



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

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8622nd meeting

Thursday, 19 September 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mrs. Craft

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Russian*): 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 Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: There have been several notable developments in Syria since the Under-Secretary-General briefed the Council three weeks ago about the humanitarian situation (see S/PV.8609). I wanted to start today with an update about north-west Syria.

On 30 August, the Russian Federation announced a unilateral ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation area, which the Government of Syria later confirmed. Reports indicate a decline in the fighting compared with the period since late April, when the military escalation began. It is critical that this much-needed respite for civilians continue, unimpeded humanitarian access be facilitated to all civilians in need and the protected status of civilian infrastructure be respected.

Worrying signs of insecurity are, however, present. Ground forces have continued to exchange shelling in southern Idlib and eastern Latakia, and air strikes were reported in central and northern Idlib over the past week. At the same time, the listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other non-State armed groups continue to harass, intimidate and coerce civilians, including medical workers.

The humanitarian situation remains alarming. An estimated 400,000 people fled their homes in north-west Syria in the period from May to August. Many of those people have been displaced multiple times, both prior to and during the current military escalation. These displacements follow familiar patterns, with

civilians largely moving northward, away from conflict-affected areas, to already densely populated areas in northern Idlib.

In addition to the needs of those displaced, host communities are becoming increasingly strained, leading to additional demands on overstretched humanitarian assistance. Needs in these areas are considerable across all sectors: food and non-food, water and sanitation, health, education and protection.

The shelter situation is of particular concern. Increased demand and short supply mean that many families are unable to afford rents in urban areas. A survey earlier this month found that about 600,000 people live in tents, camps and sites for internally displaced persons. Humanitarian partners report that in the absence of viable alternatives, families in some areas resort to living out in the open.

Following months of intensive fighting, the outlook in north-west Syria remains uncertain. We know, though, that winter is coming. Humanitarian organizations are already planning how to help people in need before temperatures drop and inclement weather arrives. Humanitarians estimate that an additional \$68.4 million is required to address expected winterization, shelter and non-food item needs. Continued donor support is essential to maintain the current humanitarian response, but also to scale up operations to meet the expected needs across north-west Syria in the months ahead.

Humanitarian efforts to assist civilians in need across north-west Syria depend on more than just financial support. As the Under-Secretary-General stressed last month, the people in Idlib are reached exclusively through the cross-border operation. On a monthly basis, more than 1.6 million people in need receive some form of assistance. The renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) later this year will be crucial to sustaining the ongoing support to millions of people in need and to respond to further needs in the months ahead.

As members of the Council are aware, on 13 September the Secretary-General announced the establishment of an internal, independent United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry to investigate a series of incidents that have occurred in north-west Syria. The board will commence its work on 30 September to ascertain the facts of specific incidents of concern and report to the Secretary-General about

its conclusions. We stand ready to support the Board in its inquiry.

I have some developments to report about another intractable humanitarian situation in the Rukban area. On 11 September, a team comprised of 20 United Nations staff and 170 staff and volunteers from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) completed a six-day mission to Rukban, delivering food and nutrition assistance for approximately 15,000 internally displaced persons. That joint mission was the second United Nations-SARC convoy in 2019 to reach the remote area with humanitarian assistance.

The mission was not without difficulties. Access to people in the area depended on extensive coordination with community leaders, armed groups and multiple Member States, including the Syrian Arab Republic, the Russian Federation, the United States and Jordan. Tensions on the ground were high. Moreover, the teams found that conditions have gradually deteriorated in the past months, with reports that several children have died of preventable causes.

The work to support people in Rukban is not over. United Nations-SARC teams are preparing for the next phase of their plan, which is to assist up to 6,000 people who have expressed the wish to depart Rukban for areas under Government control. Such an operation depends on the continued cooperation of all parties to facilitate the United Nations-SARC teams in supporting the voluntary departure of civilians from Rukban, in a safe, well-informed and dignified manner. The relevant parties will also need to make further efforts to find solutions for the population staying in Rukban, in consultation with them. On a related note, I welcome the arrival of Mr. Imran Riza, the new United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, who presented his credentials to the Syrian Government on Monday.

We have frequently reported to the Council about the desperate situation in Al-Hol camp. As of early September, some 68,600 individuals were residing in the camp, 94 per cent of whom were women and children. Humanitarian organizations continue to seek ways to improve camp facilities, particularly in the water and sanitation conditions and the availability of health care. Their efforts have contributed to a decrease in reported illnesses in recent weeks. Negotiations continue with camp administrators to ensure sustained humanitarian access to civilians in need, particularly

in the camp's annex, where third-country nationals are accommodated. If agreed, humanitarian organizations are prepared to provide around-the-clock health services, which are currently restricted to daylight hours.

Despite those efforts, the situation in Al-Hol remains extremely challenging and seemingly without an imminent solution. Children comprise two-thirds of the camp population. Many of them have been exposed to extreme violence and trauma under the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Insecurity and violence continue to be reported inside the camp. Many households face uncertainties about their future and remain concerned about the fate of missing male family members.

In that regard, solutions for foreign nationals need to be urgently found so as not to prolong their conditions. We call yet again on all Member States to take the measures necessary to ensure that their nationals are repatriated for rehabilitation and reintegration or prosecution, as appropriate, in line with international law and standards. Failure to do so now can place children at risk of future radicalization, which will only make future action more difficult.

