



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8628th meeting

Monday, 30 September 2019, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Vershinin (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. Esono Mbengono
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Ugarelli
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Roscoe
United States of America	Mrs. Craft

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 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 representatives of Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Gholamhossein Dehghani, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and His Excellency Mr. Sedat Önal, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: 1. In one month, on 30 October, I intend to convene 150 Syrian men and women for the launch of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva. I believe that this should be a sign of hope for the long-suffering Syrian people. It comes after the agreement of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Negotiation Commission to a package deal of the nominees to the Committee and a Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure to guide its work.

We should stop for a minute and take stock of the significance of this agreement. This is indeed the first concrete political agreement between the Government and the opposition to begin to implement a key aspect of resolution 2254 (2015) and to set a schedule and process for a new constitution. It implies a clear acceptance of the other as an interlocutor. It commits their nominees to sit together in face-to-face dialogue and negotiation, while at the same time opening space for civil society at the table. It is also a shared promise to the Syrian people

to try to agree, under the auspices of the United Nations, on new constitutional arrangements for Syria — a new social contract to help repair a broken country. This can be a door-opener to a wider political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Seizing this opportunity will not be easy. Syria remains in the gravest crisis, with violence and terrorism continuing, five international armies operating on its territory, appalling suffering and abuses, a deeply divided society and a sense of despair among its people inside and outside the country. Trust and confidence are almost non-existent. The Constitutional Committee will really matter if it becomes a step along the difficult path out of this conflict and to a new Syria, and if its launch and work are accompanied by other steps to build trust and confidence among Syrians and between Syria and the international community.

The Secretary-General formally announced the agreement on 23 September. Allow me to join the Secretary-General in welcoming the progress made by the Government and the opposition. I particularly thank Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Al-Moualem, and Syrian Negotiation Commission leader Al-Hariri for their engagement with me in a sustained dialogue to help bring this about.

Like the Secretary-General, I am grateful to the wide range of Syrian women and men — including the Women's Advisory Board, participants in the Civil Society Support Room and Syrians from all parts of the country — who have offered their counsel and insight. I join the Secretary-General in expressing my particular appreciation to the Governments of Russia, Turkey and Iran for their support in the conclusion of the agreement. I also join the Secretary-General in expressing my thanks for the support of the members of the Council, including all five permanent members, and my appreciation to the Small Group for their support.

The Secretary-General transmitted the agreed Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Committee via you, Mr. President, to the Security Council; all members now have it in document S/2019/775. The agreement is framed by key principles that must underpin any process and any settlement. These include respect for the Charter of the United Nations; Security Council resolutions; Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity; and the Syrian-led and owned nature of the process. The principles also include the objective

of United Nations-supervised elections envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), based on a new constitution. They also recognize the need for a broader political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

The Constitutional Committee has a clear mandate. It shall, within the context of the United Nations-facilitated Geneva process, prepare and draft for popular approval a constitutional reform as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The constitutional reform shall, *inter alia*, embody in the constitution and constitutional practices of the country the letter and spirit of the 12 living intra-Syrian essential principles that emerged in the Geneva process and were affirmed in Sochi. The Committee may review the 2012 Constitution, including in the context of other Syrian constitutional experiences and amend the current constitution or draft a new one.

The constitutional reform adopted by the Constitutional Committee must be popularly approved and transposed into the national legal order by a means that will need to be agreed. There is a clear, balanced and, I believe, workable structure. There will be two equal co-chairs from the Government and the opposition who will proceed in consensus and exert the prerogatives necessary to ensure the Committee's smooth functioning. There is small body of 45 — 15 Government nominees, 15 opposition nominees and 15 from civil society — to prepare and draft proposals. And there is a large body of 150 — 50 Government nominees, 50 opposition nominees and 50 from civil society — to discuss and adopt proposals.

The agreement promotes consensus within the Committee where possible, but also specifies a decision-making threshold of 75 per cent. All main components need to be on board for proposals to move forward. No one bloc can dictate the outcomes, and the incentives exist to reach out to the middle ground and across the divide. The parties have agreed and committed to working expeditiously and continuously to produce results and continued progress, without foreign interference or external deadlines, and also without preconditions or insisting on agreement on one point before discussions can begin on another.

The parties have welcomed and embodied in the agreement the facilitation role of the United Nations, including using good offices and reporting to the Council on progress. Both parties have told me that they

have confidence in the United Nations and want to work with us in a sustained and constructive manner. We will do everything we can to meet their expectations.

The names of the 150 members will be released by the United Nations once all nominees have formally confirmed their participation, but let me say a few words about them. Beyond the Government and opposition nominees, the middle third comprises 50 civil society actors. They hail from different religious, ethnic and geographical backgrounds, hold a range of political leanings, and include respected experts. Some live in Syria; others are based outside the country. Facilitating agreement on this list has been the most complex part of the deal. Ensuring sufficient credibility, balance and inclusiveness in a manner that keeps all on board has been a key priority for us. The result is, of course, a negotiated compromise, and like all compromises, no one is completely satisfied.

We are proud that nearly half the civil society list are women, and that we have around 30 per cent women in the overall 150. Any viable, sustainable peace process needs to have women of all political persuasions at the table, since they represent over half its population and since, throughout the course of the conflict, they have taken on an ever more prominent role in their communities.

We have worked hard to secure guarantees — and here I quote from the agreement — that

“members of the Constitutional Committee and their relatives or political and civil society organizations and entities of which they are part are not subject to threat or harassment or actions against person or property directly related to their work in the Constitutional Committee and to addressing and resolving any incidents and concerns should they arise” (*S/2019/775, annex, para. 19*).

These guarantees have been solemnly given and must be respected.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Syrian experts and activists, men and women, on all sides, have done outstanding work throughout the years of this conflict, developing ideas and proposals as a basis for lasting peace. In so doing, they helped create a public space for democratic and civic debates. We have actively supported and facilitated this process. Not all of them could be on the Committee, but I am confident that they will continue to make their voices heard and I am

equally confident that Committee members understand their responsibilities towards all Syrians and their obligation to listen to and take on board the ideas of others. I will continue to consult widely and closely among Syrian civil society, including through the Civil Society Support Room and with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, and with all components of Syrian society, including in the north-east of the country.

Let me, above all, stress the following: the future Constitution of Syria belongs to the Syrian people and to them alone. This effort is about meeting the aspirations of the Syrian people. The United Nations will jealously guard the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led nature of the process. Syrians, not outsiders, will draft the Constitution, and the Syrian people must popularly approve it. We will be there to facilitate the process in a manner that ensures its continuing credibility, balance and inclusiveness, and to help when needed.

Let me assure the Security Council and all the Syrian people that I am fully aware that the Constitutional Committee obviously cannot resolve the conflict alone. We must look squarely at the facts and address the conflict and the crisis more comprehensively, in line, of course, with resolution 2254 (2015).

A humanitarian crisis continues, in Idlib in particular, and in many other parts of Syria. Idlib is calmer today than it was last month, but violence continues, and there is an ever-present threat of Idlib or other parts of Syria being engulfed in all-out conflict. Meanwhile, terrorist groups, listed by the Security Council, continue to metastasize, touching all Syrian communities. A solution that does not endanger civilians is essential — a solution to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other extremist groups in Idlib, and to a resurgent Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant elsewhere. Violent confrontations between international players remain frequent, within Syria and across its international borders. The spectre of a broader regional conflagration still looms over the country. The country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence are not being respected.

De-escalation steps towards a nationwide ceasefire are absolutely essential because the violence and killing must stop, because there is no military solution and because resolution 2254 (2015) tells us so. A ceasefire — with a shared international understanding of how to combat terrorism in a manner that protects

civilians and upholds international law — is vital in its own right and would help animate the political process.

Tens of thousands remain detained, abducted or missing, their families suffering from untold pain and daily challenges. I appeal for action on detainees, abductees and the missing, particularly the release of women and children. This action would be a vital step. Now is the time. Now is the time for action on this issue.

Millions remain displaced, inside and outside Syria, many mired in hopelessness and fear. Meaningful steps will be required to create an environment for refugees and internally displaced persons to return in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner. Millions continue to live in poverty, facing widespread commodity shortages and an economy that lies in tatters. Lawlessness and fragmentation abound, weakening the social fabric and prospects to build the rule of law and a culture of respect for human rights. This too must be our concern.

That is why, as we look towards the first meeting of the Committee, I urge all stakeholders — the Syrian parties and their backers — to think more broadly, more inclusively and with the ultimate objective of a country at peace. I appeal for them to seize upon the momentum that the Committee offers and take concrete actions to build trust and confidence.

Language matters too. I hope that the Syrian parties and the international community can find the right words to clearly signal their good intentions — to each other and to the Syrian people — to open a new chapter and create new and better realities on the ground.

Ultimately, I hope that we can begin to build a positive dynamic step by step by the Syrian parties, as well as by the international parties. We need to build the kind of safe, calm and neutral environment that could make Syrians feel that the political process can restore their country and respond to their aspirations.

That requires genuine international dialogue and cooperation in support of the Geneva process. Any concrete steps should be reciprocal, building trust among Syrians as well as between Syria and the international community. I know that it will not be easy but I sense among my key partners an honest understanding that it is necessary. I will keep working to that end.

Ultimately, the Syrian people must be able to participate in free and fair elections under United Nations supervision, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), in which all Syrians, including those in the diaspora,

are eligible to participate. Elections, held to the highest international standards, take a long time to prepare. That is why I have already begun to think about how the United Nations could plan for that task, of course in dialogue with the Syrian parties.

Let me conclude with a simple request to the Council. I have greatly appreciated the excellent dialogue that I have had with members of the Council, and I will need their support in the difficult work ahead. I appeal to the Council to unite behind a revitalized effort by the United Nations with the parties so as to move the Geneva political process forward.

