



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

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Tuesday, 28 September 2021, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Ms. Byrne Nason . . . . .	(Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	India . . . . .	Mr. Gotru
	Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico . . . . .	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. Aougi
	Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam . . . . .	Mr. Pham

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Ms. Rouba Mhaissen, Founder and Director of Sawa for Development and Aid.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Last week, a grim announcement reminded us of the appalling suffering and losses of the Syrian people. The High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that more than 350,000 people can be confirmed individually — by name, date and location — as having been killed in the first decade of the conflict. Given the vast numbers still unaccounted for, the actual figure is likely much higher.

To that horrific death toll, we may add other measures of deep suffering from more than a decade of conflict. More than 12 million Syrians are displaced; that is half of Syria's pre-conflict population. Tens of thousands remain detained, abducted or missing. Poverty levels are approaching 90 per cent after a decade of conflict, mismanagement and corruption, and now there is the impact of the Lebanese economic collapse, the coronavirus disease and, indeed, sanctions. Syria is divided into several de facto zones, with international players jostling in the theatre, as well as violent episodes that continue to test the relative calm of the past 18 months.

The Syrian people desperately need a Syrian-led and -owned political process to deliver. As part of that, they also need the sustained attention of the international community in support of a wider effort that could solidify calm, ease their suffering and carry us forward

along the path of restoring Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity and meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to determine their own future — the pillars of resolution 2254 (2015).

With military front lines largely frozen for 18 months and the concerns of parties regarding the status quo, the time to push for a political process is now. Resolution 2254 (2015) recognizes the close link between a nationwide ceasefire and a parallel political process, and I continue to call for that, particularly given the episodes of violence and the dangers of that spiralling into an all-out confrontation.

In Idlib, many who returned to their homes in the south of the province have now been displaced once more against a backdrop of sustained mutual shelling, rocket fire and increased air strikes amid reports of civilian fatalities. Many strikes have been concentrated south of the M4 highway, but there have also been strikes deep inside the de-escalation zone, including alarming strikes near internally displaced person camps. Meanwhile, an agreement has brought calm to Dara'a Al-Balad, and I hope that it proves sustainable. I welcome the reduction in violence and the resumption of humanitarian access. I hope that civilians are protected without any further escalation there or in other parts of the south-west where similar agreements are being replicated. I also hope that there can be safe, dignified and voluntary returns of all civilians to their homes.

Elsewhere in Syria, there are multiple sources of concern: ongoing shelling and skirmishes among non-State armed groups and the Turkish military on front lines across the perimeter of north-west Syria and northern rural Aleppo; reports of an increase in Turkish drone strikes in Syrian territory; and yet another round of air strikes attributed to Israel on targets near Damascus.

Multiple listed terrorist groups continue to operate across all quarters of Syria. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant attacked a gas pipeline supplying the power plant in Deir Ali, causing a power outage across the country — a reminder of the dangers those groups still pose. Counter-terrorism action in accordance with international humanitarian law, conducted in a manner that is effective while protecting civilians and safeguarding regional security, is possible and indeed needed. It will require greater international cooperation among key stakeholders.

I am sure that the situation on the ground in Idlib and elsewhere will be an important issue when Presidents Putin and Erdoğan meet tomorrow. I continue to appeal for those with influence to promote calm. Much depends on that.

Meanwhile, Russian-American contacts to pursue humanitarian progress in the framework of resolution 2585 (2021) have continued. Indeed, the United Nations is committed to doing all it can to fully implement the resolution in all its aspects.

Let me also remind Council members that any humanitarian effects of sanctions that could exacerbate the plight of ordinary Syrians need to be avoided and mitigated, particularly in terms of overcompliance. But I hope that the issues being discussed in recent international contacts are the floor, and not the ceiling, of what we collectively want to achieve in Syria. That has been my message during recent weeks, including trips in the region and in New York. I have engaged intensively with the Syrian parties — the Syrian Government and the opposition Syrian Negotiations Committee. I was able to join the Secretary-General when he met several Foreign Ministers and senior officials of key countries. I have seen several other senior officials recently, including in Geneva. I will be travelling from here to Washington, D.C., as my consultations continue.

It is clear from all our engagements that trust is low, but it is also clear — and let me emphasize this — that common interests do exist, that things are not static and that there is every reason to try now to build a more effective political effort.

On the Constitutional Committee, we are at an important moment. It has now been exactly two years since the Committee was agreed by the Government of Syria and the Syrian Negotiations Committee. Regrettably, the Constitutional Committee has not yet begun to make steady progress on its mandate.

But today there is some good news to report. Following eight months of intensive facilitation with the co-Chairs, I am pleased to announce that agreement is in place on methodology, and invitations have been issued for a sixth session of the Constitutional Committee. While we are still in the process of confirming logistics, the small drafting body will convene in Geneva as of 18 October, and the co-Chairs will meet the day before for the first time, together with me, to prepare the session.

The co-Chairs' agreement on methodology is based on three pillars that formed the basis of my engagement with them: first, respect for the terms of reference and core rules of procedure; secondly, the submission of texts of basic constitutional principles in advance of the meetings; and thirdly, regular co-Chair meetings with me before and during the coming session. The co-Chairs are also committed to setting provisional dates for future meetings and discussing a workplan.

In short, we should all now expect the Constitutional Committee to begin to work seriously on a process of drafting — not just preparing — a constitutional reform. If it does that, then we will have a different and credible constitutional process. We need that if we are to build a modicum of trust. All three delegations — the delegation nominated by the Government, the delegation nominated by the opposition and the middle third civil society delegation, which my Deputy Special Envoy, Ms. Matar, briefed yesterday — have important contributions to make in that regard.

We need to find a genuine intra-Syrian political dialogue — something that was reportedly discussed when President Putin met President Al-Assad in Moscow recently — and through that, a genuine process of Syrian political reform. I am convinced that Geneva can be the place where Syrians committed to durable peace can begin to work with each other in a constructive manner.

Let me recall that resolution 2254 (2015) also encouraged the meaningful participation of Syrian women in the political process. Without that no solution in Syria can be complete. My office has continued to consult with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. In fact, the Board is currently convening in Helsinki, and Deputy Special Envoy Matar will be joining them. While there, the Board has also been invited to meet with Finnish officials to gain insights on the Finnish experience in education and conflict resolution.

Let me underline the importance of action on the crucial file concerning detainees, abductees and missing persons. All sides say that they agree that action is needed. All sides stand to benefit from progress, as families from every corner of Syria have seen loved ones detained, abducted or gone missing. I remain absolutely convinced that, if we could make inroads on that, it would be a vital confidence-builder, a signal to all Syrians that peace is possible and a circuit-breaker in the context of international diplomacy.

My hope is that this concerted international cooperation could also help to focus on the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees. Clearly the conditions are far from being ripe for most of them. But we can start to look at how to remove some of the obstacles to returns — whether they be in terms of the security situation, legislation, resources or livelihoods and with the relevant authorities sending clear and credible signals. That would send a signal of concrete hope to millions of Syrians. And I believe that it would help decrease tensions across the region — tensions that are intimately linked to the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict.

