



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

*Provisional*

## 8957<sup>th</sup>

meeting

Thursday, 27 January 2022, 3 p.m.

New York

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*President:* Ms. Juul . . . . . (Norway)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. Costa Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Xing Jisheng
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mrs. Hackman
India . . . . .	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
Kenya . . . . .	Mrs. Toroitich
Mexico . . . . .	Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.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. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

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

Before we begin with our speakers list today — recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working methods — I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to seven to 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I start by saying how extremely concerned we are — and I am sure we all are — about the hundreds of children trapped in a terrifying prison siege in Al-Hasakah. It is critical that all children be accounted for, evacuated to safety and supported.

But even if they leave the prison, their future is uncertain. They are not out of danger. Their chance of a family life or of a return to any kind of normal is remote. They need to recover, reintegrate into their communities and rebuild their lives. As Henrietta Fore of UNICEF has said, the children in that prison should never have been there in the first place.

Their predicament, if I may, echoes that of the whole country. It should never have been in the situation we

see now. Many more Syrian girls and boys are shivering in tents in the snow. Others are stuck in displacement camps or detention facilities with little hope of getting out. And millions more, lucky enough to have housing and to be with their families, are still missing out on a healthy diet and reliable schooling.

As the country moves further into its second decade of conflict, and as I have said before, we are failing the Syrian people, young and old. If civilians were protected, sufficient relief provided and basic social services kept going, we could say that we are providing a bare minimum. But we are not even managing that, I regret to say. Failure each year cannot be our strategy. This year, we have to lighten the load on Syrian civilians. I urge Council members to work with the United Nations and key humanitarian agencies on a new approach.

Hotspots in the conflict continue to claim civilian lives. On 20 January, six civilians, including four children, were killed when missiles landed in Afrin city. The support systems for everyday life are at risk. Another airstrike in early January severely damaged the main water station servicing Idlib city. The appalling attack on a prison in Al-Hasakah in recent days and its aftermath are another vivid reminder — if we needed one — of how volatile other parts of the country still are. It is also a chilling reminder of the threat of the Islamic States in Iraq and the Sham.

In Al-Hol camp, meanwhile, violence continues. On 11 January, a Syrian health worker was killed. Another doctor was injured the next day, as we all know. We need to do better to keep camp residents and humanitarian workers safe. Above all, we need durable solutions for the people living in the camps, including the safe repatriation of all third-country nationals, first and foremost children.

I reiterate a simple message. Civilians, especially children, and civilian objects must be protected.

On top of the effects of conflict, unusually bitter winter storms last week left a trail of destruction. Thousands of tents, in which people have been living for so many years, were damaged in camps in the north-west. Displaced people are burning garbage to stay warm, and risk asphyxiation sheltering from sub-zero temperatures in those tents. One child was reported to have died when snow collapsed a tent. I cannot imagine that. In the last month, at least 24 people have been injured and two have died due to tent fires.

People should not have to suffer like this every winter. We could and should get them the support they need and a different kind of housing, even if it is temporary. But with our current funding, we can help only half of the over 4 million people across Syria who need protection from the elements and the basics of survival.

Meanwhile, the economic crisis continues to deepen. Food is getting ever more expensive. The cost of an average food basket has reached new highs in every one of the past four months. Domestic food production is also a concern. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reports that wheat production dropped by over 60 per cent in 2021 — a single year. While needs are increasing, international aid resources are declining, despite the generosity of many member States represented here, including your own, Madam President. The food aid we provide to millions of people each month is just not enough.

However, despite the daunting circumstances and the sad and tragic picture that I have been trying to depict, we can continue to make a difference with smart funding and creative humanitarian efforts. For example, we run early recovery projects to support food production so that we can reduce dependency on food aid. FAO is expanding irrigation projects along the Euphrates river, specifically with such an objective in mind. Expanding early recovery projects — and we have seen reference to them in resolution 2585 (2021) — is crucial. We continue to reach people in need in north-western Syria through cross-line deliveries. As we discussed at our last meeting on this issue in December (see S/PV.8937), two cross-line operations have been completed and a third is expected to take place soon, in line with the six-month plan that we discussed earlier. I urge ongoing support from all here to ensure that timely and predictable deliveries continue. I thank the authorities responsible for those permissions for the actions they have taken. Distribution of that aid also continues. Food delivered cross-line has reached more than 40,000 people again this month.