I believe that this moment is an opportunity for the Council to publicly support the process that it mandated in resolution 2254 (2015). The road ahead will be long and difficult but if the Council can unite, and remain united, behind the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process that the United Nations will seek to facilitate, I believe that we can begin to make a real difference to the people of Syria, the region and international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

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

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): We welcome the Secretary-General's announcement that the Syrian Negotiations Commission and the Syrian regime have reached agreement on the committee that will draft a credible, balanced and inclusive constitution. That constitution must reflect the aspirations of all Syrians, both inside and outside the country.

Lasting peace is not easily or quickly won. It requires commitment, meaningful action and a consistent effort over a sustained period of time. With that in mind, I therefore say to Special Envoy Pedersen that the United States would like to extend its thanks for his personal commitment and effort over the past 21 months in helping to form the Constitutional Committee.

I also want to thank our partners in the small group — Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom — as well as Turkey and Russia for helping us take that encouraging step. A special word of gratitude also goes to the leadership and members of the Syrian Negotiations Commission for their cooperation, even as their supporters faced brutal attacks.

Last Thursday, the small group on Syria reaffirmed its broad support for the Special Envoy's efforts to implement all the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015). We encourage the United Nations to convene the Committee, and we reiterate our belief that there can be no military solution to the conflict — may I repeat, no military solution to the conflict.

The formation of the Committee is a historic, tangible first step in the political process to resolve the Syrian crisis. But if we are honest, we know that there is hard work ahead for the parties to the conflict and civil society leaders, who will be tasked with drafting a new Syrian constitution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). It is essential that the Council vigorously support their efforts, as well as those of the Special Envoy to convene the Committee's first meeting on 30 October. When they gather, the members of the Committee must be able to work in safety, free from intimidation to alter the outcome of their work.

Furthermore, it is critical that all parties, including the opposition, the regime and civil society leaders, engage in good faith in the days ahead with the aim of ensuring that the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians are represented.

If there is one party that consistently fails to act in good faith, it is Iran. It is therefore ironic that the State responsible for much of the carnage in Syria and for most of the current conflicts in the Middle East sits before this very Council today presumably to lecture us on the path to peace in Syria. If Iran genuinely wished to contribute to the political process under resolution 2254 (2015), it would leave Syria and remove its militias and their affiliates without delay.

I also wish to be very clear on the following point. The Al-Assad regime and its allies must not use the launch of the Constitutional Committee as a pretext to stall the political process and pursue a military solution to the conflict. The violence in Idlib must cease immediately and unconditionally. That will protect the lives of innocent civilians and improve the prospects for a political solution on the ground.

At the outset of my remarks, I noted that lasting peace requires commitment and meaningful action. But it also requires that we tell the truth about what has happened, and what is still happening, in Syria. It is that aspect of peace with which, I regret to note, the regime does not appear comfortable.

Bombings continue to terrorize innocent women, men and children in Idlib. The regime's campaign has displaced more than half of the Syrian population and thousands of Syrian mothers and fathers have had to bury their own children — a fate that no parent should suffer.

The agreement to form the Constitutional Committee is clearly an encouraging step but there are too many levelled neighbourhoods and too many shattered lives for anyone here today to act as though the horrors visited upon the Syrian people can now be forgotten.

The Council cannot believe the version of events, preferred by some, that our work is nearly finished. The United States, for one, will continue to speak the truth about the atrocities committed by that regime, as well as what must be done to right the wrongs committed against the Syrian people.

I want to end my statement today by sharing a brief story. Last week, I had the privilege of meeting with Amina Khouliani, the co-founder of Families for Freedom and a woman of profound courage. I was deeply disturbed by what she shared with me: nearly 128,000 Syrians — 128,000 — face arbitrary detainment. That practice is unacceptable. The Al-Assad regime must release detainees and provide international monitors access to detention centres.

However, while I was distressed by Amina's account, I was even more inspired by her spirit. She is advocating faithfully, cheerfully and relentlessly for the dignity of all Syrians. As we seek to build on this first step towards peace in Syria, I hope that the Council will adopt the same spirit.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We welcome your participation, Mr. President, in this meeting and the fact that you are presiding over it.

At the outset, we thank the Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen, for his valuable briefing on the Syrian political process. I also take this opportunity to reaffirm to him the full support of the State of Kuwait for his efforts to revitalize the political process in Syria. We call on all the parties to provide support to and work with the Special Envoy in order to enable him to fully carry out the mandate entrusted to him.

We welcome the announcement by the Secretary-General of the agreement reached between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission

on the formation of the Constitutional Committee, which is scheduled to start its work in Geneva on 30 October under the supervision of the United Nations in order to facilitate a balanced Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee (see S/2019/775).

We express our appreciation for the efforts made by the guarantors of the Astana agreement, which contributed to reaching this very pivotal stage in the Syrian political process, as well as our support to the small group. We also commend the tireless efforts made by the Special Envoy, Mr. Pedersen, to reach this agreement. We endorse his call for the Security Council to be publicly united and to be supportive of his efforts and of the important steps taken in order to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. We hope that this step will represent the beginning of a long-awaited Syrian political process and will be important in enabling the fraternal Syrian people to realize their legitimate aspirations through a political settlement that is agreed by all constituents and that maintains the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

We stress that this political process should be accompanied by confidence-building measures. Perhaps the most prominent measure, as noted earlier by Mr. Pedersen in his briefing, is to ensure that real and tangible progress is achieved as concerns detainees and missing persons, and that specialized international organizations are given access to detention centres and prisons.

We are concerned about the situation in Idlib province, which since April has witnessed a military escalation, and about the possibility that developments in Idlib could be reflected in the political process. Military operations in the north-western part of Syria have led to the displacement of more than half a million people and the deaths of more than 1,000 civilians, not to mention the significant damage inflicted on health-care, educational and civilian facilities.

We reiterate our condemnation of the targeting of innocent civilians by any party, and we condemn all attacks carried out by terrorist groups included on the Council's lists. At the same time, we would recall once again that counter-terrorism operations in no way exempt any party to the conflict from its commitments under international humanitarian law, including compliance with the principles of distinction,

proportionality, precaution and the protection of civilians and civilian targets.

We reiterate that no lasting and comprehensive peace can be achieved in Syria in the absence of justice or of guarantees that there will be no impunity. The perpetrators of the crimes committed during the Syrian crisis since 2011 must be held accountable. We also fully support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria.

In conclusion, we stress once again that a solution to the conflict will be achieved only through a political settlement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), which sets out a road map for a multi-stage transitional political process, including the drafting of a constitution and the holding of free and fair elections according to the Constitution, under the supervision of the United Nations and with the participation of all Syrians, including those abroad.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for his specific and very detailed briefing on the progress made in the political process and on its upcoming stages.

France welcomes the announcement made by the Secretary-General as regards the Constitutional Committee, which is a first positive step in the framework of the political process provided for under resolution 2254 (2015). The agreement reached under the auspices of the Special Envoy represents an initial and decisive move forward that took about two years to take shape. We fully support the efforts made by Geir Pedersen aimed at ensuring that the Constitutional Committee can soon meet in Geneva and at facilitating its work.

It is vital that the Committee be in a position to make a useful contribution to restoring a political horizon in Syria. Determined action and a resolute commitment by all parties will be vital to ensuring that credible negotiations begin without delay and enabling the Constitutional Committee to discharge its mandate by providing Syria with a new constitution, in line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015). It is vital in particular to ensure that the security and integrity of the members of the future Constitutional Committee are fully respected. For this process to be a useful one, it is also necessary for the Syrian regime to at last engage in it in good faith. The work of the Committee must be a starting point for the elaboration of a comprehensive

and inclusive political solution to which all Syrians, including women, will contribute.

This political process, in order to be credible, requires that security be ensured throughout Syrian territory, as noted by the Special Envoy. In that regard, France expresses its deep concern as regards the situation in Idlib, where the regime and its allies are pursuing an indiscriminate military operation whose primary victims are civilians. More than 1,000 civilians have already died in bomb attacks, and the population, with winter coming, will suffer even more from the consequences of this offensive, which could also lead to a dispersal of the terrorist elements currently present in the north-west. This relentless military action has to stop; we call for an immediate freeze of positions in Idlib and throughout Syria, which would be a first step towards a national ceasefire, in line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015). Only a lasting cessation of hostilities will allow for the creation of conditions conducive to discussions within the Constitutional Committee and for the lifting of impediments to humanitarian access. The combat against Da'esh and Al-Qaida, which continue to pose a threat to our security, must be our priority but must not serve as a pretext for indiscriminate strikes.

It is urgent now to progress in parallel on all of the elements contained in resolution 2254 (2015) so as to devise an inclusive political solution and open up genuine prospects for peace and reconciliation. The establishment of the Constitutional Committee is but one stage of the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which represents a road map for the international community in proposing a lasting, inclusive political solution for the future of all Syrians, definitely eradicating terrorism and ensuring the safe and dignified return of refugees under the auspices of the United Nations.

All of these elements must be implemented, which means that confidence-building measures must also be taken in order to ensure a safe and neutral environment. This includes the freeing of all detained or abducted persons and exchanges of information on missing persons. This also includes efforts to create the conditions necessary for the holding of free and regular elections, under United Nations supervision, in which all Syrians would participate, including refugees and displaced persons, as well as those living outside the country. Only in this way will Syrians will be able to take control of their future.

France will continue working in this regard along with its partners. That is the message that France and its partners from the small group conveyed during the ministerial meeting held on 26 September. We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy to bring the small group and the Astana guarantors closer together within a single international forum in order to support the political process between the Syrian parties, under the auspices of the United Nations. France would recall that there can be no peace without justice and that the perpetrators of the atrocities committed in Syria each and every day must answer for their crimes.

Lastly, France reiterates its consistent position on reconstruction, which is the same as that of the European Union: we will not participate in reconstruction unless a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is implemented — not just initiated — on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). Our position on sanctions and normalization also remains unchanged, as is our determination to contribute to helping Syria emerge from the war. There can be no purely military solution, and that is why it is more urgent than ever to move forward in a swift, resolute manner towards an inclusive political solution.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing and wish to convey our gratitude to the Syrian Government, the opposition and the members of the small group on Syria and the Astana guarantors for having created a forum for dialogue among the parties involved, so as to achieve, for the first time in a long time, tangible progress in the political process.