As I have often stressed, the issues are not solely in the hands of the Syrians. We need constructive Syria diplomacy to help save lives, ease suffering, promote stability and further the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, I am continuing to ask key States to work with me in exploratory discussions on concrete, mutual and reciprocal steps that are defined with realism and precision and that are implemented in parallel and are verifiable. I am continuing my consultations to seek real buy-in in the form of relevant players being ready not only to identify what they seek, but also what they can deliver on, in a reciprocal process.

I remain ready to use the convening power of the United Nations in Geneva if that can help create prospects for incremental progress. I will continue that work on the wider process, while focusing in the weeks ahead on facilitating the next session of the Syrian-led and -owned Constitutional Committee.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mhaissen

**Ms. Mhaissen:** With the pressing socioeconomic and political issues in multiple Security Council Member States, the escalation and heightened nature of conflicts in countries like Afghanistan, Yemen, the Sudan and others and the protracted nature of the Syrian conflict, it is a challenge today to keep Syria on the priority agenda, whether on the political or the humanitarian levels. However, the demands for which the people of Syria, especially the courageous women of Syria, went to the streets in 2011 remain unmet. Until Syrians — inside Syria or in forced refugeehood — can exercise their long-demanded human rights under international law and until a fair political settlement and a holistic transition are reached, it is our imperative to actively work on ensuring that

Syria remains on the international agenda and that the everyday demands of people — not only the interests of those in power — find their way to the negotiating table.

Yes, there have been some gains that we as Syrians, as Syrian women, are proud of at the level of political representation. The wall of fear surrounding us has been toppled. We have penetrated realms where we were not previously welcome. In the past years, we have carved out spaces for us as Syrians and fought for a seat at the table of the political process as women. The successes are modest, but we did manage to participate in official delegations to the United Nations-led talks, including 28 per cent representation in the Constitutional Committee, the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, the women members of the Civil Society Support Room and women briefers to the Security Council, to name just a few. However, a lot remains to be done to ensure that women are truly participating and that women are included at all levels. The everyday contributions of women at the community level remain unseen, and their demands remain unheard at the peace-process level.

"Peace process" is a phrase much used, but often stripped of its meaning. We are today far from peace or peacebuilding in Syria. We simply cannot talk about peacebuilding when Syrian's rights, especially Syrian women's rights, are being breached on a daily basis.

Many stakeholders engaged at the Syrian political level have seen a constant belittling of safety, livelihoods, housing and education rights. Those are set aside as pure humanitarian concerns to be addressed only in humanitarian meetings. But the concerns of everyday Syrians are what is most political. If accessing one's home and land is not political, then what is? If one's ability to vote in one's constituency or place of origin is not political, then what is? If one's ability to live in dignity in a country that welcomes, resembles and protects one is not political, then what is? And if the everyday women heroes fighting for those demands are not recognized at the political level, then who is?

Politics is about monitoring humanitarian aid. It is about documenting human rights violations. It is about negotiating the release of loved ones. It is about forging new civil spaces. It is about continuing to fight for inclusion at all levels. How can one expect a wife who knows not the fate of her husband — imprisoned, disappeared or kidnapped — to contribute to any sustainable peace? How can one convince a woman who

cannot return to her land with her children to accept a political settlement that does not guarantee her rights?

Those are the Syrians we cannot fail. We cannot allow the political process to bring them justice before anyone else to continue to stall. In the direst of circumstances, those women have gathered their grievances, losses and hardships into a unifying power — rising above affiliations, ideologies or the instrumentalization of their voices. They said it clearly: Syria first. To honour them, a Syria for all must remain first — above any one person, one party or one interest.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to make that vision of a dignified life a reality when the political process continues to be obstructed. Throughout our work, we see that, despite challenging times in neighbouring countries, refugees' intentions to return today are at their lowest levels. Yet we see no prioritization of alleviating pressures on forced refugee returns when conditions are not safe. Today we continue to see evidence of returnees leaving Syria again; we continue to see big waves of forced internal migration. Refugees and internally displaced persons are continuing their search for a decent life, flowing into Egypt, Turkey and Europe through newly formed trafficking channels. The prolongation of the current status quo at the political process level inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries will not be conducive to stability and a sustainable voluntary return of refugees. Those issues rarely find their way into political discussions. The political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), requires compromises, but those compromises should be at the expense of the parties' interests rather than those of the people.

Nevertheless, the stalling of a political settlement has not stopped local actors at the community level — many of them women activists and agents of change — to push for local dialogue and mediation efforts, often at great risk to themselves. They have fought for spaces to express their needs, negotiated with parties to the conflict, demanded to know the fate of their loved ones and fought to ensure that their children are well fed and receive an education. Again, if that is not political participation, then I do not know what is.

In order for any political settlement to be successful, we must focus on building local resilience and supporting Syrians, especially women's voices and agencies. It is time for societal structures, including leadership and legislative frameworks, to reflect the

shifts in gender dynamics that are emerging every day at the community level. As we stand here today, it is difficult to deny that the traditional efforts to convene the parties around the table — alone — are insufficient in the face of military developments inside Syria and are subservient to the will of proxies and regional Powers.

This increasing grass-roots approach to crafting healthy communities, despite polarized and divisive environments, both inside and outside Syria, shows promise in increasing the unity of the Syrian people and healing the divisions and trauma caused by 10 years of conflict. However, this approach alone will not pay off if it is not accompanied by a political settlement that is fair and just to all. It is time to activate the role of women as community mediators and bring their everyday demands to the negotiating table.

Finally, peace in Syria will require the Council to move from its fixation on great-power politics to dynamic engagement with communities affected by conflict in order to understand our perspectives. Put Syrians at the forefront of any strategy. Speak to us — not about us or in our name. Invest in us if the Council is serious about achieving sustainable and just peace in a democratic Syria, free of oppression, violence and extremism and advancing global peace and security.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Mhaissen for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank Geir Pedersen for his briefing. We listened closely to Ms. Rouba Mhaissen.

On the political track, we welcome the progress observed in the resumption of the efforts of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. In our contacts with the parties and the leading actors, we have continuously advocated for this. We anticipate the prompt resumption of direct intra-Syrian dialogue in Geneva. It is exceedingly important for that process to remain Syrian-led and -owned, without intervention from abroad and without the imposition of artificial timelines, supported by the impartial mediation of the United Nations. Recent developments reflect the fact that burdening the pursuit of negotiations with artificial demands is misguided and counterproductive.

The situation on the ground in Syria remains complicated. At the same time, in early September, the Syrian army, with support from Russian military specialists, managed to peacefully settle the situation in Dara'a governorate, specifically around the Dara'a Al-Balad neighbourhood, where there was an alarming uptick in tensions since the end of May.