Still in north-east Syria, in Deir ez-Zor governorate, humanitarian actors are increasingly concerned about new access challenges. On 13 September, the Syrian Democratic Forces reportedly closed all crossing points to areas under the Government of Syria until further notice, forcing civilians to resort to more dangerous informal crossings and interfering in humanitarian operations. Unimpeded humanitarian access remains essential to ensuring that the estimated 1.2 million people in need across north-east Syria have access to essential services and assistance.

I would like to take a step back from those urgent humanitarian situations, which we brief the Council about on a routine basis, to highlight two cross-cutting dynamics affecting civilians across Syria.

The first is food insecurity. Earlier this month, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reported greater harvests in Syria compared to last year. Wheat production, for instance, is estimated at 2.2 million tonnes, up from 1.2 million in 2018. Even if the overall production remains a fraction of pre-crisis levels, an improved agricultural outlook is hopeful news. At the same time, families in Syria face even greater challenges in making ends meet. Food prices have gradually increased nationwide over the past 12 to

14 months, just as the value of their currency has gone down. Importantly, we know that the most vulnerable families are the least able to cope with such pressures.

Such conditions only heighten the importance of ongoing efforts to support the more than 6.5 million people estimated to need food and livelihood support. On a monthly basis, humanitarian organizations deliver food assistance to 4.4 million people in need. It is important to stress that this assistance is provided based on assessed needs; almost 75 per cent of that food assistance reaches districts identified with the most severe needs.

The second dynamic that I would like to highlight is the threat posed by unexploded ordnance. Civilians in Syria face a chronic danger, even in areas where fighting has subsided. More than 10 million people in Syria are estimated to live in contaminated areas. Indeed, incidents have been recorded across Syria since the end of August. On 8 September, in Deir ez-Zor, an unexploded ordnance reportedly killed a man while he was checking on his house in the district of Abu Kamal. Days earlier, in northern rural Aleppo, two separate landmine explosions reportedly caused multiple casualties. On 1 September, a landmine reportedly injured 11 people, including five women and three children, in western rural Dara'a governorate.

The indiscriminate nature of unexploded ordnance makes it a shared challenge. I support standing calls on all parties to the conflict to allow the clearance of unexploded ordnance, to safely conduct risk-education efforts and to ensure respect and safety for the humanitarian staff conducting clearance activities.

I want to return to north-west Syria to conclude my briefing. In recent weeks, the fragile ceasefire has brought into focus an outlook that, for the Security Council, should be all too familiar. Further fighting will endanger and displace thousands of civilians. Further displacement will create even more needs. Further needs will stretch humanitarians who are already at their limit. The world is watching in the hope that a more humane outlook for Syria will be created, one where civilians are safe, needs are addressed and humanitarians are protected.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

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

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I deliver this statement on behalf of the co-penholders — Belgium, Kuwait and Germany.

At the outset, let me thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We once again reiterate our appreciation for all the efforts of humanitarian and medical personnel to alleviate human suffering in Syria.

We heard again from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs about the dire situation in north-western Syria and the fragility of the unilateral ceasefire. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is staggering. There are almost 3 million people in Idlib, the vast majority of whom are women and children. Over half a million people have fled the violence over the past few months, some of them having to flee more than once. Over 1,000 civilians have been killed. Hospitals, schools, and locations of internally displaced persons have been targeted and destroyed by bombardments. If this situation does not move the Council to take action, what will?

That is why today we will be voting on a draft resolution proposed by the Syria humanitarian co-penholders — Kuwait, Belgium and Germany. We have been negotiating this text in an inclusive, transparent and thorough manner for the past few weeks with all Council members. The aim of the text is purely humanitarian — it intends to protect the civilian population of Idlib from the ongoing offensive. It also emphasizes that counter-terrorism operations must be in compliance with international humanitarian law; respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution; and distinguish between the civilian population and combatants.

Civilians must never be the victims of a fight against terrorism. We hope that our draft resolution will gain the support of the entire Council, especially as its objective is purely humanitarian. The Council must speak up in a united manner to address the immense human suffering faced by the civilian population of Idlib. We call for the Council to urgently take a unified stance in support of our humanitarian draft resolution.

We are also extremely concerned by the situation in other areas of Syria, which was also highlighted by the Assistant Secretary-General. In the south, 2.8 million people require humanitarian assistance. In Rukban, we continue to call for a sustainable solution for the thousands of people there. In Al-Hol camp, where over

70,000 people still receive humanitarian assistance, the situation remains of deep concern, especially as women and children — who make up more than 90 per cent of the camp's population — are highly vulnerable and need specific protection.

We welcome the composition and the start of work of the Board of Inquiry. It is important to conduct a quick and thorough investigation of the incidents that took place, in particular the attacks on facilities identified under the de-confliction mechanism.

The cross-border mechanism, renewed under resolution 2449 (2018), remains a critical lifeline for millions of Syrians, particularly in the north-west. The United Nations has repeatedly stated that there is no other way to provide support for those civilians. The continuation of the mechanism is essential to alleviating human suffering, as the Assistant Secretary-General indicated this morning.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for her sobering but necessary update on the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

First, let me commend the organizations and individuals that are providing life-saving assistance to millions of Syrians. Their work is heroic, and the United States proudly supports them. At the same time, I regret the fact that the Security Council is yet again hearing reports of medical facilities being targeted by the Al-Assad regime and its allies, civilians being killed and humanitarians being denied access to desperate populations. Business as usual cannot continue to define these monthly meetings. The Council must hold the regime and its allies accountable for the atrocities it has committed, and we must ensure access for humanitarians wherever aid is needed in Syria.