We welcomed the announcement made by the Secretary-General a week ago on the composition, terms of reference and basic rules of procedure of the Constitutional Committee. We see that as a first major step towards resolving the conflict in Syria. We hope that it will translate into a resurgence of hope for all Syrians.

We reiterate the support of the Dominican Republic in this new phase for the efforts aimed at the advancement of the Committee and the eventual satisfactory conclusion of its work, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), facilitated by the United Nations. We invite the parties to show the highest possible levels of compromise, flexibility and mutual respect, but above all to keep the Syrian people at the centre of each and every decision they take. After

all — and we must always remember this — it is the Syrian people who will decide their own future.

We advocate for the participation of women in equal conditions to be respected, valued and strengthened at every stage of the constitutional process. The voice of women must resonate louder than ever in all aspects of the broad political process, but especially in the Constitutional Committee as a fundamental piece of the creation of a new national system based on the rule of law and respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens. We urge the Special Envoy to continue to advocate for at least 30 per cent female representation throughout the process. The road to political and national reconciliation is long and complex and must have at its core the strengthening and empowerment of all Syrian civil society, for whose participation clear terms must be fixed. Certainly, an agreement such as this is an important achievement, but it is essential, in our view, to strengthen the people's trust through urgent measures on the ground.

First, we believe it is crucial to ensure the safety and protection of the members of the Constitutional Committee and their families.

Secondly, given the humanitarian and, consequently, impartial nature of the treatment of detained and missing persons, we reiterate the need to see more progress in that area. We therefore invite the parties to work in good faith and to immediately release women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as to provide information to families about their missing loved ones.

Finally, we reiterate the need to protect the civilian population in the north-west of the country and avoid indiscriminate attacks against areas inhabited by civilians and against civilian infrastructure. We recall that even counter-terrorism measures must adhere to international humanitarian law and avoid the loss of civilian lives at all costs. All efforts must be aimed at alleviating the precarious conditions in which a large portion of the Syrian population lives and at restoring their dignity and ensuring their protection and development without any further delay.

I would like to take this opportunity, at the last open meeting in September, to congratulate Ambassador Nebenzia on the success of the Russian presidency. As expected, he has demonstrated great diplomatic capabilities, which should be emulated, and great

efficiency in the conduct of the Council's work. I thank him and his entire team.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation extends a warm welcome to you, Mr. Deputy Foreign Minister, and congratulates Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for his very informative briefing on the latest developments in the political process in Syria. My delegation welcomes his mediation efforts and good offices at having the Syrian parties firmly commit to dialogue and make the necessary compromises with a view to creating the conditions for a lasting return to peace and stability in Syria.

My country believes that it is imperative to make the Constitutional Committee operational and to place it at the heart of the political process to end the crisis, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore welcome the announcement by the Secretary-General, on 23 September, of the decision of the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission to form a credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee, of which the United Nations would be the facilitator. Accordingly, Côte d'Ivoire calls for strong support from the international community, and in particular from the Security Council, to ensure that the commitment by the Syrian parties is realized in the near future. In addition, my delegation encourages Mr. Pedersen to continue his consultations with stakeholders in order to ensure that the Constitutional Committee is inclusive, which is a prerequisite for its credibility and effectiveness. We also very much hope that the meeting scheduled for 30 October in Geneva, under the auspices of the United Nations, will enable the effective establishment of the Constitutional Committee in order to inject new momentum into the political process to resolve the crisis in Syria.

As vital as the Constitutional Committee is, it remains but a link in the chain of requirements that will determine the return of lasting peace and stability in Syria. It is essential that current efforts towards a political solution to the Syrian conflict benefit from a calm environment, achieved through an immediate and lasting cessation of hostilities, which will allow for better management of the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the unilateral truce decreed by the Russian Federation and Government forces in Idlib province on 31 August. We fervently hope that the parties to the conflict will take more confidence-building measures, including the

release of prisoners. In addition, Côte d'Ivoire urges the belligerents to respect the ceasefire in order to allow for, among other things, the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in distress. My country also calls on them to respect human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular by refraining from any attacks on health and education infrastructure.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire once again welcomes the commitment of Syrian actors to form a credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee, which is an encouraging step in the right direction. We reaffirm our full support for the actions and initiatives of the Special Envoy taken with a view to achieving a peaceful and lasting settlement of the Syrian crisis in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Equatorial Guinea welcomes the convening of this meeting and would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Nebenzia and his entire team on the success of the Russian presidency of the Security Council during the month of September. I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for the pertinent information he has provided us and for his admirable commitment to lasting peace in Syria.

Today's meeting should be considered historic following the long-awaited announcement of the establishment of the Constitutional Committee. After eight years of conflict and despite numerous obstacles and several rounds of difficult consultations and negotiations among all the key actors in the Syrian political process, the establishment of the Constitutional Committee is undoubtedly good news that restores hope to all the Syrian people. The Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the fact that a credible, impartial and inclusive Constitutional Committee has been set up, which should finally open up the way for an end to the Syrian crisis in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and in line with the statement of the small group on Syria. We must be aware that this positive step requires serious dedication and a firm commitment to achieving positive and tangible results. We very much look forward to the first meeting of the Committee, to be held in Geneva as soon as possible, so that the parties can begin to discuss the substance of the Committee's mandate as well as all other dimensions of the Syrian political process.

In this new scenario, brought about with the diplomatic support of the Astana guarantors, namely,

Russia, Turkey and Iran, we must be aware that the Committee's establishment and action must go hand in hand with tangible confidence-building measures that facilitate progress in the political process. We must also ensure the approval of the Committee's rules of procedure so as to guarantee that its members act independently and are not subject to external pressure.

At the same time, we agree that it is unacceptable to partition Syria into zones of influences, which would only heighten tensions, particularly in Idlib. The presence of five different armies in Syria is cause for concern to the Government of Equatorial Guinea, since, as the Special Envoy just underscored, it not only poses an obvious threat to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, but also heightens the risk of the conflict escalating dangerously and spilling over into the region and beyond.

I wish to reiterate my Government's full support to the Special Envoy in pursuing the successful conclusion of the process, which inevitably requires a concerted diplomatic solution to the Syrian and not undue use of force. There is no military solution to the war or alternative to a political solution. It is therefore imperative that we continue to make progress towards a political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

I should like to break with protocol for a moment. In Spanish we say that "gratitude is the sign of noble souls". I cannot conclude my statement without first expressing my gratitude to the interpreters and translators for their work, as today is International Translation Day. Without them, I believe that our work would be much more difficult.

Mr. Roscoe (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom joins others in welcoming the announcement by the Secretary-General last week that agreement had finally been reached on the Constitutional Committee. As Mr. Pedersen said, it will be convened in Geneva on 30 October. We are also grateful to him for setting out the modalities and complexion of the Constitutional Committee, which we also welcome. That progress is a true testament to Mr. Pedersen's hard work over the past nine months and, of course, that of his predecessor, Staffan de Mistura.

Last week, the United Kingdom hosted a ministerial meeting of the Syria small group, at which all members welcomed the agreement. But we also recognized that this is only the first step towards the inclusive political settlement that Syria so desperately needs and which

must ultimately include transitional arrangements and free and fair elections. As the Secretary-General himself stated,

"this can and must be the beginning of the political path out of the tragedy towards a solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians".

To succeed, it will require the serious engagement and commitment of all participants to succeed. We call on the regime, in particular, to demonstrate genuine commitment at the first meeting and beyond.

However, the problems in Syria were not caused by flaws in the existing Constitution, but by how that Constitution was implemented and the regime's repressive policies. This is a critical first step, but the deeper roots of this conflict still also need to be addressed. With that in mind, progress on the political process cannot be made in isolation. No one here is blind to this. We agree wholeheartedly with the Secretary-General that the Constitutional Committee's launch and work must be accompanied by concrete actions to build trust and confidence. It is therefore crucial that all elements of 2254 (2015) be taken forward in tandem. Mr. Pedersen has our support in advancing these efforts and we ask that all sides, and in particular the regime, engage fully with Mr. Pedersen's confidence-building measures, especially in terms of greater humanitarian access, the release of detainees and much-needed information on the missing.

It is also crucial that the Constitutional Committee represent the voices and views of the Syrian people, freely expressed. Mr. Pedersen has done tremendous work to secure balance, and particularly we welcome the strong participation of civil society and women, but it is also critical that Committee members be allowed to fulfil their duties free of fear and intimidation, for themselves or their family members, if this process is to be truly free, legitimate and credible.

Today's briefing is rightly focused on the political process, but it would be remiss of us, as Mr. Pedersen and others have said, not to recall the dire situation in Idlib, an issue that has quite rightly dominated the Security Council's work over the past few months. Over 1,000 civilians, including 500 women and children, have been killed. Over 676,000 people have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of May. Idlib is the Syrian conflict in microcosm. The Syrian regime has targeted civilians through indiscriminate

aerial bombardment, arbitrarily detaining and torturing political opponents and deliberately bombing civilians seeking shelter in schools and hospitals. We cannot allow impunity for these crimes or any of the crimes committed in the Syrian conflict, so it is a matter of utmost importance that the people of Idlib and throughout Syria be allowed to live free of fear.

In this respect, we welcome the most recent ceasefire in Idlib, which has largely held since 31 August. However, we note its fragility, particularly given the continued reports of regime shelling. To our great disappointment, Russia and China vetoed draft resolution S/2019/756 at the most recent humanitarian meeting (see S/PV.8623). It is now morally incumbent on them and on Damascus to ensure that the ceasefire in Idlib continues and that international humanitarian law is fully respected. Perhaps when the representative of Syria speaks shortly, he might tell this Chamber what they are doing to ensure that the ceasefire continues to hold and to protect civilians on the ground.