The cessation of hostilities is ongoing against the backdrop of the road map, which stipulates, inter alia, settling the legal status of the fighters with whom reconciliation is possible, the expulsion of hard-line elements to Al-Bab to northern Syria, the laying down of weapons and the deployment of Government forces and Russian military police in the besieged area.

Terrorists in Idlib are attempting to exploit instability in the south. In the past month alone, more than 760 shellings of Government positions were reported. As a result, several dozen Syrian military personnel were wounded. The situation is worsening in the area where Turkish operations are being carried out in the north of Syria, as well as in the area beyond the Euphrates — and this amid ongoing clashes between the Kurds, the pro-Turkish units and Arab tribes.

We condemn unremitting Israeli air strikes targeting Syria, which are undermining efforts to stabilize the situation both in Syria and in the wider region. We believe that the establishment of long-term peace and security in Syria is possible only through the full restoration of both the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, with an end to the illegitimate foreign presence and the definitive routing of terrorists.

The humanitarian situation in the country continues to remain dire. We believe there is an urgent need to depoliticize the Syrian humanitarian dossier and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance deliveries under the auspices of the United Nations to all Syrians, while respecting the core principles set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

Against this backdrop, the question of lifting anti-Syrian sanctions from the West remains urgent, which, international experts all concur, makes the suffering of ordinary civilians all the more dire. According to United Nations reports, the conditions for the overwhelming majority of Syrians continue to deteriorate. Some 90 per cent of Syrian people are below the poverty line. These people are encountering not only dire economic difficulties — inflation and food scarcity, inter alia — but they are also coming up

against the dangerous consequences of the water crisis, which is creating a threat to more than 5 million people. Accordingly, the full-fledged implementation in good faith of resolution 2585 (2021), which provides for expansion of internal humanitarian aid deliveries in Idlib and the north of Syria and for more transparent cross-border deliveries, project implementation for early recovery and greater support for Syrians against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, is of particular importance.

Resolution 2585 (2021) now represents a qualitatively new framework for the provision of humanitarian assistance. However, the clock is ticking. We need tangible progress on the ground, and that needs to be reflected in the report of the Secretary-General by January 2022.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I thank the Special Envoy for his briefing and, as always, for his tireless efforts. We offer a special welcome and thanks to Ms. Mhaissen as well. We know her organization is doing valuable work to empower Syrian refugees and promote the dignity of all Syrians. We thank her for her insights today.

Last week, after a decade of conflict in Syria, one number stood out for my delegation as it did for the Special Envoy: 350,209. This was the number that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released after the painstaking research by the United Nations to identify all those who have been killed since the beginning of the uprising: 350,000. And, as the special Envoy noted, this is most certainly an undercount, given the incredible difficulty of obtaining data during an active conflict.

These were people who had families, hopes, dreams, full lives. They were no different from us, except that they were unlucky enough to live and die under the horrific Al-Assad regime.

While we cannot bring back those that have died, there is another number the Al-Assad regime could do something about right now: 149,000. That is the estimated number of Syrians suffering in arbitrary detention or whose whereabouts are unknown. I am glad to hear the Special Envoy highlight this issue this morning, and we reiterate our call for the Syrian regime to unilaterally and immediately release the tens of thousands of arbitrarily detained men, women and children in its custody and share information on the fate of those that are missing.

We certainly agree with what we heard from the Special Envoy this morning, namely, that progress on the detainee issue could serve as a confidence-building measure that would bolster the political process. Despite its occasional announcements of alleged amnesties, we have not yet seen meaningful efforts from the Syrian regime. The United States therefore reiterates its support for the Office of the Special Envoy's continued efforts aimed at addressing this protracted issue, and we call for those with influence over the regime to use it.

In Dara'a, we are cautiously hopeful that the September ceasefire will hold. We are encouraged by reports that some bakeries and other businesses have reopened, and that the World Food Programme was able to deliver emergency food assistance in the region. We urge all the parties to abide by the ceasefire and for the regime to allow unhindered, regular access to Dara'a for United Nations humanitarian assistance.

Similarly, we are deeply concerned about the potential for a resurgence of violence in Idlib. Over the past few weeks, as we heard, the number of civilians killed and injured in the region has increased. We encourage all States, especially members of the Security Council, to take any and all possible action to stem this violence through diplomatic negotiations.

Finally, we have lamented in the Security Council that it has been two years since the inauguration of the Constitutional Committee, and yet we still have not seen its members actually discuss a single clause or a single sentence of the Constitution. We therefore very much welcome the news today on progress on holding a new round of the Committee. We now urge all sides to participate in good faith at this sixth round of the drafting group in October, and we call on the Al-Assad regime to stop stalling the process and meaningfully participate.

In conclusion, there is only one way forward for peace and stability in Syria, and that is a peaceful resolution to the conflict and an end to this war. It is time for the Al-Assad regime and all parties involved to come to the table, follow the path that has been laid out in resolution 2254 (2015) and put an end to the Syrian conflict once and for all.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and express my appreciation for his recent visit to Damascus and for his active mediation efforts during

his stay in New York. I listened carefully to the briefing by Ms. Rouba Mhaissen.

The Syrian crisis has dragged on for 10 years, causing over 500,000 deaths and the displacement of over 10 million people. An early end to the Syrian crisis is the shared expectation of the international community and the Syrian people.

Regrettably, today, after the Syrian crisis has entered a second decade, the country still faces unabated violence and terrorist activities, increasing humanitarian needs and deep suffering for its people. All of these aspects highlight the necessity and urgency of a political solution to the Syrian crisis. China supports the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and the advancement of a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process.

Just now Special Envoy Pedersen brought us the good news of the launch of the sixth round of the work of the Constitutional Committee, which will start soon. We hope this sixth round of the Committee's work will begin as soon as possible, while it stays independent and free from external interference. We also hope that its work will be productive.

At the same time, we have realized that the Syrian political process cannot operate in a vacuum. If there is a serious lack of mutual trust among parties, it is hard for the Constitutional Committee to make substantive progress. While schemes for regime change are still in place, the work by Special Envoy Pedersen is bound to be difficult. China calls on the Syrian parties to actively cooperate with the Special Envoy in his work, strive to narrow differences and build consensus through dialogue and consultation.

At the same time, the international community should create favourable conditions for the political process.

Foreign forces lacking authorization from the Syrian Government should withdraw from the country immediately. The illegal unilateral sanctions against Syria should be lifted immediately, and the plan to impose an external solution should be renounced immediately. The economic plunder of Syria should end immediately. Only by fully respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and the right of its people to choose independently their political system and development path can there be the possibility of and hope for a successful political settlement.

Terrorism is a common menace facing humankind. Combating it can serve as the starting point for parties to carry out cooperation and build mutual trust on the Syrian issue. All parties should support the Syrian Government in combating the terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council, avoiding double standards and political manipulation.