As we have heard, the toll in Idlib over the past four months has been gruesome — more than 1,000 people killed, including at least 304 children, 164 women and 30 humanitarian workers, and roughly 2,000 people wounded. Nearly all of the 1,089 civilians killed between April and August were attributed to Syrian regime forces and their allies, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet.

The Al-Assad regime unilaterally announced a ceasefire on 30 August, but that so-called ceasefire, like others before it, merely offered cover for the

regime to regroup, reorganize and rest before its next attack. The regime's despicable, if familiar, practice of launching attacks that damage health-care facilities has likewise resumed. On 13 September, a regime artillery strike hit the Kiwan Hospital in Idlib. That marks the fifty-second medical facility struck in the past five months. In the short term, these effects are horrific, but the lasting effects are catastrophic and will persist for generations.

Meanwhile, in Sufuhan, a White Helmet centre was destroyed on 12 September. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to establish a Board of Inquiry to investigate attacks that damaged humanitarian facilities in north-west Syria and that the United Nations has selected the Board's members to manage that important accountability effort. We stand ready to support the Board's work and encourage all Member States to do the same.

Additionally, we call for the Secretary-General to make the Board's final report public. The intentional targeting of civilians and civilian objects is a violation of international humanitarian law, especially when those persons and objects reside in formally de-conflicted zones. Issuing a public report will greatly aid in holding responsible parties to account. The Al-Assad regime and Russia must cease bombardments that would wound and kill civilians and devastate civilian infrastructure. As the United States has reiterated time and time again, there is no military solution to this conflict.

With respect to the Rukban settlement, we commend the United Nations and its partners for completing their assessment mission and delivering critical supplies to nearly 15,000 displaced Syrians. We urge the Al-Assad regime and Russia to allow sustained deliveries of humanitarian assistance to Rukban from Damascus and to keep commercial routes to the encampment open as long as the civilians choose to remain in the settlement.

The return of internally displaced persons and refugees in Syria must be informed, safe, voluntary and dignified. We strongly urge all parties to work with the United Nations to ensure that proposals for return align with the United Nations guiding principles on internal displacement, and that the displaced persons receive all relevant information so that they may make informed decisions about their movement and safety. We were alarmed by reports that the Al-Assad regime has detained thousands of returning Syrians and continues to arrest and torture civilians, including

those who signed reconciliation agreements with the regime. We call for an end to the Al-Assad regime's cruel detention practices.

We welcome the efforts by the members of this organ to stop the unfolding of this humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib. To meet that goal, we strongly support the draft resolution submitted by Kuwait, Belgium and Germany, which includes a meaningful ceasefire to the ongoing hostilities in Idlib and will protect civilians and provide needed accountability measures. All Council members should support the draft resolution.

Finally, efforts by other members of the Council to promote a separate draft resolution that denies the people of Syria a full ceasefire will not halt the suffering of Syrians and should not receive the support of any Council member. I would certainly like to believe that the entire Council will join me in standing with the people of Syria by supporting the sole draft resolution that will bring an end to the ongoing regime strikes.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Ms. Mueller for her very useful briefing. I also reiterate my appreciation for the outstanding commitment of all humanitarian personnel in Syria.

More than ever, we must focus our efforts on three areas. The first, which must be an absolute priority, is the implementation of the ceasefire in Idlib. We are very concerned about the resumption of air strikes last week, following the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire on 31 August. We will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground and to call for the strict implementation of the Sochi memorandum, one year after its signature between Turkey and Russia. Every effort must be made to ensure an effective ceasefire in the north-west with a view to halting hostilities and to instating a nationwide ceasefire, in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we support the draft resolution submitted by Germany, Belgium and Kuwait.

The second area of focus is respect for international humanitarian law, which is binding on all and non-negotiable. In that connection, I would like to recall two imperatives.

The first is the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel. The fight against terrorism, which is undisputedly an essential issue, cannot be invoked to justify violations of international

humanitarian law. For that reason, we welcome the launch of an internal investigation by the Secretary-General into the attacks on de-conflicted infrastructure in the north-west and reaffirm our full support to him. I repeat that the fight against terrorism cannot under any circumstances justify the sacrifice of civilian populations, let alone children, nor does it justify indiscriminate bombing or the deliberate destruction of hospitals and schools. The crimes committed in Idlib and the rest of Syria cannot and must not go unpunished. Those who commit such acts will one day be held accountable by the courts.

The second imperative is guaranteeing immediate, safe, secure, comprehensive, sustainable and unhindered humanitarian access to the entire Syrian territory for those who need it most. For that to happen, the violence in Idlib must stop immediately. We reiterate our call on those with the means to do so to exert the necessary pressure on the regime to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Syria, in particular in the areas under its control, including the territories it reclaimed in 2018 in the south-west, eastern Ghouta and the Rukban camp. Ensuring humanitarian access also implies — and this is an essential point — that the United Nations have access to displaced persons and refugees who have returned home.