Since our Turkish colleague is present today, the United Kingdom would like to state again that we welcome Turkey's ongoing efforts to end the violence in Idlib and to work to protect the ceasefire.

The United Kingdom has so far given over \$3 billion in response to the crisis in Syria, which is our largest-ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. We will continue to do what we can to support those in need. With more than 400,000 Syrian lives lost and nearly 12 million people in continued dire need of humanitarian support, a political settlement cannot come soon enough. Therefore, the United Kingdom this morning joins others in welcoming Mr. Pedersen's briefing on the plans and prospects for the Constitutional Committee. We support his efforts and wish him every success in his continuing work. We call on all members of the Security Council gathered here, all those in Syria and all those across the region to support his work.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, we congratulate the Russian Federation on its successful presidency during the month of September and express our gratitude for the wonderful results achieved this month. We commend the Russian delegation for the great deal of work accomplished.

I wish to thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing. Since the beginning of his mandate, Special Envoy Pedersen has engaged with multiple stakeholders through his good

offices leading to positive results in the tasks at hand. China expresses its appreciation.

Lately, important progress has been made on the Syrian issue, with a breakthrough on the political track. On 23 September, Secretary-General Guterres announced that the Syrian parties had reached an agreement on the formation of the Constitutional Committee. On 26 September, the Secretary-General sent a letter to the President of the Council, transmitting the Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Committee (S/2019/775, annex). We also note that the Special Envoy said that the Constitutional Committee will meet on 30 October. Those achievements are of great significance to the political process in Syria. China welcomes those developments, appreciates the constructive participation of the Syrian parties in the preparation of the Constitutional Committee and commends the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations and the Astana guarantors, namely, Russia, Turkey and Iran.

During the high-level segment of the General Assembly, the Syrian issue was one of the constant focuses of world leaders and representatives. In his statement at the general debate, Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic stressed that the Constitutional Committee must maintain independence in its work and be free from foreign interference (see A/74/PV.11). Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be fully respected. All parties must pay attention to Syria's concerns and create favourable conditions for the political settlement of the Syrian issue.

First, they must build on the results achieved to continue moving the Syrian political process forward. A political settlement is the only way out for the Syrian issue. Parties to the issue should seize the current favourable opportunity to advance the work of the Constitutional Committee. Committee members are expected to set store by the interests of the Syrian people so as to reach a consensus at an early date. The Syrian Government is encouraged to strengthen communication and coordination with the United Nations. To that end, the international community, including the Security Council, should provide support and do more to help the Syrian parties narrow their differences and build consensus.

Secondly, security guarantees must be provided to ensure a sustainable political process. Rampant terrorism is a major latent security problem for the political process. If not properly addressed, it will adversely affect the political settlement of the Syrian issue and the future of the country. China is closely following the relevant trends with regard to the terrorist forces in Idlib. With respect to the issue of the settlement of the foreign terrorist fighters and their families in Syria, the international community should, under international law and on the basis of relevant Council resolutions, continue its collective efforts against terrorism.

Thirdly, an integrated approach must be taken in dealing with all aspects of the Syrian humanitarian issue. The international community should provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and support the post-war reconstruction of the country. The humanitarian issue must not be used as a bargaining chip to exert political pressure. It is necessary to address the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons objectively and impartially, while taking into account the legitimate concerns of Syria's neighbours, and actively encourage the return of Syrian refugees. Lifting the economic sanctions against Syria will be an important step to improve the overall humanitarian situation of the Syrian people.

China categorically rejects the groundless accusations made by the representative of the United Kingdom against China in his statement. China has clearly indicated that it makes its decisions on the merits of an issue. We proceed from interests of the Syrian people when deciding how to vote on draft resolutions. No country has a right to make irresponsible remarks in that regard.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): Let me begin by congratulating you and your team, Mr. President, for your remarkable and successful presidency during the month of September. My delegation would also like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing.

Indonesia welcomes the announcement by the Secretary-General on 23 September on the agreement of the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission for a credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee, one that will be facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva. We are pleased and delighted with that positive and encouraging

development in the political process in Syria. The launch and the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva next month, *inshallah*, will indeed serve as a door opener for a serious political path towards a sustainable and lasting solution to the current crisis in Syria, in accordance with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

Indonesia commends the hard work of Special Envoy Pedersen and his team in facilitating the process and engaging with various relevant parties. As we have stated many times, my delegation strongly supports and stands ready to assist the Special Envoy's mandates. My delegation would like to emphasize three points on ways forward.

First, we encourage the immediate launch of the Committee and the commencement of its first consultation as scheduled, under the United Nations in Geneva, so as to keep the positive momentum alive. To that end, the Security Council should continue to spare no effort in supporting the work of Special Envoy Pedersen. A strong and genuine commitment from all parties in ensuring and assisting the Committee to succeed is urgently required, a commitment that is based on respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Those principles must be respected and should not be taken for granted.

Secondly, moving forward, we need to ensure that we have all agreed to work in a cooperative manner in addressing future challenges. Indonesia appreciates all efforts from various parties in trying to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and, in that regard, invites all the relevant parties to work together. We will be able to find solutions and reach middle ground if we talk to each other instead of talking about each other. Again, dialogue is key.

Thirdly, my delegation believes that a political process and a ceasefire should move ahead in parallel and expeditiously. Upholding the ceasefire agreement is critical, not only to prevent further humanitarian catastrophe but also to support the political initiative. In that context, Indonesia supports a nationwide ceasefire in Syria and calls for parties to strengthen their efforts to implement it.

The Council's support for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated political process is needed today more than ever. We are entering a crucial phase, one for which we have been waiting for so long,

namely, the launch of the Constitutional Committee. I have heard much support for that, and the Council needs to work in harmony to guarantee that we see progress in that regard. The pressure is on. The road ahead is not going to be easy. But reaching the destination is indeed possible.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank the Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen, for his comprehensive and insightful briefing. I would like to assure him once again that he has our full support. We wish him every success in his work.

Let me start by welcoming the announcement made by the Secretary-General on 23 September on the agreement on the formation of the Constitutional Committee. Poland has underlined on many occasions that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process. We therefore look forward to the inaugural meeting of the Committee at the earliest possible opportunity. That is a definite step forward and one that is certainly full of potential.

Unfortunately, the escalation of the conflict in Idlib persists. It is therefore of paramount importance to ensure positive developments on the ground, in particular a cessation of hostilities, in parallel with the work of the Constitutional Committee.

All parties to the conflict need to engage in confidence-building measures. In that context, let me stress again the importance of detainees, including abductees and missing persons in Syria. Eight years into the war have brought unspeakable suffering to the once peaceful country. Thousands of people remain in arbitrary detention, where many are subject to various forms of ill-treatment, including torture and rape. At the same time, thousands remain missing, with their relatives deprived of any information on their fate. We call for their release, particularly for the release of children, women and the elderly. Progress in that area would help to raise the level of confidence between the parties and greatly contribute to the efforts aimed at reaching a lasting peace in Syria. That is one of the most important, if not the most important, confidence-building measure between parties to the conflict.

We also underscore the need to ensure humanitarian access and full respect for international humanitarian

law, as reiterated by the Council in presidential statement S/PRST/2019/8, adopted in August on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Only by ensuring those measures will we be able to generate the positive atmosphere necessary for the success of negotiations between the Syrian parties.

In conclusion, I want to recall Poland's position, as well as the stand of the European Union, on reconstruction. We will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only once a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process, is firmly under way.

We fully support the safe return of Syrian refugees who fled their homes. We believe that a durable solution should ensure the security of the sustainable, dignified and voluntary return of Syrians to their country of origin, in accordance with international law and the principle of non-refoulement.

Since it is the last meeting of the Security Council under your presidency, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you and the entire team of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation for your professionalism and the successful way in which the work of the Security Council was conducted during the month of September.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): We want to thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over our meeting today, as well as the Russian Federation, Mr. Vassily Nebenzia and his team for the excellent manner in which they managed the Council programme for this month. Allow me to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing to the Council today.

The recent political developments in Syria, as announced by the Secretary-General on 23 September (see S/2019/775), are warmly welcomed by my delegation. South Africa congratulates Mr. Pedersen, the Syrian Government, the Syrian opposition and all other stakeholders on the agreement on the establishment of a credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee. We in the Council all know that the journey to this point has not been easy but the perseverance and determined efforts of all parties have borne the fruit of compromise, unity and a commitment to the people of Syria for sustained peace. We thank all Governments and parties that made that possible.

My delegation looks forward to the convening of the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee on 30 October. We hope that the commitment for a 30 per cent representation of women in the larger 150-member body and the smaller 45-member body will be upheld. As has been said before by South Africa and many other delegations, the active participation of women at all levels of the peace negotiations is essential to a successful and inclusive political process in Syria.

With the establishment of the Constitutional Committee, it is also necessary to ensure the safety and security of all its members. The members of the Committee must be assured that they will be able to do their duty to the people of Syria without undue pressure or influence from any sector.

While we commend the agreement regarding the Constitutional Committee, we cannot forget the broader political process. The establishment of the Constitutional Committee and the finalization of its Core Rules of Procedure (see S/2019/775, annex) is but one step towards the full implementation of the political process, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

The work of the Constitutional Committee must be accompanied by the active engagement of all parties in the continuing political process facilitated by the Special Envoy. In that regard and in calling for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), my delegation calls for the release of civilians from detention, particularly women, children, the sick and the elderly. That will serve as a gesture of good faith and confidence-building among the parties and bolster the goodwill created by the establishment of the Constitutional Committee.

The humanitarian situation in parts of Syria remains of concern. Progress in improving the humanitarian situation will come about only if progress is made in the political process, which can be resolved only through continued negotiations and dialogue among the parties. At this important juncture in Syria's history, we call on all parties to recommit to ensuring the peace, stability and prosperity of all Syria and its people.