The international community has reached a high level of consensus on alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. As such, assisting Syria in improving people's livelihoods and combating the pandemic can become another a priority area for cooperation among parties. Opposing the Syrian Government cannot justify punishing the Syrian people.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to point out once again that devoting three meetings per month to the Syrian issue takes up too much of the Council's resources. We support a gradual adjustment of our method of deliberations to combine deliberations on the political situation and humanitarian issues while giving greater consideration to internal consultations.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing. I also thank Rouba Mhaissen for her valuable contribution.

We are glad to hear from the Special Envoy that the parties have been able to agree on a framework for the next round of negotiations and that invitations have been distributed for a meeting of the drafting committee on 18 October in Geneva. We also appreciate the updates provided from his meetings with concerned parties and hope that this next round of negotiations will bring the constitutional process forward in a substantial and tangible way.

We urge the parties to contribute concretely to the drafting of a new constitution. Progress here can increase confidence and pave the way for advancement on other parts of resolution 2254 (2015). We also reiterate the importance of consulting with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room in those efforts.

The statement made by Ms. Mhaissen today illustrates the importance of listening to civil society and ensuring an inclusive process.

The dire humanitarian, economic and security situation on the ground must be improved. We will continue to actively support all efforts to that end, but the root causes of the conflict must also be addressed.

Credible progress on the political track is key to development, stability, the return of refugees and, ultimately, peace.

We support the Special Envoy's calls for the Syrian parties to move forward in their dialogue as well as his call for the international actors engaged in Syria to come together and identify concrete steps that can move the political process forward.

It is imperative that both the Syrian parties and we in the international community do more to ensure the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Finally, let me express the importance of continuing the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Syria. That terrorist group continues to use Syria as a base from which to operate. That further underscores the fact that a political solution and stability in Syria is crucial not only for the people of Syria but also for its neighbours and for the broader international community.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Mhaissen for their statements.

The recent clashes in the region of Dara'a and the increased attacks by the regime and Russia on the Idlib zone make clear that the war is not over. It cannot be over until such time as a political solution is implemented. That is why France recalls the importance of fully implementing resolution 2254 (2015). The resolution, adopted unanimously, remains the common road map for all members of the Council. That implies that urgent progress needs to be made on the issue of detainees held by the regime as well as missing persons. That is a key demand of all sectors of Syrian society. This also requires that progress be made with regard to a lasting and verifiable cessation of hostilities at the national level. International humanitarian law must also be fully respected, in particular the protection of civilians and humanitarian access.

France takes note of the confirmation by the Special Envoy of the holding of the sixth meeting of the Constitutional Committee on 18 October next. It is imperative that the representatives of the regime participate therein in good faith in order to enable tangible progress to be made. In other words, we want to see the Committee finally discharge its mandate, that is to say, draw up a constitution. The full participation of women must also be ensured as part of that process.

In the absence of a robust political solution, our positions with regard to the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction will remain unchanged. Without a political solution there will be no safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. We will continue our tireless fight against impunity for the crimes committed in Syria. Those responsible must be held accountable.

**Mr. Gotru** (India): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing today. I also thank Ms. Rouba Mhaissen, the civil-society briefer, for her insights.

The past few weeks have seen developments of interest on the Syria political track. Special Envoy Pedersen visited Damascus earlier this month for the first time since February. The important countries having influence on Syria have also held discussions informally. There have been high-level engagements between Syria and the Russian Federation, and we heard from the Special Envoy details of those engagements today.

The Constitutional Committee was set up nearly two years back, and the process of drafting the constitution needs to begin. The efforts of the past two years have made it clear that external influence remains the major impeding factor hampering progress on the political track. We call on all external actors to desist from adversely influencing the parties concerned. We hope that those ongoing efforts will re-energize the political track. The Special Envoy informed us earlier today about the convening of the sixth meeting of the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. We take note of that positive development. All three sides need to engage constructively with the Special Envoy on his bridging proposals. The process has to remain a Syrian-led and Syrian-driven process, facilitated by the United Nations.

On the security front, the ceasefire agreement in Dara'a is a welcome development. However, we remain concerned at the overall situation in Syria, including in the north-east and the north-west. As mentioned in the recent Secretary-General's report (S/2021/735), military activity and hostilities have increased in recent months, seriously affecting the civilian population. We believe that a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire is paramount to the interests of the Syrian people and will help to ensure that positive developments such as the first cross-line humanitarian aid operation from

Aleppo to Idlib can take firm root and not remain a one-off occurrence.

We have been referring to the involvement of external actors in Syria and its impact on the growth of terrorism both in Syria and in the region. Designated terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham have continued to gain in strength in Syria, and their activities have been mentioned in the Secretary-General's recent reports. ISIL has continued to launch attacks in areas across Dayr Al-Zawr, Hasakah and eastern rural Homs. ISIL has also targeted energy infrastructure in some instances. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continues to have a dominating influence in Idlib. The most recent report of United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant also referred to the repeated deployments of chemical weapons by ISIL against civilian populations between 2014 and 2016. That is a cause for serious concern and needs to be fully recognized and acted upon, given that the core area of operations of ISIL also include Syria.

Long-term security and stability in West Asia can be achieved only by preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We remain convinced that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict, and we reaffirm our commitment to advancing a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

India has extended development assistance and human resource development support to Syria through grants, lines of credit for development projects, medicine and food supplies, artificial-limb fitment camps and capacity-building and training programmes. India has always engaged diplomatically with Syria since the beginning of the conflict, including at the highest levels. Our External Affairs Minister held bilateral discussions with the Foreign Minister of Syria earlier this week on the margins of the ongoing seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly. We reiterate our steadfast commitment to continuing to render all possible support and assistance to the people of Syria.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Rouba Mhaissen for their briefings.

It bears repeating that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The only solution is through a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led credible, balanced and

inclusive political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We reiterate that the political and humanitarian situations are inextricably linked, as without a political solution to the conflict the humanitarian crisis will worsen, and the suffering of the Syrian people will continue.

For that reason, we continue to support the unwavering efforts of the Special Envoy to facilitate the wider political process, of which the Constitutional Committee remains an integral component. We welcome the announcement of the convening of a sixth session of the Committee in October, and we encourage all the parties to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and compromise to make much-needed progress.

The full participation of women in the political process must be guaranteed to ensure a sustainable and equitable peace for all Syrians. Ms. Mhaissen underscored that during her briefing. We laud the work of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, and we take note of its meeting currently being held in Finland. We are certain that the discussions will be constructive and meaningful.

We remain concerned by the sporadic violence across the country. There is a close link between the nationwide ceasefire and the parallel political process, and the perpetuation of hostilities denies an environment conducive to the achievement of the goals and objectives set out in resolution 2254 (2015). As such, we strongly urge the parties to the conflict to exercise maximum restraint, de-escalate and fully abide by their obligations under international law for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, we welcome all international diplomatic efforts to reduce hostilities and cement a ceasefire, particularly in Dara'a Al-Balad.

Security Council-designated terrorist entities continue to pose a grave threat to Syria's people, sovereignty and territorial integrity. A collaborative and targeted approach that is strictly within the confines of international law is therefore required.