Thirdly, the urgency of the situation in Idlib is a cruel reminder that only an inclusive political solution can bring lasting peace and stability to Syria and enable refugees to return to their country. We reiterate our full support for the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen, with the aim of concluding a balanced agreement on the constitutional committee, regarding both its composition and its rules of procedure. We take note of the latest encouraging developments related by the Secretary-General and call for the launch of the constitutional committee as soon as possible, under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva. The procrastination must stop.

It is important that, in parallel, the Special Envoy work on the basis of all the elements of resolution 2254 (2015), in particular on the preparation of elections and confidence-building measures. We hope that the high-level week of the General Assembly will provide an opportunity to increase mobilization in support of the political process. In the absence of any progress and without the prospect of a political settlement, France and the European Union cannot participate in the

financing of reconstruction. That will fall to the regime and its allies. We call on each and every member of the Security Council to take responsibility for putting an end to the tragedy that is unfolding before our eyes in Idlib, and we invite them to vote in favour of the text presented by Germany, Belgium and Kuwait.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for her detailed account of the current situation in Syria.

Since March 2011, Syria has been in the throes of a conflict that has forced more than half of all Syrians to leave their homes. Millions of Syrians are either displaced or have been forced to seek refuge outside the country. The crisis has resulted in more than 12 million people needing assistance.

The current situation in Syria remains unacceptable. Poland is deeply concerned about the possible surge of violence across Syria, in particular in the north, resulting in a high number of casualties among civilians and threatening the vital lifeline provided by the import and distribution of basic supplies and services across the country.

Air strikes have been destroying civilian infrastructure, including camps for the internally displaced, markets, schools and, most importantly, health-care facilities. Children, pregnant and lactating women, persons with disabilities, the elderly and other groups or individuals with specific needs or diminished coping mechanisms are particularly at risk. The protection of civilians and the provision of unhindered access to humanitarian assistance are not a choice but a legal obligation on all sides of the conflict. Those who do not comply should be held accountable. Multilateral cooperation in this respect is urgently needed.

As we hear almost daily about the suffering of the civilian population in Idlib province, we want to underline that civilians should be subject to protection in line with international law. Unfortunately, this basic condition is still not being met. Enhanced efforts aimed at the promotion of and respect for international humanitarian law are of the utmost importance. Ensuring that the de-escalation zone in Idlib, agreed by Russia and Turkey, is fully respected is crucial to preventing a full-scale humanitarian catastrophe. All parties to the conflict should spare no effort in ensuring the full implementation of the agreement. For that reason, Poland supports the draft resolution presented by the humanitarian penholders on Syria.

Let me conclude by stressing that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. A lasting settlement can be achieved only through a political agreement, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). A political settlement is urgently needed, as it remains the only way to achieve sustainable peace under these extremely dire circumstances.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her briefing.

The relevant actors of the international community have recently made active diplomatic efforts to improve the situation in Idlib. Since 31 August, Russia and the Syrian Government have implemented a ceasefire in Idlib, which has generally held. On 16 September, the Presidents of Russia, Turkey and Iran met in Ankara and agreed to take measures to ease the tension in Idlib, stressing that no party is allowed to violate Syrian sovereignty, independence, unity or territorial integrity and reiterating their intention to cooperate to fight terrorism and to take concrete measures to protect civilians. China welcomes those developments and supports Russia, Turkey and Iran in seeking, in the interests of the Syrian nation and people, a comprehensive solution to fight terrorism and address the humanitarian issues in Idlib. We expect the Astana process to continue its important role.

China has been closely following the humanitarian situation in Syria, as it cares about the interests and well-being of the Syrian people. Years of conflict have resulted in a huge demand for humanitarian aid in Syria, and the economic sanctions have worsened the living conditions of the Syrian people. The international community must take into account the current food situation and other living conditions of the Syrian people and issues relating to the country's post-war reconstruction, national security and development. We should also properly tackle the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and their families and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the homes.

The international community has a moral responsibility to help the Syrian people emerge from the shadow of war and lead a peaceful, stable and promising life. In conducting humanitarian relief operations in Syria, the United Nations and its relevant agencies should fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territory integrity, and strictly abide by the resolutions of the Security Council, the

United Nations guiding principles on humanitarian assistance and relevant provisions of international law. They should step up communication and coordination with the Syrian Government.

There has been a great deal of controversy over the Secretariat's move to establish a Board of Inquiry into incidents in north-west Syria. China is concerned about the implications that might have on Syria's political process. At present, the Syrian Government is actively promoting development and improving people's livelihoods. China appreciates those efforts. In communication and coordination with the Syrian Government, China plans to focus on launching livelihood-related projects to support Syria in its post-war reconstruction. A political solution to the situation in Syria is the fundamental way to ease the humanitarian situation in the country.

For some time now, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, has been actively engaged in good offices to promote the political process based on the principle of Syrian leadership and ownership and on resolution 2254 (2015). With momentum now building for a political settlement to the Syrian issue, China supports the Special Envoy's efforts and calls for all parties in Syria to resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation. Members of the Council should also remain united in providing political support for the Special Envoy's efforts, such as that in forming a constitutional committee.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

Once again, we express our gratitude to all humanitarian actors who continue to provide assistance under truly challenging conditions. We believe we should commend in particular the Syrian non-governmental organizations engaged in humanitarian work. Those organizations are proof of the often-overlooked resilience and solidarity of the Syrian people. To all of them, I express our deepest gratitude.