In conclusion, let me again congratulate the parties on this important step towards long-term peace and security in Syria. However, we all know that this is not the end of the journey. Yet the journey has begun, and the Council should accompany the Syrian people as they negotiate their way to a peaceful, stable, inclusive and prosperous Syria.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I can be brief, as much has already been said. I wish to start by thanking the presidency of the Russian Federation for this month of work. Your country, Mr. President, did a very good job and you are very good diplomats. I will return to Russia a little later.

I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his work and his tireless efforts. His insistence has paid off. I thank him very much for his briefing. I just want to repeat one sentence. He said that the Constitutional Committee is a promise to the Syrian people for a new social contract and to achieve that, we must overcome the deep divisions in the population and build trust and confidence. I hope the work that is now starting will achieve this.

As others have said, this is a first step, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so we have to see that the Constitution actually works. It is very important that all parties be fully committed to this process, including, in particular, the Syrian regime. What is very important is that Committee members be able to exercise their mandate free from threats and intimidation, including concerning their families.

I would agree with what Jerry just said to the effect that the Council should accompany this process. The representative of Kuwait has proposed that we prepare a statement; Germany would support a statement by the Council endorsing the work of the Committee and giving more weight to what has been achieved. Of course, this is not the only thing we need. We hope that the establishment of the Committee will now allow the door to be opened to a broader political process — and here I can only echo what others, including Jerry and the representative of Poland, have said — that in this political process, a political solution can be achieved in this conflict only if Syrian women are fully involved in and participate in all the processes, which have to result at some stage in free, fair and credible elections.

Again, I would like to echo what many have said before. As Geir said, it is now time for action. I think that the release from prison of women, children, handicapped persons and the elderly would send a very good signal and contribute to this new social contract. I would also underline that accountability for all the crimes that have been committed in the country remains important; we cannot allow impunity to continue or to gain ground.

Let me end briefly by echoing what my British colleague said earlier: that we, including Kuwait, Belgium and Germany, tried very hard to get the Idlib draft resolution (S/2019/756) adopted here (see S/PV.8623). It was a very simple draft that asked that all counter-terrorism measures respect international humanitarian law; I must say that it was very sad that China and Russia vetoed it, given that 12 countries stood firmly behind it and wanted to send this humanitarian message to the people of Idlib.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank the Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen, for his briefing and for his tireless efforts.

The Council is meeting today, after eight years of violence, with a glimmer of hope. A fragile glimmer of hope, to be sure, but hope nonetheless. We cannot overestimate the importance of the agreement between the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission to put together a Constitutional Committee facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva.

First, this is the first time in the course of the Syrian conflict that the United Nations has been able to facilitate a direct agreement between the parties. And, secondly, this is the first time in a very long time that the Syrian people have received good news. We have reiterated on many occasions that there can be no military solution to the crisis in Syria; the solution is a political one. The Constitutional Committee has the potential to be a key that can open doors to other aspects of the political process, as provided for by resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

We recognize the important role that the Special Envoy played in its establishment, and we support his future role in ensuring the functioning of the Committee. We also appreciate the role played by the States members of the Council and others, in particular the Astana process guarantor countries, for their diplomatic commitment in support of the Special Envoy.

Today we are therefore optimistic, but cautiously so. Belgium sees the Committee is a means to an end. The fact that the parties can now undertake structured discussions on the future of their country represents significant progress in and of itself. Nonetheless, the real progress will lie in the outcome of such talks. A great deal of time has been lost, and it is now important that the Committee get to work quickly and that tangible

progress be made as a first step towards a political solution that is in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

This opportunity to work together towards a Syria that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians carries with it obligations for all parties. All parties must continue their engagement in good faith, and Committee representatives will have to be encouraged to speak freely and to conduct their work in a favourable environment that is free of obstacles or intimidation. The Syrian Government has a special obligation to create a safe, stable and calm environment in the country.

The violence in Idlib has to stop. It is difficult to conceive of talks going on in Geneva even as the violence continues. We reiterate our appeal for a nationwide cessation of hostilities nationwide.

Lastly, let us not forget the thousands of Syrians who continue to be arbitrarily arrested and detained. We encourage the Special Envoy to redouble his efforts on this important issue, and we fully support his appeal to the parties to exchange prisoners on a large scale. Most particularly, we call on Damascus to take into account the crucial importance of this issue as a sign of good faith towards the people of the country. Thousands of Syrians continue to wait for news of their loved ones who were arbitrarily detained or who have disappeared.

I cannot conclude without offering my congratulations to the Russian delegation on its presidency of the Council during the month of September.

Mr. Ugarelli (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to welcome the presence of Sergey Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and to echo other delegations in congratulating the presidency on the successful manner in which it has helmed the important work and agenda of the Security Council. We are also grateful for the convening of this briefing and thank Mr. Pedersen for his comprehensive presentation. We acknowledge his intensive and always careful work and reaffirm our commitment to continuing to contribute in a positive fashion to the discharge of his mandate.

We wish to commend the developments described by the Special Envoy on the upcoming implementation of a Constitutional Committee that the Syrian people and the international community will be able to acknowledge as legitimate, balanced and inclusive, as

set out in the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

We echo those who underscored the role played in this regard by the Astana guarantors as well as the constructive participation of the Syrian Government and opposition groups. We would highlight the fact that the elaboration of a new Constitution will be necessary if we are to lay fresh political and institutional foundations in Syria. However, we must also be careful, as the reality today points to the fact much remains to be done to put an end to the suffering of millions of Syrians.

We therefore wish to emphasize the importance that the Committee be effective and diligent in fulfilling its mandate and that it produce tangible results under deadlines that are in keeping with the sense of urgency inherent in the seriousness of the humanitarian situation and the latent threat of terrorism in Syria. That implies that the parties show genuine signs of disinterestedness, be flexible in their respective positions and come to the table with a renewed willingness to engage in a different yet constructive dialogue. Furthermore, we note the central role of the Special Envoy as facilitator of the process and promoter of consensus to that end. In that connection, we underscore that the international community should provide him with broad support.

We commend the efforts to make the Committee representative and inclusive of all segments of Syrian society. We especially emphasize that the final percentage of women members of the Committee is close to the 30 per cent quota initially envisaged. We encourage the meetings of the Committee and the various discussions held there to take place in a context of transparency so as to enable the international community, and the Council in particular, to monitor and support the implementation of any agreements and to inspire greater confidence among all the parties to the peace process.

As we look towards the Committee's first meeting, we urge the parties to continue to work on measures to promote a better climate of understanding, including the release of detainees, the identification of missing persons and the transfer of mortal remains. We welcome the work being done in that respect under the Astana framework, but note the need for more substantial progress. In addition, we underline the importance of facilitating the voluntary, safe and dignified return of millions of internally displaced persons and refugees,

under internationally recognized parameters, as an essential element of achieving reconciliation in Syria and building sustainable peace in that country.

I conclude by reaffirming Peru's full commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Syria. Any détente or other arrangements or the presence of foreign forces should always be temporary and not lead to a de facto partition of the country.

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

We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Pedersen, for his briefing and all the speakers for their views and assessments.

The Security Council has repeatedly considered the matter of a political settlement in Syria, but today's meeting is special. For the first time, we meet at a time when we can say with satisfaction that real conditions have been created and are in place to move forward on the path to a lasting and just settlement of the Syrian crisis in the interest of all Syrians without exception. As Special Envoy Pedersen just confirmed to us, the work on the formation of the Constitutional Committee has been fully completed. That is undoubtedly a major accomplishment for the entire international community.

Let me remind members that the idea of establishing the Constitutional Committee was adopted by the participants in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi in 2018, who represented all segments of Syrian society. We agree with Mr. Pedersen that the establishment of the Committee is not an end, but the beginning of a long road. And many have stated that today. Syrians have to agree for themselves on the parameters of the future development of their country. I would also like to recall the key principle of their independent work, as enshrined in resolution 2254 (2015), which is to promote a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

We welcome the intention to hold the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva in late October. Russia, together with Iran and Turkey, made a decisive contribution to determining its composition and agreeing on its rules of procedure. The guarantor countries worked very closely with the Syrian parties, namely, the Government and the opposition, and carefully coordinated their efforts with Secretary-General Guterres and his Special Envoy. Russia

will continue to support the successful launch and sustainable work of the Constitutional Committee in every way possible. The same assurances have also been repeatedly given by the representatives of Turkey and Iran. At the same time, all the activities of the Astana guarantors will be based on the strict observance of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Presidents of the three countries stated that firmly at the fifth tripartite summit in Ankara on 16 September. The practice of holding high-level international meetings on Syria in the Astana format will continue. The next such meeting is scheduled to be held in the capital of Kazakhstan in the near future.

We believe that all of us should take great care in preserving the inter-Syrian dialogue to begin in Geneva at the end of October. We have no doubt that the Syrians themselves, who represent one of the oldest and most unique countries in the Middle East, with a centuries-old tradition of peaceful coexistence among ethnic and religious groups, will be able to find mutually acceptable solutions themselves. They also have sufficient expertise to achieve that end. We are convinced that attempts to interfere in the inter-Syrian dialogue and impose prescriptions on Syrians that are incompatible with their cultural, religious and national traditions are unacceptable. It is also unacceptable to set artificial time limits or to demand concessions from only one of the parties. That is the position of the Astana format, which stands ready to continue providing constructive assistance to the Syrians in coordination with the United Nations. We invite all those genuinely interested in returning peace to Syria to join our efforts in a constructive way.

It has been said that it is strange that the representative of Iran should be at the table with us. It seems strange to me that those words were heard in this Chamber at all. As a member of the Astana troika, Iran has done much to defeat terrorism in Syria, but I have difficulty remembering what some Western members of the small group have done to launch the political process and create the conditions for it. There is a lot of talk and lecturing, but little is actually done. I hope that that will change.

We may be talking about Syria today, but we are well aware that if we can move towards a sustainable and lasting political settlement in that country — based, I repeat, on a commitment to its sovereignty and territorial integrity — it will certainly have a much-

needed impact on the entire region. Peace, security and stability in the Middle East will benefit. The time has come to encourage, not discourage, Syria's return to the Arab family.