There exists a well-established link between justice and peace, and it has long been recognized that neither one is able to thrive in isolation of the other. We therefore reiterate that accountability for the atrocities committed since the commencement of the war ought to remain a high priority.

Ten years of war have eroded the social fabric of the country. It is therefore important to make concrete steps on critical issues, such as those of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Action on those matters of concern will serve as expressions of goodwill, cultivate trust and promote reconciliation within Syria.

Practical steps must be taken by the international community to address the plight of the Syrian people. As such, the adverse impact of unilateral coercive measures on the civilian population should not be ignored, and we appeal for such measures to be immediately lifted. Also, conditions must be cultivated for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Naturally, that must include the reconstruction of homes, schools, medical facilities and other essential infrastructure that have been decimated. We once more encourage the international community to contribute to Syria's rebuilding. Furthermore, the continued presence of unauthorized foreign forces on Syria's sovereign territory should be given due attention, and their withdrawal must be prioritized.

With the socioeconomic conditions rapidly deteriorating in the country, a political solution is needed now more than ever. Special Envoy Pedersen emphasized that what is needed is constructive diplomacy. The Security Council has a responsibility to engage pragmatically in order to adequately support the political process, which is the only viable path to return peace and stability to Syria.

**Mr. Pham (Viet Nam):** I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing and Ms. Rouba Mhaissen for sharing her insights. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in this meeting.

The 10 and a half years of crisis have had a devastating impact on the lives of the Syrian people, especially children and other vulnerable groups. As a result of the continued violence and economic meltdown, as well as the impact of the coronavirus disease, a multi-layered crisis is pushing them further into misery.

Across the country, 13.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance due to the extremely limited access to food, fuel, water, health care, education and other basic goods and services.

A relatively calm situation on the ground has been preserved for months. However, insecurity persists, and

escalation takes place in certain parts of the country. Innocent civilians continue to be killed or injured; civilian infrastructure continues to be affected. Although a ceasefire deal has come into effect, the recent uptick in violence in Dara'a clearly shows the volatility of the security situation in Syria.

Against the current backdrop, concrete steps towards a political solution are needed now more than ever in order to find a viable way to long-term peace, stability and development for the Syrian people.

Let me once again stress our staunch support for the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

In pursuing that goal, first of all, trust and confidence must be rebuilt among all the parties concerned in order to bridge the long-standing substantial differences.

My delegation calls for constructive dialogue and negotiation among the Syrian parties, especially within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. We warmly welcome the agreement just reached on the working methodologies, and we look forward to further concrete, positive steps in the work of the Constitutional Committee.

To support their efforts, the requisite spirit of cooperation among all international interlocutors must also be revived to promote meaningful engagement in a political solution. Throughout this process, we would like to reiterate our full support for the bridging role of the United Nations and the Special Envoy. The Special Envoy's proposal on a new international format could be a feasible way out of the current impasse.

Secondly, a political solution necessitates an environment conducive to dialogue and negotiation. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from actions that could lead to further escalation. A sustainable calm period is of vital importance to unlock progress on the political track.

Efforts to combat terrorist groups designated by the Security Council need to be maintained. At the same time, those efforts should be well coordinated to ensure respect for international law, including humanitarian law, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions.

Last but not least, my delegation would like to highlight the need for the unity of the international community in assisting Syria. Efforts to achieve sustainable peace and improve the resilience of the Syrian people must always be coupled with our unwavering and unified support. We therefore call for continued assistance for the Syrian people in all areas and by all means in order to facilitate a peaceful solution to the crisis and to help alleviate their extremely dire conditions.

**Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Mhaissen for their briefings. I also welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to this meeting.

Today I will focus my remarks on three areas: the political process, the ceasefire and human rights.

Mexico applauds the Special Envoy's continued efforts to promote the political transition. We welcome his most recent visit to Damascus and his convening of the sixth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee. We call on the parties to join this process, which is being facilitated by the United Nations, in a constructive and committed spirit, and thereby advance the very necessary political transition. We also reiterate our call for continuing to encourage the participation of representatives of civil society so as to promote and support a broad and inclusive political process that ensures the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, youth and minorities and makes it possible meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Secondly, despite the relative freeze along the front lines of the conflict, violence continues. The situations in Idlib, the north-west and Dara'a are of serious concern. Concerning the latter situation, the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law are worrisome. Mexico condemns the siege tactics against the civilian population. We have taken note of the truce that the Special Envoy referred to, and we hope that it can be sustained. Without a national and sustained ceasefire, the humanitarian demands will continue to increase.

More than 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance today. It is clear that the conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the refugee population are not in place. We applaud the efforts of those countries that have hosted Syrian refugees throughout the past decade.

We echo the calls for the release of detainees and clarification with regard to the whereabouts of disappeared persons. Access to detention centres must be granted for humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations.

With regard to the most recent report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, we note that human rights violations continue to be reported. We call on all States to cooperate with the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. And we echo the Secretary-General's call for the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, it is time for the international community to adopt and support new approaches that will make it possible for there to be a genuine political transition and for a lasting and sustainable peace agreement to be reached.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): Allow me to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Mhaissen for their briefings.

We join others in welcoming Mr. Pedersen's announcement that a sixth round of Constitutional Committee talks will take place in Geneva in mid-October. We commend Mr. Pedersen for his persistent efforts to secure agreement to the further talks. As Mr. Pedersen has made clear, the next meeting needs to be different to those that have gone before. Just as the United Nations strives to facilitate a political process in the implementation of its side of resolution 2254 (2015), so it is now down to the Syrian parties to take responsibility for implementing their side. It is time for the regime to end its artificial delays of the process and for substantive progress to be made on a new constitution, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015).

Resolution 2254 (2015) explicitly recognizes the link between the political process and a nationwide ceasefire. We therefore remain very concerned by the ongoing escalation of violence in north-west Syria, which has recently led to the deaths of civilians and humanitarian workers, including in heavy shelling of residential areas, and the destruction of medical facilities. We hope the upcoming meeting between Turkey and

Russia in Sochi will lead to the full implementation of the 5 March 2020 ceasefire agreement.

And we remain concerned too about the potential for renewed conflict to break out across the rest of Syria. The recent hostilities in Dara'a are a reminder of that. We welcome the recent ceasefire there, but that, and the ceasefire in Idlib, need to form part of a nationwide ceasefire agreed in parallel with the upcoming political talks in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Until progress is made on the political process and until there is a nationwide ceasefire, the suffering of the Syrian people will continue, and the millions displaced will be unable to return home. In that regard we take note the Commission of Inquiry's latest report, which documents the atrocities, abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law that continue in Syria to this day, including the indiscriminate use of weapons, targeted killings, arbitrary and incommunicado detention and torture and the denial of humanitarian access, which Ms. Mhaissen described so eloquently to us.