The growing humanitarian needs of the vulnerable population, fuelled by successive displacement and conditions of insecurity, are a source of grave concern to the Dominican Republic. The alarming statistic of 630,000 newly displaced persons represents a major humanitarian challenge that demands a robust and urgent collective response backed by the necessary funding to achieve the objectives of providing

protection, basic services and shelter, while preserving the humanity and dignity of those people. We are talking about a population that was mostly already in conditions of extreme poverty, with little capacity to withstand further blows.

We echo the joint appeal issued by the Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding the use of explosive weapons in urban areas, which affirmed that parties in conflict

“must recognize that using explosive weapons with wide area effects in cities, towns and refugee camps places civilians at high risk of indiscriminate harm”.

Idlib is no exception.

Hundreds of thousands of girls and boys in the north-west of the country have been unable to begin because their schools have either been attacked or are being used as shelters. How could we possibly justify this situation to those children? What promises for the future can be made in such a climate of insecurity? For the Dominican Republic, the price that children have paid for this conflict is particularly alarming. It is more crucial than ever that we ensure those children will enjoy a better future, free of threats to their development.

We wish to draw the Security Council's attention to an important point Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock raised during our latest briefing (see S/PV.8619), when he quite rightly noted that it had not received a great deal of attention: food security. While harvests have increased as compared to 2018, according to the latest report of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization on the situation on Syria, 6.5 million people suffer from acute food insecurity and 2.5 million additional people are on at risk of food insecurity. The factors driving that food insecurity include conflict-induced migration, the destruction of crops, limited agricultural equipment, a lack of inputs and rising food prices, to name but a few. As a result, millions of Syrians are dependent upon food assistance, which means it remains an urgent priority for Member States to honour their financial commitments to the humanitarian response plan.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the holding of this meeting and express our gratitude for the important information provided by Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller.

Peru continues to follow with grave concern the continuing conflict and grave humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. While recent days have seen positive developments in the north-west of the country, the overall situation remains uncertain and millions of people continue enduring conditions of extreme vulnerability.

We note with alarm the report of approximately 630,000 new internally displaced persons since May, the majority located along the Turkish border. Those people, largely women and children, are facing abjectly precarious conditions as a result of the extensive territorial control attained by terrorist groups and the continuous air strikes that make no distinction between civilians and combatants.

Peru once again expresses its profound solidarity with the Syrians enduring this cruel and protracted conflict, as well as our gratitude and support to United Nations personnel and other humanitarian agencies deployed on the ground.

We hope that, given this delicate situation, the bilateral arrangements announced relating to those areas will pose no threat to the civilian population or affect humanitarian assistance operations. We wish to underscore the joint United Nations operation with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, as mentioned by Ms. Mueller, to address the grave situation facing the thousands of displaced people in Rukban, characterized by daily shortages of food, drinking water, health care and medical supplies as well as extreme weather conditions. While we welcome the recent humanitarian deployment by the United Nations to the camp, we stress the obligation to provide continuous access to humanitarian assistance for as long as necessary and continue in efforts to guarantee the safe and dignified return of persons currently in the camp due to a lack of resources to move.

We must also emphasize the major challenge involved in meeting the critical needs of the more than 70,000 people in the Al-Hol camp and the importance of continuing to mobilize the support of the international community.

We encourage the Government of Iraq to implement the repatriation plans for its 30,000 nationals with the support of the United Nations. To that end, we believe it vital that the parties continue to work on measures that foster a climate of better understanding, including the release of detainees, the identification of missing

persons and the transfer of human remains. We welcome the work being done in that regard within the Astana framework but we note the urgent need to make more substantive progress in that area.

We also highlight the importance of continuing to promote humanitarian demining work and the clearance of improvised explosive devices in Syria, whose effects not only wreak havoc among the population but also hamper the delivery of the necessary assistance.

I would like to conclude by underlining the urgent need for a permanent end to the hostilities as the only way to begin to put an end to the suffering that the continuation of the conflict will cause to Syrian civilians.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): The situation for civilians in northwest Syria is devastating. More than 1,000 civilians have been killed, including over 500 women and children, and almost 630,000 people have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of May. I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her briefing and for the work that her officials and colleagues are doing. We commend their work and that of the humanitarian agencies to address the humanitarian suffering of the people in Idlib. The United Kingdom has contributed more than \$150 million to humanitarian assistance in Idlib over the past 18 months. I took careful note of what Assistant-Secretary-General Mueller had to say about the importance of resolution 2165 (2014) regarding cross-border operations in that context. We of course support that resolution.

The Security Council must act to protect civilians in Idlib. That is why we fully support the humanitarian penholders — Belgium, Kuwait and Germany — with regard to their proposed draft resolution S/2019/756. We will vote in favour of the draft resolution and in favour of protecting civilians and ending indiscriminate attacks. The Council has a duty to protect those suffering on the ground. We need to send a message to the regime that the international community is resolute in condemning its actions and will not allow them to continue unabated. Only a vote in favour of the co-penholders' draft resolution will send the message that countries around this table, representing the international community, will not accept the wanton targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure regardless of the stated objective. Now is not a time to sit on the fence.