The Syrian people, including with the support of Russia, have won a decisive victory over terrorism. The main forces of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Jabhat Al-Nusra, or whatever it may be called nowadays, and other terrorist groups recognized as such by the Security Council have been eliminated. But the eradication of terrorists, including in such major hotspots as Idlib, must continue with the utmost care for the lives and security of civilians.

We are disappointed that consensus could not be reached on most issues during the recent discussion of the situation in Idlib. But the blame in that regard is on those who, under humanitarian pretexts, deliberately submitted a draft resolution (S/2019/756) that was politicised and had no chance of being adopted. Of course, we cannot but be concerned about the situation in north-eastern Syria, where ISIL sleeper cells are becoming more active. We believe that achieving stability and security in those areas is ultimately possible only if they are returned to the control of the legitimate Government. It is also unacceptable to consolidate the dividing lines that, unfortunately, exist in Syria today, in particular under the pretext of a so-called nationwide ceasefire. Declaring a truce with terrorists is not possible by definition, and the problems within Syria ought to be resolved through a broad, inclusive dialogue.

Today's turnaround in the political settlement creates the conditions for taking concrete steps to provide comprehensive humanitarian assistance in the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria. That will help to strengthen the country's economy and create conditions conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes. That is precisely what our Western partners have been talking about over the past year, literally pleading for help in launching the Constitutional Committee as a key precondition for unfreezing funding for necessary post-war recovery. I believe it is immoral to condition conciliatory gestures towards Damascus with constantly changing political demands.

Finally, I support the coordinated and coherent efforts of the international community, provided that they are meant to advance a genuine peace process

rather than serving narrow geostrategic aims. I am convinced that, if we act together — all together — we will be able to do more for Syria and Syrians than we would if we acted on our own.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The representative of China has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): In his statement, the representative of Germany once again referred to China's position with respect to the voting on the draft resolutions concerning the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.8623). We have clearly asserted that we do not accept such accusations. Like others, China pays close attention to the humanitarian situation in Syria, which is precisely why China, together with Russia, submitted an alternative draft resolution (S/2019/757) that comprehensively addresses the humanitarian and counter-terrorism situation in the country, reflecting the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. Regrettably, the draft was not adopted.

As I said earlier, if we wish to improve the overall humanitarian situation for the Syrian people, one important step would be lifting the economic sanctions imposed on Syria.

Lastly, I emphasize once again that China supports the Syrian Government in its reasonable demands, as well as the good offices of the United Nations and the Special Envoy. We also support the ongoing efforts to advance the political process in Syria through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process and resolution 2254 (2015). China stands ready to play a constructive role in that regard.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Önal (Turkey): I would like to begin by congratulating Russia upon the successful completion of its presidency. I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's Council briefing, with our participation.

Another word of appreciation goes to Ambassador Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. As perhaps one of the closest witnesses to his dedication and professionalism, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Pedersen and his team on their efforts in the finalization of the Constitutional Committee and its rules of procedure.

The establishment of the Committee is an important first step. It could not have been possible without the constructive engagement of the Syrian parties within the Astana context, in coordination with the United Nations. In this respect, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Russian Federation and Iran for their contributions to bringing about this result. As we keep emphasizing, it takes an alignment of positions among all major stakeholders to advance the political process and bring it to a final conclusion.

The international community, first and foremost the Security Council, should continuously support and encourage the Committee to achieve an end result that should eventually pave the way for free and fair elections under United Nations supervision, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and in line with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The political process and the upcoming round of negotiations in Geneva can hardly yield a positive outcome unless a conducive environment is ensured on the ground. Idlib is a case in point. We are pursuing our efforts within the Astana format for the full implementation of the Sochi memorandum. As such, the preservation of the status quo in the province remains crucial. We recognize the presence of radical elements, as well as the necessity to address this threat.

However, we do not agree that the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure is the right way to achieve this objective. There can be no military solution to the crisis. We subscribe to the principle that the political process should be led and owned by the Syrians themselves. The success of this process will depend to a large extent on the ability of the international community and the United Nations to create a certain level of mutual confidence among Syrians. Special Envoy Pedersen will enjoy Turkey's continued support in this regard.

On our part, Turkey will continue our efforts within the Astana format to contribute to putting in place confidence-building measures in support of the United Nations endeavours. We consider the projects of the Astana format working group on the simultaneous release of abductees and detainees to be modest but promising practices. We will continue to support the working group's activities.

As one of the countries most affected by the conflict in Syria, Turkey is determined to tackle the threats emanating from the conflict. Terrorist elements — be it

in Idlib or in the north-east; be they Da'esh or the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat-People's Protection Units, should have no place in Syria. The presence of such terrorist organizations, let alone their empowerment, constitutes a direct threat not only to our national security but also to Syria's territorial integrity and political unity.

Turkey has always been in the forefront of efforts to alleviate the plight of Syrian refugees. While hosting 3.6 million Syrians in our country, we spare no effort in facilitating humanitarian assistance to those living in difficult conditions inside Syria as well. On the other hand, we believe that the time has come to think seriously and start to act on creating conditions for the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. That is an exercise that we have started first with neighbouring countries and in coordination with regional and international stakeholders.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming Turkey's commitment to remaining engaged in efforts to find a sustainable political solution in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this meeting. I also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Pedersen, for his input and his tireless efforts.

The agreement on the formation of the Constitutional Committee is a positive step towards ending the Syrian crisis through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process to reach a political solution that my Government has called and striven for from the inception. We welcome the formation of the Committee, which is the result of continued close consultations of the guarantors of the Astana format and a clear sign of its effectiveness.

Along with the other guarantors of the Astana format — the Russian Federation and Turkey — we are resolute in our determination to actively participate in helping the Syrian Government to launch the Committee and to support its work, as declared in the ministerial meeting of the guarantors in New York on 24 September. In that context, we fully support the principle stipulated in the Committee's Core Rules of Procedure that the Constitutional Committee

“shall work expeditiously and continuously ... without foreign interference, including externally imposed timelines.” (*S/2019/775, annex, para. 21*)

Therefore, while the Committee should be extended every support to do its work, everyone must avoid any and all forms of external pressure or setting of artificial deadlines. That is what the Committee expects and what must be observed by everyone. Any possible assistance to the Committee, even by the United Nations, must be extended only on the request of the Committee itself in accordance with its Core Rules of Procedure and in full respect for the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The recent Astana format summit reaffirmed those principles and rejected any and all attempts to create new realities on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism, including illegitimate self-rule initiatives. The guarantors of the Astana format also expressed their determination to stand against separatist agendas. Accordingly, all foreign forces whose presence is not authorized by the Syrian Government must leave the country. The living example in that regard is the occupation of certain parts of Syria by forces of the United States, which continue to support and shield terrorist groups under the mask of combating terrorism.

Obviously, Israel's acts of aggression against Syria are in gross violation of those principles and further complicate the situation. The international community must compel Israel to stop its aggression and violations. In the face of those acts of aggression, the Syrian Government has a sovereign right to decide how and when to exercise its inherent right to individual or collective self-defence. In that context, Iran also stresses that the occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan by Israel is illegal, and the recognition by the United States of its annexation by Israel is null and void. While condemning such unlawful, irresponsible acts, we stress that the Golan is, and will remain, part and parcel of the Syrian territory.

While the Constitutional Committee should fulfil its mandate expeditiously, there should be no linkage between its work and other such important measures as fighting terrorism, the restoration of control of the Syrian Government over its entire territory, the return of all refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the reconstruction of Syria. A large number of Syrians are trapped in terrorist-held areas. Ensuring their security against terrorists is the main

responsibility of the Syrian Government. At the same time, while fighting terrorists must continue unabated, every effort should also be made to protect the lives of civilians. Likewise, the international community should contribute to and facilitate the speedy, safe and voluntary return of all refugees and IDPs. No refugee or IDP should be forced either to return or not to return. More important, all refugees and IDPs shall return to their place of origin. Politicization or impeding the return of refugees and IDPs is unacceptable. Moreover, supporting the reconstruction of Syria is essential. That should be neither politicized nor linked to any other issue.

To end the Syrian crisis, we will continue our cooperation with the Syrian Government. Through hosting the next summit of the Astana Format, Iran will endeavour to fulfil that aim.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Russian presidency of the Security Council for this month, which has been very busy with important issues. I would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his informative and invaluable briefing.

My country's delegation would like to congratulate the fraternal Syrian people for the achievement represented in their agreement to establish the Syrian Constitutional Committee, which we hope will be instrumental in ending the suffering of the Syrian people and reaching a Syrian-led political settlement under the auspices of the United Nations for the years-long Syrian crisis, which has only grown deeper. We appreciate the tireless efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres and the key role played by Special Envoy Pedersen, who has been working in collaboration with the relevant parties to reach that important agreement. We also express our appreciation for the positive spirit that was shown by the Syrian parties in concluding that achievement. Perhaps that progress now calls on all of us to rapidly build upon it by taking tangible steps, as follows.

First, the work of the Constitutional Committee should start as soon as possible and focus on substantive issues, while avoiding any complexities or procedural disputes that would only prolong the suffering of the fraternal Syrian people.

Secondly, we have to work in parallel and without delay on the remaining issues of the political settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), and not to use the Constitutional Committee as an alternative to other necessary procedures.

Thirdly, serious and collective measures should be taken to fight terrorism and illegitimate armed groups throughout Syrian territory, and not to blindly follow the attempted change of names that those terrorist groups have used to conceal their identity. At the same time, measures should be taken against the parties that continue to finance those terrorist groups and provide them with weapons, not to mention the related political cover, which is seen by all and ignored by some.