We urge the Syrian parties, particularly the regime, to commit to compliance with their obligations and a nationwide ceasefire and to seize this opportunity for progress with both hands. The international community will support them.

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and Ms. Rouba Mhaissen, Founder and Director of Sawa for Development and Aid, for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in this meeting.

Tunisia is following with concern the developments on the ground in Syria in the light of the increasing level of violence, tension and escalation in recent days in a number of regions of the country. That poses major security and humanitarian challenges and undermines international efforts to ease the crisis and contain the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We reiterate the importance of a rapid return to stability in Syria through efforts to de-escalate, restore calm and protect civilians at all times, in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in order to bring about a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire in Syria.

We look forward to the Special Envoy's de-escalation efforts in that regard.

We recall once again that the current understandings and arrangements in Syria, despite their importance, are only short-term solutions. They do not offer a practical way to neutralize the organizations classified as terrorist groups and to eliminate their safe havens in certain parts of the country, leading to a sustainable political solution and stability in the country and the region.

We support any measure that will end the current political stalemate and help to resume the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee and its subcommittee soon. We also welcome the preparation work for holding the sixth round of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva in October, facilitated by Mr. Pedersen. In that context, we hope that international efforts will make it possible to advance the constitutional process and a broader political path.

It goes without saying that a secure and stable environment in Syria and the strengthening of confidence-building measures would create the right conditions for accomplishing that objective in accordance with relevant Council resolutions, including resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2585 (2021). Existing and interrelated problems should be addressed, especially the issues of establishing a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire, achieving the safe and dignified return of refugees and displaced persons, promoting the recovery of Syria and the Syrian people, mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, fighting terrorist cells in the country and managing the situation of detainees.

It is worth stressing also that arriving at a common vision for resolving the Syrian crisis will require searching for common factors among the Syrian parties in a way that prioritizes the overriding needs of the brotherly Syrian people above all else. That requires as well a common vision and the support of the actors concerned and the Security Council.

In conclusion, we reiterate Tunisia's steadfast position, namely, that resolving the Syrian crisis requires finding a Syrian-led and -owned political settlement facilitated by the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), in order to preserve Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and restore its security and stability.

**Mr. Aougi (Niger)** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Rouba Mhaissen for their briefings. I welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey to this meeting.

After so much loss of life and the immense destruction caused by a decade of conflict, it is regrettable that the Syrian political actors are unable to lay the groundwork for a process to end the crisis. It is therefore urgent to get the political process back on track, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

On the security front, the Niger remains concerned about the continuation of hostilities in areas inhabited by civilians, particularly in the south and the north-west. We welcome the ceasefire between the armed opposition and Government forces, negotiated under the auspices of Russia in the city of Dara'a. That is a positive development that has given the people of the city a respite and enabled many families to return to their homes.

My delegation calls on the parties to agree a general ceasefire in the country, as requested by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy. This is a sine qua non for tangible progress in resolving the crisis in Syria. At the same time, Syria, in the exercise of its sovereignty, must not waver in its fight against terrorism. Any attempt to undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity is unacceptable.

My delegation reiterates its concern about the fate of the many detainees by both sides. We call on the parties to take confidence-building measures, especially through the unilateral mass release of detainees and by providing clarifications to families about their missing loved ones. That would help de-escalate the situation, build confidence among the parties and thereby achieve the progress we all expect on the political track.

We welcome the Constitutional Committee session to be held in October. The Niger calls on all stakeholders to show flexibility in order to advance the political process. As we have always said, only a Syrian-led inclusive dialogue that reflects the will of the Syrian people can lead to a peaceful long-term solution to the crisis.

We also welcome the meeting of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to be held in Helsinki. The Niger welcomes the admirable contribution of the Board and that of all Syrian women, who are playing a leading role.

In conclusion, my delegation remains convinced that progress in the work of the Constitutional Committee and the cessation of hostilities must go hand in hand with the other aspects of the crisis, such as putting an end to external interference, the support of armed groups and the plundering of Syrian resources, among others. Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity must be respected by all.

**Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Mhaissen for their thorough briefings.

At least half a million people have lost their lives during the decade-long Syrian conflict. Despite the current relative calm, military operations continue in many parts of the country. Achieving a nationwide ceasefire and ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access remain priorities.

In addition to violence, economic worries further hamper the livelihoods of the Syrian people. I thank Ms. Mhaissen for her insightful comments, which helped to shed light on these compounding challenges. The problems can be seen in two main areas.

First, the economic difficulties of the broader region, especially those in neighbouring Lebanon, greatly affect Syria. Moreover, targeted international sanctions play a minimal role, as noted by the Syrian regime on several occasions.

Secondly, the economic crisis is the result of internal factors. Widespread corruption, warlordism and lack of good governance hinder any potential positive developments in terms of recovery. The lack of meaningful steps towards a credible solution is also reflected in the wider political process. The Constitutional Committee has been dormant. However, we welcome the upcoming sixth round of talks in Geneva. We appreciate the Special Envoy's efforts in mediating the differing views.

Finally, without justice for victims, there will not be any real peace in Syria, and Ms. Mhaissen's testimony today confirms this point. The Security Council needs to act decisively against the widespread and systematic violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Syria.

Estonia and the European Union call on the creation of an international mechanism to locate missing persons or their remains. There are already multiple initiatives that have collected, systematized and preserved evidence of these crimes since the very beginning of

the conflict. Such investigative mechanisms as the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic established by the Human Rights Council, which reports to the General Assembly, and the Fact-Finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons can all be used to improve accountability. A lasting and credible political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can be reached only when we end impunity once and for all.

**Mr. Kiboino** (Kenya): Let me also thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Rouba Mhaissen for their briefings on the political situation in Syria. I acknowledge the presence of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in the Chamber this morning.

Every month, the people of Syria look to the Security Council as it considers the situation in their country, with the expectation that perhaps something positive would emerge — something that would help to turn their situation around for the better. We believe that it is only by working together, as we did in the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021), that the Council can put together the long-desired consensus for achieving a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution to the decade-old conflict.

Kenya welcomes the positive developments that emanated from the Special Envoy's trip to Damascus early this month, and we know that, after a drawn-out stalemate, the sixth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee are now set to resume on 18 October. We commend the parties for making this crucial decision, which will hopefully significantly contribute to taking the much-desired political steps towards a solution that will bring back the peace, security and stability that the country sorely needs, through a new Constitution, as envisaged by resolution 2254 (2015).

Kenya calls on the parties to seize the moment, engage constructively and demonstrate commitment to the millions of Syrians who are counting on their leadership for a brighter future. We commend the Special Envoy's continued robust engagement with civil society and with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. In particular we welcome the convening of the Women's Advisory Board meeting from 26 September to 1 October in Helsinki, and we encourage their continued engagements in a manner that reflects the diversity of voices of Syrian women.

