Power, and its supporters in the United States Administration, that betting on the war that they have waged against my country for the past eight years to destroy Syria and reduce its role as an Arab, Islamic and regional leader has been a monumental mistake and great failure.

I reaffirm Syria's readiness to pursue its cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General so that he can carry out his mission successfully by facilitating the intra-Syrian dialogue to bring about a political solution that will serve the interests of Syrians and ensure the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and its people. That would lead to eradicating terrorism and ending the illegal foreign presence in Syria. Those many issues echo what you said earlier, Mr. President. Syria reaffirms that the political process must be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned. The Syrian people have the exclusive right to decide on the future of their country, their Constitution and all that relates to national sovereignty, which are the domain of the Syrian people, without foreign interference, as provided for under international law, the Charter of the United Nations and all the relevant Security Council resolutions on Syria.

In conclusion, my colleague, the representative of the United States, talked at the beginning of his statement about killing and burning a 13-year-old boy. That is an outright lie. There was no killing and burning of a 13-year-old boy at the beginning of the conflict in Syria. Let me repeat. That is a lie. With regard to the child Aylan Kurdi, whom he mentioned, yes, he was a Syrian child but he died in Turkey on the Turkish

coast because of Turkish smuggling gangs who put 300 people onto each boat rather than 50. That is why people used to drown in the Mediterranean because of the Turkish smuggling gangs.

With regard to the child Omran, who was on the front page of *The New York Times*, the accusation was that the Government had bombed Aleppo and killed that child. Later it was proved that that was false and that the child, Omran, had gone with his father to The Hague and Geneva and proved that everything people had seen was a pretence. They had forced him to look like a child who had been seriously injured and he was told what to say. That child and his father gave testimony that it was all a lie.

The United States representative mentioned the killing of persons in Khan Shaykhun. As we say in Arabic, when there is no shame, people can say whatever they want. Everyone knows that a commission of inquiry was supposed to go to Khan Shaykhun but it refused to go. The site was not examined. The United Nations mission did not go to Khan Shaykhun despite our insistence that it should and despite our scores of repeated requests for it to do so. Our United States colleague concluded that there were killings in Khan Shaykhun due to an attack by the Syrian regime, as he says. That is a lie and a disgrace.

Our United States colleague also said that he wanted to send a third humanitarian convoy to Rukban. Let me repeat that the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have attested that 95 per cent of the people in that camp want to leave it. So why organize a third or fourth humanitarian convoy unless the real objective is to continue that anomaly? They want to continue blackmailing Syria and the international community by using the Syrian refugees in Rukban. Let them leave. The Syrian Government wants them to leave the camp. The vehicles are ready to take them. The Syrian Red Crescent is ready. Let them go and put a stop to that blackmail.

The United States is imposing economic sanctions not only on Syria but also on those who assist Syria. The most recent United States sanctions is that the office linked to the United States Treasury that controls assets issued a new circular yesterday threatening ships that transport humanitarian aid to Syria with an embargo. But the United States colleague wants to send aid to Rukban. I say that he sheds crocodile tears regarding the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people, while his

Government is at the same time preventing such ships from transporting humanitarian assistance to Syria.

Regarding the positions that have been liberated by the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces and the United States forces, can the Americans tell us where the Da'esh leaders are? Where are they? Da'esh has been eliminated, is that not so? So where is Al-Baghdadi? Where are the leaders? Where are he and his gang? Where are the Da'esh fighters? What happened to those people? What about the investigations? Where does the information come from? Where did the people come from? Who sent them? Where is the accountability in that regard? Who is going to request accountability for the crimes committed by Da'esh terrorists in Syria and Iraq? Why are their leaders now hiding or being

hidden? They have been transferred to special camps under American control. Why? Why do we not disclose the identity of those who have been arrested? Who are those leaders? Or is the United States planning to recycle them and send them to another front somewhere else? I expect answers from my United States colleague to all such questions.

Syria is a victim of manipulation by the intelligence services under the auspices of the United States of America. That is what Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani, former Prime Minister of Qatar, said. He noted that Qatar had spent \$137 billion to destroy Syria on the basis of a directive from Washington. It is a disgrace. That is all.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.