It is perhaps our right, or it is our duty, to legitimately wonder about who contributed to the arrival of thousands of foreign fighters in Syria, who armed and funded them, who provided them with safe havens in egregious violation of international law and the resolutions of this Council, as well as the sovereignty of Syria and the rights, security and life of its fraternal people. I would like mention that there has been a spillover of this danger outside of Syria, as thousands of terrorists are now in Libya.

In the same vein, Egypt calls upon the Security Council and its Counter-Terrorism Committee to shoulder their responsibilities and immediately stop the flow of terrorists and foreign fighters from Syria to Libya and other areas in Africa. In recent months, thousands of them were transferred supported, financed and protected by certain parties that provide these terrorist elements with safe corridors to move to other regions so as to continue their subversive acts and their destructive schemes in the Middle East, in flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. That also constitutes a very serious threat to international peace and security.

Fourthly and lastly, the efforts of certain parties to undertake demographic engineering so as to change the demographic composition of northern Syria should cease, since they seek only to expand their regional influence. We must emphasize the importance of accurate implementation of international standards on the voluntary and safe return of refugees to their homes and of not transferring them to other areas in order to alter the original Syrian demography in certain areas of the country.

My country's delegation would also like to draw the Council's attention to the importance of the elements contained in the joint communiqué issued on 26 September by the Foreign Ministers of the small group on Syria, reflecting a balanced and objective vision of the next steps to bring about a political settlement of the crisis and put an end to the humanitarian tragedy.

In conclusion, Egypt reiterates its determination to tirelessly support all efforts to achieve a balanced and sustainable political settlement that ensures the restoration of security and stability to sisterly Syria, while fully maintaining its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity as well as the safety of its people.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and for the efforts made during the Russian Federation's presidency of the Security Council to deliver on the Security Council's mandate on the maintenance of international peace and security. I would also like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his comprehensive briefing. In that regard, I express my appreciation for his ongoing tireless efforts to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis, which culminated recently in the announcement of the formation of the Constitutional Committee.

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has stressed that there is no military solution to the crisis. We have worked with the international community to find a peaceful solution that would spare Syria and its people destruction and displacement, put an end to the humanitarian repercussions and mitigate the suffering of the fraternal Syrian people. Jordan will continue to support all efforts to achieve a political solution of the Syrian crisis, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), by engaging positively with the international community both through our membership of the small group and as an observer to the Astana meetings.

My country emphasizes its support for the efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria to reach a political settlement based on resolution 2254 (2015). We also welcome the announcement by the United Nations of the agreement reached by all parties regarding the formation of the Constitutional Committee, which will launch the political process (see S/2019/775, annex).

This is a positive and long-awaited step to which all relevant parties contributed and merits success. That requires cooperative efforts so as to build on the agreement rapidly and effectively in order to reach a comprehensive solution to the crisis that is acceptable to Syrians and that will restore security, stability and unity to Syria and free the country of terrorist gangs, while creating a climate conducive to the voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees. All the aforementioned also requires greater efforts ensure the necessary funding so as to restore stability throughout the Syrian territory.

My country hosts 1.3 million Syrian brothers and sisters. Despite the fact that the capacity of the Kingdom has been exceeded, we spare no effort in responding to the needs of the refugees and assisting them, notwithstanding the resulting enormous pressure on our national economy. In that regard, we reiterate that the refugee crisis is an international responsibility and therefore requires a collective solution. International aid to date has not been commensurate with all the needs of the refugees and host communities, for whom we need a more coordinated effort. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan encourages the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homes. However, we stress the need for all parties to coordinate their efforts to that end by creating a climate conducive to the voluntary, dignified and safe return of our Syrian brothers and sisters.

I am fully confident that the Security Council appreciates the serious task and daunting responsibility for our brothers in Syria, who hope that the Council will restore stability, peace and normalcy. That requires the international community to spare no efforts to serve the interests of the fraternal Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first to congratulate you, Mr. President, on managing wisely the work of the Security Council this month.

We meet today amid critical challenges in the Middle East. However, the announcement early last week is a glimmer of hope regarding the situation in Syria (see S/2019/775). My country's Government welcomes the announcement of the agreement on forming the Constitutional Committee and the imminent onset of its work to draft a constitution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). That is a decisive step towards

achieving a long-awaited political solution that can put an end to the suffering of the brotherly people of Syria and ensure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees.

The Syrian Negotiation Commission, as testified by all parties, has cooperated with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, whose efforts we support. In line with current requirements, the Commission will convene a meeting of candidates and advisors to the Constitutional Committee in Riyadh on 7 October so as to prepare the constitutional documents. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will ensure a successful outcome of this meeting and urge the Commission to seriously and objectively cooperate in the upcoming phase. The Commission is serious in its work to let the Committee reach a successful conclusion.

My country's Government calls on the Syrian authorities to use this opportunity to engage seriously and sincerely in the Constitutional Committee's first meeting, to take place at the end of October, and not to obstruct it. The Syrian authorities must therefore acknowledge that this first step towards a political solution requires a serious commitment to the political process and tangible measures. The voice of reason must prevail in order to ensure an end to the eight-year crisis in Syria, which has been exploited by the enemies of the people of Syria and the Arab world to implement a foreign agenda aimed at plunging the region into devastation as part of destructive sectarian politics based on expansionism within the region, while keeping it ablaze in the interest of that agenda.

We have to realize that the terrorist sectarian militias supported by Iran that have infiltrated Syria have played a major role in Syria's destruction. Any solution to the Syrian crisis will therefore require that these militias leave Syrian territory.

Iran must also realize that Syria is an Arab State and that its natural place is among its brother Arabs. Iran's blatant interference in Syria clearly shows that this terrorist regime has transformed it from a normal State respecting international norms and laws as well as good-neighbourly behaviour into a rogue State that sows chaos, heedless of the suffering it causes to the peoples of the region.

My country rejects and condemns the killing and displacement of civilians as well as the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and we call for accountability for those who have committed such inhuman crimes. The

crimes being committed in Idlib must stop immediately, without preconditions. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports the Syrian people by all means possible to ensure that Syria gets back on the right track while saving its people from further destruction and suffering. The safe return of refugees must be guaranteed as provided for by international law. We call on the international community to stand united in supporting the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy in order to arrive at the desired political solution, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015), with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like, Mr. President, to express once again on behalf of my country, the Syrian Arab Republic, our pride in the Russian presidency of the Security Council this month. We believe that the coincidence of the announcement of the formation of the Constitutional Committee with your presidency of the Council once again asserts your country's key role in establishing international peace and security and upholding the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, especially the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs.

The Syrian Government, in close coordination with its friends in Russia and Iran, and in collaboration with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen, was able to achieve the formation of the Constitutional Committee, as announced by the Secretary-General, and to agree on its terms of reference and rules of procedure. The Committee is Syrian-led and -owned and free of any foreign interference, as reiterated by Mr. Pedersen at the beginning of this meeting. This success represented by the establishment of the Constitutional Committee is a Syrian national success par excellence, overcoming all the impediments placed by Governments hostile to Syria so as to prolong the crisis and obstruct a political solution.

Syria's determination to establish a Constitutional Committee, with close follow-up by the President of the Republic, contributed to this important national achievement for the Syrian people. Indeed, all of us are familiar with the famous saying, "Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan". Given the fact that the Constitution is the supreme legislation

reflecting the aspirations of any given people and that it determines their national, political, economic, cultural and social visions and choices, national ownership of the Constitution is its cornerstone and foundation. The Syrians alone have the exclusive right to discuss their national Constitution and to adopt it of their own free will, without any foreign interference, preconditions or extortion by parties or Governments that wish to see the country's destabilization and the destruction and pillaging of its assets, violating its sovereignty and prejudicing its national, independent determination by engaging in terrorism in all its political, military and economic forms.

Syria is as ancient as history itself. The tomb of our joint ancestor, Abel, is in the suburbs of Damascus, and Ugarit, Syria, provided humankind with the first alphabet, in 1700 B.C.E. The Syrian legislator Emilius Babinos, who was born in Homs in 142 B.C.E. and whose statue still stands at the Palace of Justice in Rome, was one of the five Syrian legislators whose national laws constitute 80 per cent of the Justinian law code. The engineer Apollodorus, born in Damascus in the year 60 A.D., was the greatest architect in the history of humankind and designed the great bridge over the Danube. I say this so that everyone can know that we are not novices when it comes to politics, history, law or economics.

My country's Government continued to participate in the Astana meetings as a framework that has yielded tangible results on the ground. We have positively dealt with the outcomes of the national dialogue conference in Sochi, as represented by the agreement on the establishment of the Constitutional Committee. That has crystallized into the agreement with the Special Envoy on the terms of reference and rules of procedure of the Constitutional Committee. We have agreed on its regulatory principles, foremost of which is the principle of a full and strong commitment to the sovereignty and independence and to the unity of the people and land of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the Syrian-owned and -led nature of the political process. No preconditions or prejudged conclusions will be dictated regarding the Committee's work and recommendations.

The Committee is the master of its own modus operandi and decisions, and no country or party, especially the one known as the small group, may intervene in its work, either directly or indirectly. We also agreed that no ultimatum or timetable can be imposed on the Committee and that every single

step should be studied and clear, as the Constitution will determine Syria's future for coming generations. Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, is fully aware of all these facts.

We in Syria are keen on seeing progress in the political process based on sound foundations that meet the aspirations of the Syrian people. The role of the Special Envoy for Syria is to facilitate the work of the Committee and ensure compromise between the parties thereto through his good offices, if necessary, as he himself noted in his briefing.

On that basis, we reiterate that we stand ready to actively work with friendly countries and the Special Envoy to launch the Committee. We look forward to the visit to be made by the Special Envoy to Damascus in a few days to coordinate with the Syrian State for the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee and on the steps necessary for the Committee to produce serious outcomes that respond to the aspirations of the Syrian people.

At the time when my country's Government stands ready to engage positively in the work of the Constitutional Committee, we are very realistic, responsible and cognizant of the fact that the political process is not a walk in the park. The Council might recall that we and other Members States, in this very Chamber, have warned against allowing some to tamper with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, as was done when Iraq and Libya were invaded. What our States really need is to inhibit the ball of flame that some have been trying to fan across our region for decades in order to destabilize the region, pillage its assets and displace its peoples.