We know that the Syrian regime does not care how many of its civilians it kills but Russia says that it does care. If so, Russia should vote in favour of the co-penholders' draft text and it and China should withdraw their draft text, which would permit continued attacks on civilians. We note Russian claims to the press recently that the information of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is apparently not up to date given its lack of presence on the ground. That only reinforces the need for Russia to press the Syrian authorities to approve OCHA's request for greater humanitarian access on the ground.

On Monday, the Astana guarantors noted their commitment to sustainable peace in Syria and that that can be achieved only through political and diplomatic methods. We have been waiting a very long time for political progress. We ask again for Russia to maintain pressure on the regime, to fully engage with the political process and, of course, to end the violence in Idlib, which threatens that political process.

Finally, we welcome the Secretary-General's board of inquiry, which will soon begin to investigate some of the recent appalling attacks in Idlib. We call for the findings of the inquiry to be released to the public. Some of the information underlying those findings may need to remain confidential but it is crucial that the board be transparent in its mandate and output. The international community, but, more importantly, the Syrian people, deserve to be privy to its findings on events in Idlib.

Assistant Secretary-General Mueller said that the world was watching the Council but the Syrian people — men, women and children — are dying while they watch.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for updating the Council on the current humanitarian situation in Syria.

Indonesia is following very closely developments on the ground across northwest Syria. My delegation believes that when civilians have been killed and injured, the Council really needs to act. That is not something new. Many of us have repeatedly voiced the need for the Council to prevent the further deterioration of the humanitarian suffering in Idlib. Indonesia would like to highlight three points.

First, respecting and upholding the ceasefire agreement is of crucial importance. Fully implementing the September 2018 memorandum of understanding on

Idlib is essential. We appreciate the ceasefire that began on 31 August and encourage all parties to respect it. We regret to note the shelling that reportedly continues to affect civilians in southern Idlib. More than 630,000 individual displacements were also reported. Those people are fighting for their lives. They need to survive. Again, to immediately cease hostilities in Idlib governorate is the priority.

Secondly, pursuing a peaceful resolution should be the priority, with the aim of achieving concrete results so as to alleviate the suffering of civilians on the ground. In that regard, the Council should spare no effort in creating a conducive atmosphere and in avoiding further humanitarian catastrophe.

We note the most recent joint statement of the tripartite summit held in Ankara, which agreed to take concrete steps to reduce violations in the Idlib de-escalation area and to ensure the protection of the civilian population, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, my delegation would like to urge all parties to facilitate immediate, safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access for the United Nations to the requested areas and populations in need.

The Council is scheduled to take action today on draft resolutions S/2019/756 and S/2019/757 regarding the humanitarian situation in Idlib. My delegation wishes to emphasize that it is indeed important for us, the Council, to truly focus on the humanitarian aspect and to ensure that we are not too late in responding to the humanitarian situation in Idlib.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Ms. Ursula Mueller on her very comprehensive and informative briefing on the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with concern the continuing deterioration of the already alarming humanitarian situation in Syria, particularly in Idlib. Despite the agreement between Russia and Turkey, signed in Sochi on 17 September 2018, which created a demilitarized zone in Idlib governorate, the latter is facing an unprecedented military escalation. The escalating violence has resulted in many deaths, thousands of wounded and massive population displacements. The destruction of hospital and school infrastructure, as well

as attacks on internally displaced persons camps, further aggravate an already worrying humanitarian situation.

Given the situation, Côte d'Ivoire calls on all parties to respect the demilitarized zone, which should ensure a cessation of hostilities in that area. My country remains convinced that the cessation of fighting will create the necessary conditions for the voluntary return of refugees and pave the way for creating a climate of trust in support of an ongoing and inclusive political process. My delegation also urges the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, including by removing all obstacles to the provision of assistance to refugees and displaced persons, including women and children, and by protecting humanitarian personnel.

It therefore rightly welcomes the unilateral ceasefire declared on 31 August by the Russian Federation and Government forces in Idlib province. It calls on the parties to respect that ceasefire in order to allow humanitarian aid to be delivered to those in need. My country also welcomes the commitments made by the guarantors of the Astana process at the fifth summit on Syria, held in Ankara on 16 September. It welcomes in particular news of an agreement reached on the establishment of entities to draft a new constitution for the Syrian Arab Republic. We believe that that initiative would be another important and effective step towards lasting peace in the country.

My delegations also welcomes the dispatch, on the same day, of a mission with 22 trucks of humanitarian aid to Syria to provide assistance to suffering people in Idlib and its surrounding villages. We also welcome the resolve of Russia and Turkey to implement all agreements reached on Idlib and take concrete steps to ensure the protection of civilians.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire encourages the international community to pursue its humanitarian assistance efforts in Syria and reiterates its support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in his firm commitment to creating the conditions for a peaceful and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Van Shalkwyk (South Africa): Let me begin by thanking Ms. Ursula Mueller for her briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We, too, are deeply concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, particularly with regard to the thousands of civilians who continue to suffer.