The security situation continues to be characterized by an uptick in violence, targeted killings, terrorist attacks, shelling and air strikes in parts of the north-east and north-west of the country and in the south, particularly in Dara'a. Indeed, the alarming and vicious attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other armed groups are despicable. In this regard, Kenya reiterates, first, the ever-growing need for the parties to honour the nationwide ceasefire and commit to ensuring that it holds. Secondly, the parties must commit to a renewed unified action against terrorist groups, including holding to account those responsible for heinous crimes in accordance and full compliance with international humanitarian law and applicable United Nations resolutions. Thirdly, all parties, including foreign armies, must exercise maximum restraint and refrain from actions that could jeopardize the safety and security of the people and the country.

In closing, Kenya commends and supports the efforts of the Special Envoy in facilitating the Syrian political process, which should remain Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, in a fashion that reflects the collective aspirations of the Syrian people.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ireland.

I want to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and express the deep appreciation of my country, Ireland, for his ongoing and tireless efforts. I also want to sincerely thank Ms. Rouba Mhaissen for her impressive remarks this morning. Her voice and, through her, the voices of the countless communities affected and displaced by the tragic conflict in Syria are exactly what the Security Council needs to hear. Her presence today matters, and I want to thank her.

Regrettably, of course, we meet again against the backdrop of extremely limited political progress. For millions of vulnerable people, that means another month of conflict, another month of suffering and loss, and another month without hope. We reiterate our call on the Syrian Government to cooperate constructively with the United Nations and to engage fully and in good faith with the efforts of the Special Envoy.

The upcoming round of negotiations of the Constitutional Committee is a welcome development. It presents a rare opportunity now for real progress. I urge all parties to grasp that opportunity. Otherwise put, we cannot afford to squander this chance.

Our briefers today have put into stark relief the fact that peace and stability remain distant dreams for the Syrian people. We know that there are differing views around this table about how to address that. But let us be clear: when we are divided in this Chamber, it is almost always the vulnerable who suffer the consequences.

As High Commissioner Bachelet set out last week, a decade of conflict has already caused over 350,000 identifiable deaths. This is unconscionable and cannot continue. A comprehensive political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is more urgently needed now than ever. To achieve that, addressing the root causes of the conflict and the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons remains fundamental.

In Ireland, we know that inclusive peace is sustainable peace. It is critical that Syrian women, representing all backgrounds, are fully, equally and meaningfully involved at all levels in the political process. All of us in this Chamber know that Syrian women and girls have been disproportionately affected by this devastating decade-long war. They have been subjected to horrific sexual and gender-based violence as well as to early and forced marriage. Many have experienced food insecurity and lack access to education and health care.

Despite these challenges, the women of Syria, as Ms. Mhaissen has so clearly described, are keeping faith with the future of Syria and are playing a critical role in leadership development and conflict resolution. We salute their courage, determination and commitment. Their resilience inspires us. We should listen and learn from their valuable experiences. Put simply, their meaningful participation, to which some of us often pay lip service in this Chamber, is an actual reality and is key to achieving long-lasting peace.

We are deeply concerned by reports of the explicit targeting of refugees returning to Syria. Unfortunately, the fact remains that Syria does not yet offer a safe and stable environment for the sustainable and dignified return of refugees. I want to underline that all returns should be safe, voluntary and dignified.

As we speak, tens of thousands of Syrians desperately await news from missing or disappeared loved ones. Tens of thousands more, including women and children, remain unlawfully deprived of their liberty. I repeat our call on the Syrian authorities and other parties to release detainees and abductees in meaningful numbers.

The ceasefire in Dara'a city earlier this month was a positive development. However, we remain concerned about its fragility as well as the lasting impact of the fighting that took place.

The worrying escalation of violence in north-west Syria has continued at a time when the coronavirus disease is surging. We continue to receive reports of indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects. Those remain utterly unacceptable.

Finally, I want to repeat Ireland's longstanding call for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria.

Once again, we say sincerely that it is incumbent upon all of us here in the Council to do all in our power to support the efforts of the Special Envoy and to work to prevent further destruction and loss in Syria. Now is the time to act. The people of Syria have waited too long and suffered too much.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, in his address to the General Assembly yesterday (see A/76/PV.16), indicated that the Syrian Government has always been open to any genuine and impartial political initiatives or efforts to assist the Government in ending the crisis that targeted the State and the people of Syria, despite the obstacles placed by countries that have no interest in these continued efforts to achieve stability in Syria while maintaining our national pillars.

The Syrian Government has facilitated the launch of the work of the Constitutional Committee by contributing to reaching an agreement on the formation and rules of procedure of the Committee. The Government also stressed the need for the process to be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, without any foreign intervention or any attempt to impose artificial deadlines or advance conclusions to the work of the Committee, given that the constitution and anything related thereto is a Syrian matter to be determined by the Syrians themselves, pursuant to the principle of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is an established principle that is reaffirmed by all relevant Security Council resolutions on the situation in my country.

The Syrian Government is continuing to cooperate with the Special Envoy, Mr. Pedersen, and we welcomed his visit to Damascus on 11 and 12 September, where he conducted constructive discussions. We also welcome what Mr. Pedersen noted in his briefing about his intention to issue invitations to the sixth session of the Constitutional Committee, to be held in Geneva in October.

We reaffirm the need for the Special Envoy to maintain his role as a facilitator and to convey what he sees in an impartial, neutral and objective manner.

The recent settlements and reconciliation in Dara'a governorate prove once again that the Syrian Government is keen to restore security and stability to all parts of the country while ensuring the safety of its citizens and ending the bloodshed of innocents. The patience and wisdom of the Syrian leadership, along with the efforts of our Russian friends, helped to reach an agreement to restore stability in the areas that witnessed tensions recently in Dara'a and its rural area, in south-west Syria. That also allowed residents to return home safely and peacefully.

The role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security was used by some to interfere in the affairs of my country and to disrupt security and stability in Syria over the past 10 years. We must therefore speak out to expose those practices and call on those countries to end that disruptive behaviour and to learn from the lessons of their failed and senseless wars of past years.

The war imposed on us by Governments known to all, through varied and diverse means, has claimed the lives of many. That war has undermined the achievements of an ancient civilization and has led to the loss of the significant development gains made by the Syrian people over many decades. It is high time to put an end to this war and to end the illegitimate foreign military presence on Syrian territories, including the United States military forces in the north-east and the Turkish military forces in the north-west. They must withdraw fully. We call for the immediate lifting, without any preconditions, of the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union, and for support to be provided to the efforts of the Syrian State and its allies to combat terrorism, restore security and stability, and rebuild and rehabilitate the damaged infrastructure.

Recovery projects and resilience support for all sectors must start early, particularly for those of water, energy, education, health care and others, to provide basic services to the Syrian people and improve their living and humanitarian situation, in addition to facilitating the safe and dignified return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes.

To achieve that objective, all relevant Syrian parties are intensifying their efforts to facilitate such a voluntary return and guarantee that the basic needs of returnees are met. To that end, we have taken many measures and issued a number of decrees.