Nevertheless, we remain confident in our national capacities and in the support and assistance of our friends and allies, who wish only good and stability for Syria, the region and the world, while they reject any foreign intervention and insist on an exclusively Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. We look forward to working with honest country partners that genuinely seek to build the future of Syria and are committed to the best interests of the Syrian people and to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We do not want any untrue partners whose only aim is to impose the agendas of their paymasters or any other foreign interventionist conditions as a pretext for acts of aggression, occupation and terrorism under any name whatsoever.

Yes, we unequivocally state that we look forward to working with true and honest country partners that will confront the policies and practices of the infamous countries that, up to this very moment, are trying to impose their will at the expense of the Syrian national interest by supporting terrorism and the separatist militias known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, and by using the platform of the Security Council to defame the Syrian Government and its allies while imposing continued unilateral, compulsory economic procedures on the Syrian people to impede reconstruction and prevent Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons from returning to their homes.

I would like to tell those who have been decrying the situation of Syrian civilians that, to this very moment, no magnetic resonance imaging machines or computed tomography scanners are being allowed to enter Syria. We asked the World Health Organization to send us such devices and it replied that it could not do so because certain influential States object to such medical equipment being sent to Syria. Those are the very same countries that are shedding crocodile tears in the Council on behalf of civilians.

The success of any political process in Syria requires the end of the illegitimate presence of United States, British, French and Turkish forces on the Syrian territory. Our faith in the progress of the political process does not mean in any way whatsoever that we relinquish our right and constitutional commitment to liberating every single inch of our territory from terrorism and illegitimate military presence. My country will continue to work in parallel on many tracks, including a political solution, fighting terrorism, getting rid of any illegitimate foreign presence, fostering deeper national reconciliation and repairing the damage caused by terrorism and the international coalition, while relying on our own potential and the support of our true allies.

That being said, what Syrians need is for the Council to back a serious, lasting political solution, to support our efforts with our allies in fighting terrorism and eliminating terrorism financing, and to put an end to the unilateral, compulsory economic procedures imposed on the Syrian people by the United States, the European Union and other Governments.

In conclusion, my country's delegation would like to draw the attention of all who supported the formation of the Constitutional Committee to the fact that the enemies of a settlement will never pass up any means,

including baseless fiction, to impede the Committee's work. That has been proven by the spread of hearsay and lies. As soon as the Committee was formed two days ago, the Syrian Government was falsely accused of using chemical weapons against its own people. We stress that those who seek to impede the work of the Committee should be held accountable and that, in order to ensure that the Committee's discussions are fruitful, the Governments of the notorious States must cease their hostile practices and fabrication of accusations and lies, and stop interfering in Syrian internal affairs.

We never falsely point a finger at others. No sooner had the Secretary-General sent his letter to the President of the Security Council two days ago regarding the Terms of Reference and Core Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Committee (S/2019/775, annex), than new ideas and proposals were made that ran counter to what had been agreed by the Syrian Government and the Secretary-General, with a view to overshadowing the achievement before the work of this important Committee had even been launched.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Seifi Pargou (Islamic Republic of Iran): It is not surprising that, once again, the Ambassador of the child-killer regime, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has tried his best to divert the attention of the Council from the realities on the ground in Syria and the region in order to cover up its crimes against the peoples of the region, particularly innocent children in Yemen. Similarly, by accusing others, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia desperately wants to divert attention from its support of terrorism in the region and the world.

Saudi Arabia is the main ideological, financial and logistical source of the most dangerous terrorist groups in our region, namely, Al-Qaida, Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front. The chief example of this is its support for those terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. What it is doing is in gross deviation from Islamic teachings and a flagrant violation of international law, thereby flouting its international responsibility. Accordingly, the Saudis must be held to account for all their support of terrorism and for all the other crimes they are committing in the region, from Syria to Yemen. Instead of lying, spreading misinformation and preaching to others, that abnormal regime must stop supporting terrorists, killing innocent

children and destroying mosques, schools and hospitals in Yemen and elsewhere in our region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has asked to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I had not hoped to hear the representative of Iran to resort to his tired polemics and false accusations about the role played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the region.

Who supported incidents of terrorism in Argentina, the Arabian Gulf, Syria, Europe, Berlin and elsewhere? All these incidents were the work of the ultimate terrorist State, the Iranian regime. Now we hear the representative of that country talking about the role of my country in this regard and decry the situation of our brethren in Yemen. He applies the famous Arab proverb about those who accuse others of what they are doing. This regime is shedding crocodile tears for Yemen while it has offered that country nothing but bullets, destruction and damage. That is also exactly what it has offered Syria, where it has sought to spread sectarianism and terrorism. In Iraq, the Iranian regime continues to destabilize that deep-rooted Arab country.

I therefore call on the representative of Iran to refrain from his silliness. He knows fully well that his accusations are false.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of Iran has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Seifi Pargou (Islamic Republic of Iran): In fact, since we are discussing the issue of Syria, we did not intend to raise such matters in today's meeting, but it is the representative of Saudi Arabia who took us in this direction.

It is very unfortunate that, not just in this meeting but in each and every meeting, the Saudis are trying to divert people's attention from the realities in our region. It is a fact that Saudi Arabia is the major problem; it is the main source of instability in our region. Look at the seminaries from Central Asia to Libya. Who is nourishing them? Who provides financial assistance to the seminaries who train the takfiri and other extremists who have spread throughout the region and elsewhere, destabilizing them entirely?

I do not want to go into our history with Saudi Arabia, but it is well known that its hostility towards Iran is boundless. Think of its support for Saddam — \$100 billion dollars during the course of the war to kill and maim around 1 million Iranians — or for terrorism in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. Who provides those terrorists with arms?

And it is continuing, unfortunately. Whenever we introduce a peace plan, they say, "This is the Arab world, so it is not your business". If it is not our business, why are they always and everywhere blaming us? They make accusations against us with regard to human rights, inter alia, while their dark human rights record is so well known. Eleven out of fifteen of the perpetrators of the crimes on 11 September 2001 here in the United States were Saudi citizens.

They are blaming us for terrorism. Every week we arrest groups of terrorists that are trying to infiltrate our borders from the west and the east parts. These groups are equipped and armed and financed by Saudi Arabia. We can provide evidence of this and we have told them about it. They know it very well.

A regime that has a very dark human rights record should not preach to others. Its behaviour with respect to minorities, in particular the Shia people, is appalling. Just ask what happened in the town of Al-Awamiyah, in eastern Saudi Arabia. It is not good to raise such matters in this Chamber, but it is their policy. We do not want to go into such matters.

We have proposed a peace plan for Yemen, and at the outset we also suggested a peace plan for Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, but the Saudis were the impediment; they were the main obstacle. They are always saying that it is none of our business. We are always making offers to them, including, even now, the Hormuz peace plan proposed by our President. We are always inviting all countries of the region, including Saudi Arabia, to come together, sit and discuss the issues of the region, but to no avail.

The representative of Saudi Arabia has proposed a peace plan for the region. We all can work on that and hopefully bring stability back to the region. First, support for terrorism must be stopped. Secondly, the war in Yemen must be stopped. And all of that is in the hands of Saudi Arabia.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to

make a further statement. Before giving him the floor, I just want to remind everyone of the need to be as brief as possible and not to digress from the subject at hand, which today is the main item on the agenda.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will be brief. It is unfortunate when I hear our colleague, the representative of Iran, trying to prolong this discussion. He is openly repeating his lies. He says that we tell him “It is none of your business”. That is true; it is none of his business. It is none of Iran’s business to interfere in the Arab world. Iran always boasts that it is occupying Arab capitals. It is none of its business to interfere in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain or anywhere else.

He says that every week his country is detaining terrorists. Yes, every week it detains its own citizens. It is torturing and imprisoning them. That is well known about Iran. It has spread sectarianism. Our relationship with Iran has been historically positive. However, it soured after the Iranian revolution, which called for exporting sectarianism across the Arab and Islamic world.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In my capacity as President of the Security Council, I would like to underscore that anyone who wished to take the floor has had the opportunity to do so.

We have listened very carefully to all of those who asked to speak to address the main agenda item, Syria, as well as broader, more regional issues. I think the statements made by everyone today and the exchange that ensued were undoubtedly useful and will be continued in future.

I shall now speak briefly in my national capacity.

I would like to say that the exchange and statements made in the past few minutes of our meeting showed how all the peace and security issues in the Middle East are interlinked. In my national statement, I underscored the deep regional significance of our swift action with regard to a lasting and reliable settlement in Syria, and our exchange of opinions demonstrated that, yet again, if we seize the present opportunity to move quickly towards a good and reliable settlement in Syria in the interest of all Syrians, I believe that would make a

decisive contribution to the architecture of peace and security that we all are trying to create in the Middle East and in the Persian Gulf.

The exchange of statements we have had just now only reconfirms that fact. In this regard, I would also like to express my certainty that the ideas and proposals that the Council has heard from the Russian Federation with respect to the creation of a reliable security arrangement in the Persian Gulf is a necessary and useful foundation for the discussion of how we can all jointly — together — help to create such a security arrangement. I propose that we do not waste that opportunity in our future discussions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before I adjourn the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of September, I would like, on behalf of the Russian Federation, to express our sincere appreciation to the members of the Council and the Secretariat for all their support to us. It has indeed been a busy month. And, while I might not be the one to say this, as I witnessed it more from Moscow, as I saw today, and know from the work of our Permanent Mission, headed by our Permanent Representative, it has indeed been a busy month in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. Unfortunately, that was not the case on all of them, as was mentioned today. But the consensus we did reach we could not have achieved alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and representatives of the Secretariat, including the conference servicing officers, the interpreters, the translators, the verbatim reporters and the security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of South Africa good luck in the month of October.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.