While we continue our deliberations here in the Council, we should not forget those who remain under the threat of violence, in particular those civilians still in Idlib. South Africa remains deeply disturbed about the high number of civilians, especially women and children, who have lost their lives, sustained severe injuries or have been displaced, in some cases multiple times, since April of this year. In addition to the grave loss of lives, the destruction of civilian infrastructure — such as schools, health facilities, markets and water stations, which are essential to the survival of civilians still in the area — is particularly concerning and must be condemned. In that regard, South Africa calls on all parties to ensure that they respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We wish to re-emphasize that health facilities hold a special status under international law, which must be respected.

The damage and destruction of civilian of civilian infrastructure and the inability to provide basic services contribute to the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation, pushing thousands of civilians towards Syria's northern border. If no intervention is made to address the humanitarian situation in Syria, it will result in further deaths of innocent civilians. An alternative to war has to be found.

While my delegation acknowledges the threat and violence committed by terrorist groups, we must also acknowledge and ensure that no counter-terrorism actions should be taken at the expense of civilian lives. We reiterate our position that any such action should be taken only within the boundaries of international law.

South Africa has noted and welcomes the unilateral ceasefire declared on 31 August by the Syrian Government. We hope that it will be but one of many steps towards long-term peace in Idlib and in Syria as a whole.

With regard to the humanitarian situation in other parts of Syria, South Africa wishes to welcome the recent delivery by the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent of essential humanitarian assistance to the people in Rukban. That assistance has long been awaited and is much needed by the people remaining in Rukban. South Africa maintains its position that while civilians remain in Rukban, humanitarian assistance, as needed, should be provided, and also that those wish to leave should be assisted in doing so.

With regard to my last point on recent political developments, we note the joint statement of Iran, Turkey and the Russian Federation regarding the situation in Syria, following their discussions in Turkey earlier this week. We welcome their unified commitment to increasing humanitarian assistance to all Syrians throughout the country, without preconditions.

With regard to the constitutional committee, we look forward to receiving an update from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen, at his next briefing to the Council.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates that the situation in Syria can be resolved only through negotiations and dialogue under the auspices of resolution 2254 (2015) and under the guidance of Special Envoy Pedersen, in order to halt the loss of innocent civilian lives and to restore peace, stability and security in Syria.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Equatorial Guinea thanks you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Ms. Ursula Mueller for her informative briefing.

The Second World War is said to have ended in 1945, following 2,194 days of conflict. The war in Syria has already surpassed that time frame. More than 3,000 days have passed since the start of the crisis on 15 March 2011. To date, the conflict has lasted eight years and six months and continues owing primarily to hostilities among the warring parties and to the actions of the Security Council, which is responsible for ensuring international peace and security.

For Equatorial Guinea, the situation in Syria, and in particular in Idlib, is completely unacceptable. Our position remains unchanged. We cannot continue to sacrifice the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people for prosperity and well-being at the altar of political or geostrategic interests. In the current atmosphere of tension, the Security Council should remain united and spare no effort to promote and ensure the definitive end of hostilities in north-western Syria. In that regard, we welcome the new unilateral ceasefire imposed by Syrian Government forces on 31 August and call for the moratorium on hostilities to be maintained so as to ensure the speedy normalization of the situation in Idlib. Actions that jeopardize the ceasefire in the de-escalation zone must also be avoided.

Furthermore, we strongly welcome the third round of humanitarian aid, made possible by the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to approximately 15,000 residents of the Rukban refugee camp, whose living conditions are approaching the level of a humanitarian disaster. We urge United Nations humanitarian agencies to continue to provide aid to those who intend to leave the camp.

We reiterate that, even in the fight against terrorist remnants in Syria, respect for international humanitarian law must always be ensured. In order to avoid causing further harm to civilians and damage to infrastructure during counter-terrorism operations, the parties must be fully resolved to cease indiscriminate attacks and to apply the principles of distinction and proportionality. It is within that logic that, as on other occasions, we reiterate our strong condemnation of any act of violence by any of the parties involved in the Syrian conflict that results in the loss of civilian life and damage to the infrastructure that provides basic services to the population, such as medical facilities and schools. Indeed, attacks on and the destruction of medical facilities and schools whose locations are known to the warring parties demonstrate the gravity of the violations of international law and of international humanitarian law, as well as the lack of respect for the rules of the game in the context of the Syrian conflict.

In conclusion, I reiterate the firm conviction of the Government of Equatorial Guinea that the Syrian conflict can be settled only through political and diplomatic means, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the delegation of your friendly country on the assumption by the Russian Federation of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also would like to express our deepest appreciation for your country's positions, which are underpinned by the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, which are defended by your country.

A well-known Arab philosopher, Al-Mutanabbi, who lived 1,000 years ago in Baghdad, Damascus and Aleppo, said something that remains very valid today. He said, "If someone does something wrong, then his suspicions worsen". I will explain why that saying is still valid.

The Governments of some permanent members of the Council, which are supposed to be entrusted with upholding the principles of our Charter and maintaining international peace and security, continue to misuse the mechanisms of this international Organization, including this important forum, to politicize the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria. They are using it also as an instrument in a hostile campaign aimed at undermining the security and stability of my country, supporting terrorism and levelling accusations aimed at tarnishing the image of the Syrian Government and its allies and at covering up the crimes committed by those same countries and by their allies, proxies and tools in the region.