It is unfortunate that the efforts of the Syrian State and friendly countries are faced with the attempts of some to exploit the suffering of the Syrian people and leverage that suffering to achieve aims that are far from being humanitarian objectives and do not serve the interests of the Syrian people, including by relying on the reports of committees that have proved time and again that they are politicized mechanisms and are not professional, objective or credible in their work. Their main objective is to issue reports that will allow certain hostile countries to defame Syria's image.

I must also refer to the aggressive and destructive practices carried out by the Turkish regime on Syrian territories through its support for terrorism and by killing, destroying, Turkification and the plundering of Syrian wealth. They are even using water as a tool to serve their political games and as a weapon against millions of Syrian citizens to achieve political and regional gains in total disregard for the principles of international law, international humanitarian law and international and bilateral instruments and agreements, as well as the principle of good-neighbourliness.

My country reiterates its call to the Security Council and the Secretariat to shoulder their responsibilities to put an end to the crimes of the Turkish occupation and to end the presence of its military forces on the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

**Mr. Sinirlioğlu** (Turkey): First, I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. I would also like to thank Ms. Rouba Mhaissen for highlighting the crucial role of Syrian women in the efforts towards finding a lasting political solution to the conflict. The perspective of Syrian communities with regard to the

recent developments needs to be taken into account, and we welcome Ms. Mhaissen's insights. The Security Council needs to give a greater voice to the Syrian people in the Chamber.

After 10 years of bloodshed, we simply cannot lose another day in ending the conflict. We need to take urgent action now to build momentum for a lasting and credible political solution. We have the right tools at hand to achieve a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The Constitutional Committee is the sole mechanism in place within the political process. We are pleased to learn that Mr. Pedersen's intense efforts over the past months finally paid off. Despite a long delay, the Syrian sides agreed on the methodology of the sixth round of the Constitutional Committee. It is now time to shift gears. We cannot afford to see more of the same in Geneva. It is time for the Constitutional Committee to yield concrete results with regard to its core mandate. It is time to make genuine progress on substance.

There is no room for repetition, stalling tactics or blame games. It is imperative that the terms of reference and the core rules of procedure of the Committee be fully respected. Turkey is actively engaged in efforts to ensure that the sixth round will be held in a constructive and results-oriented manner. We are confident that the opposition will maintain its positive approach, as in previous rounds. Today we reiterate our call to all parties to adopt the same constructive attitude towards the Constitutional Committee. Genuine engagement is required if we are to finally make credible progress on the political track.

While there are positive developments on the political track, we are dismayed by the ever-worsening situation on the ground. The increase in violence in Idlib is a cause for serious concern. Since the beginning of this month, the ceasefire violations of the regime and its backers have reached alarming levels. In September alone, more than 185 attacks have been documented. Due to the recent increase in violence, 22,000 more people have been internally displaced.

Continued ceasefire violations not only risk triggering a new wave of migration; they also jeopardize the prospects of ending the conflict through a political solution. That dangerous escalation also casts a dark shadow over the compromise reached on the cross-border humanitarian mechanism in July and taints the goodwill displayed in that process.

Such attacks continued unabated over the past weekend. That is simply unacceptable. Attacks targeting civilians must stop immediately. The protection of civilians is not negotiable. The regime and its backers must fully adhere to the ceasefire. That is the minimum that they can do to have any credibility whatsoever in the process.

An increase in ceasefire violations is not the only destabilizing development on the ground. The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) remains a major threat to the security of Syria. That terrorist organization and its offshoot, the Syrian Democratic Forces, are not relenting in their attacks against civilians. This year alone, they have killed at least 118 civilians. Yet the international community remains silent in the face of those crimes against humanity, which have also been documented by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

Last week, Syrian Kurds and Arabs were peacefully protesting the price hikes in areas under the de facto control of the PKK/YPG. Yet those so-called democratic forces suppressed Syrians who were exercising their democratic right to protest. It is also that terrorist group that attacks and prevents Syrian Yazidis in Iraq and Syrian Kurds from returning to their homes in Syria. When will that hypocrisy end? How much longer will the Security Council ignore the elephant in the room? When will the PKK/YPG's attack against the United Nations-supported Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin be investigated by the United Nations? We will never condone supporting terrorism under the pretext of fighting Da'esh. Turkey will continue its resolute fight against all terrorist organizations, including Da'esh and the PKK/YPG.

Yet again, the previous speaker poisoned this meeting with fabricated lies. I will not honour him with a reply. Try as it may, the regime will never succeed in diverting the attention of the international community from its abhorrent crimes. While the regime holds onto its illusions, Turkey will continue to address the suffering of the Syrian people. We will persevere until peace and stability are restored in Syria.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Takht Ravanchi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his input. Thanks to his efforts

and the cooperation of the Syrian Government, the next session of the Constitutional Committee is expected to take place soon. That is an encouraging development.

We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy and the constructive engagement of the Syrian Government in facilitating the work of the Committee. We encourage the Committee's co-Chairs to engage constructively and work in a spirit of flexibility and compromise.

The Committee must continue its work without any external interference or pressure. Setting any artificial deadline for its conclusion or any other conditions or requirements of such a nature will negatively impact the Committee's work. It must be ensured that it is a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process.

Concurrent with the Committee's work, serious efforts must also be made in other areas.

First and foremost, the occupation of parts of Syria by foreign forces must come to an end. Accordingly, all uninvited foreign forces must leave that country without any precondition or further delay.

Equally important, the Security Council must live up to its responsibility and compel the Israeli regime to put an immediate end to its acts of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. Such adventurist practices, which we condemn in the strongest terms, constitute flagrant violations of international law, threatening regional and international peace and security.

In addition, fighting all terrorist groups must continue unabated, as their presence and criminal activities threaten the security and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as peace and security in the region. We reject separatist activities or illegitimate self-rule initiatives in Syria and condemn all efforts to support them. The sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all.

Likewise, Syria's reconstruction and the return of refugees and displaced persons must go hand in hand with the political process. They are interlinked, mutually inclusive and mutually reinforcing. That requires depoliticizing humanitarian aid and the return of refugees and displaced persons, as their politicization only prolongs both the crisis and the woes of the Syrian people, who have already been suffering seriously from more than 10 years of conflict.

In that context, we recall resolution 2585 (2021), through which, in paragraph 3, the Security Council called upon all Member States “to respond with practical steps to address the urgent needs of the Syrian people”. The reference to “practical steps” in the resolution is, inter alia, meant to call for the removal of unilateral sanctions. As resolution 2585 (2021) is the result of a compromise, including by the main countries imposing such sanctions, we urge them to honour their promises, take their obligations under that resolution seriously and immediately and fully remove all unlawful sanctions against Syria, which are among the major causes of the current humanitarian situation in that country.

We reiterate our principled position that the Syrian crisis must be settled peacefully and in accordance with principles of international law, particularly respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, non-intervention and non-interference in their internal or external affairs and the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

Finally, I reiterate the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the people and the Government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.

*The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.*