Many realize that some parties have gambled a great deal of money, effort, weapons and diplomacy in the market for Syrian blood, within the Wall Street of terrorism, located in the caves of Idlib. I am pleased to tell those investors that they have lost their bets and investments, which, to themselves and to those they use as tools, will only bring them defeat and debacle on our beloved national soil in Idlib.

The truth that is absent in the statements of those countries that have adopted hostile positions against Syria in the Council and in the briefings of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is that alleviating the situation in Syria and addressing the challenges that the Syrians are facing to secure their basic living needs require the following.

First, there is a need for full respect for the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and its unity and territorial integrity. This is the substantive principle underscored by the Security Council in the more than 20 resolutions that have been adopted over the past eight years on the situation in my country at the humanitarian and political levels.

Secondly, there must be support for the efforts of the Syrian Government and its allies in combating the remnants of armed terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters to implement the 12 resolutions of the Council on counter-terrorism.

Thirdly, there is a need to put an end to the illegal presence of foreign troops on Syrian Arab Republic territories and to end the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the illegal global coalition.

Fourthly, there must be cooperation with the Syrian Government as a key partner at the humanitarian

development level, free of any political preconditions, rejected diktats or extortion attempts aimed at undermining reconstruction efforts and the return of refugees.

Fifthly, an immediate end must be put to the unilateral coercive measures that have significantly affected the lives of Syrians and impeded their ability to meet their basic daily needs.

The Syrian Government is sparing no effort to lend support to and secure the basic needs of all its citizens, wherever they may be on the Syrian territories. The Government is also supporting and facilitating the efforts of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, in accordance with the guidelines set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

I would recall that the Syrian Government accepted the ceasefire in the de-escalation zone in Idlib effective from 31 August while reserving the right to reply to any violation by terrorists. My Government also coordinated with the friendly Russian side the opening of a second humanitarian corridor in Abu Al-Duhur, in Idlib, in addition to the first humanitarian crossing that had previously been opened in the city of Souran to enable civilians to leave the areas where armed terrorist groups are present — groups that use them as human shields. This would enable those civilians to go to areas that have been liberated from terrorists by the Arab Syrian army and its allies. But terrorist groups, for the seventh day in a row, are targeting and shooting civilians to prevent them from leaving through those two crossings.

Coordinated Syrian-Russian efforts culminated in the removal from Rukban camp of more than 29,000 civilians who had been held there and in securing temporary shelters to receive them and then move them to areas liberated from the terrorists. The Syrian Government recently facilitated a visit by a United Nations assessment mission and the Syrian Red Crescent, as well as an aid convoy to the camp in the occupied area of Al-Tanf, which is controlled by United States troops and the Maghawir al-Thawra terrorist group.

The United Nations, following that visit, announced that only 13,000 people were in the camp and that 37 per cent of them wished to leave and return to the areas controlled by the Government. But the terrorist groups supported by occupying United States troops did not allow them to do so and forcibly seized a significant

part of the humanitarian assistance and transferred it to one of their posts in the Al-Tanf area. The Syrian Government continues to cooperate with humanitarian partners to address the situation in Al-Hol camp. The Government granted the International Committee of the Red Cross authorization to bring a mobile field hospital into the camp along with 100 technicians and medical personnel, as well as to render assistance to those in need in the camp and surrounding areas. Here we would underscore the responsibility of the countries concerned to withdraw their terrorists and their families from the camp without delay.

These points are but a few examples that demonstrate the significant efforts, about which there is no doubt, made by the Syrian State at the humanitarian level. This also testifies to the results of international cooperation when there are good intentions and willingness. I reiterate my thanks to the Russian Federation for its efforts to this end.

I would recall that had it not been for the support provided by the Syrian Government for the work of the United Nations and other partners in terms of humanitarian action, the United Nations would not have been able to perform the achievements noted in its reports.

In the past few weeks, humanitarian penholders have drawn up a draft resolution on my country. The draft has nothing to do with its declared objectives. My country categorically rejects it for many reasons, foremost of which are the following.

First, there was no serious consultation and coordination with the key party concerned: the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Secondly, the draft resolution ignores the root causes of the exacerbated humanitarian crisis, namely, the globally supported terrorism, the illegal presence of foreign troops on my country's territories and their

policy of imposing a new *fait accompli* that contravenes the stipulations of the Council's resolutions regarding a full commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Thirdly, the draft resolution ignores the need to exclude terrorist groups from the cessation of hostilities, flouting the Sochi and Astana agreements. It also elides the responsibility of Member States to repatriate the foreign terrorists and their families and to hold them accountable, rather than the practice of some to show indifference and of others to shirk their responsibilities. They revoke the citizenship of those terrorists in order to keep them in Syria, at the expense of the Syrian people.

Fourthly, the countries that submitted the draft resolution were hasty, not out of benevolence but in their belligerence against the Syrian State, reflecting the efforts of certain States to undermine the security and stability of the region to serve the interests of the Israeli occupation. They joined the illegal global coalition and have stained their history of relations with the Syrian people. They have perpetrated economic terrorism against the Syrians by imposing and implementing unilateral coercive measures.

I advise those who harbour illusions and believe that they can turn Al-Tanf into an occupied pocket like Guantanamo, or Idlib into another Tora Bora, to abandon those illusions. My delegation therefore invites the members of the Council to vote against the draft resolution that has been submitted by the humanitarian penholders.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.