These developments are positive, and we must use all avenues to reach those in need. However, let me reiterate that cross-line operations do not replace the size or the scope of the massive cross-border operation at this point. Each month, the United Nations and its partners deliver food and other critical items for millions of people in the north-west of Syria — people

who need our support and deserve it. Through that support, people can see a doctor, get essential medicine and send their children to school. As the Secretary-General stated in his report on resolution 2585 (2021) (S/2021/1029) in December, our cross-border operation is one of the most closely monitored operations in the world. We know what the needs are, what aid is being delivered and where aid is going.

As if it needs repeating, civilians need food, medicine and other life-saving items. They need access to basic services. They need a chance to live a dignified life. They need protection from harm.

To achieve that, we need to expand access. We need the funds to sustain humanitarian operations. We need to reach more people with immediate life-saving assistance. We need to scale up early-recovery programmes, and we will play our part in that. Such programmes offer a pathway to more self-sufficiency and the possibility of basic services for those families who must have them but so often do not.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Egeland.

**Mr. Egeland:** I returned to Syria yet again in December, travelling to Dara'a in the south, which was recently struck by renewed armed conflict, as well as Damascus and eastern Ghouta.

While Syria has faded from the international headlines, the situation on the ground has become dramatically worse. The armed conflict continues to cause death, destruction and displacement among civilians, as we saw in recent days in the north-east, as just described by Mr. Griffiths. At the same time, the economic crisis, exacerbated by drought, is now so deep that families had this recurrent message when I met them: "We have gone from war to hell." The gap between assessed needs and the humanitarian funding that we have available continues to grow. We have virtually no funding for early recovery.

Syrian civilians feel prisoners of a human-made, political stalemate that has crippled hope among children and youth. We ask for help from Council members and influential Powers with parties and actors in the region in the following areas. Forgive me for being blunt, but I think that the situation demands it.

First, on access, humanitarian work is still hampered by administrative, logistical, legal and physical barriers in virtually all parts of Syria. We need more effective humanitarian diplomacy with parties and actors so that our aid can reach all Syrians in need.

Russia and others can help on the Government side, where we are, for example, still unable to provide legal aid to displaced people and returnees to Syria. Turkey, the United States and others can help with the de facto authorities in opposition-controlled areas. The humanitarian space and action need to be depoliticized so that we can reach all people in need.

Secondly, we can, and must, prevent a bloodbath in Idlib. Three million people who are extremely vulnerable live in opposition-controlled areas in the north-west. Tents were buried in snow there last week. We cannot have a war in what is, in reality, a gigantic string of displacement camps.

We should remember that many of the fighters and their families were sent to Idlib on buses from besieged areas elsewhere as part of negotiated agreements. All conflict parties, including the Russian and Syrian Governments, and those who can influence armed opposition groups, including Turkey, must renew their efforts with United Nations mediators to reach a negotiated solution and prevent a potential bloodbath.

Neighbouring countries, in particular Turkey, already generously host millions of refugees. Now is not the time to close borders. Now is the time for all, including Europe and others, to jointly shoulder the responsibility to ensure that Syrian civilians are granted their right to protection and asylum, in accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Thirdly, on deconfliction, hospitals, displacement camps, apartment buildings and markets are still bombed and attacked in Syria in blatant violation of international humanitarian law. Deconfliction is the tool that we, as humanitarians, have to ensure that conflict parties, with air forces and heavy weapons, are aware of — and therefore must actively protect — civilian, medical and humanitarian sites.

The United Nations-led deconfliction system for Syria needs to be relaunched, with rebuilt trust among humanitarian and medical actors and with the participation of all relevant parties, including Russia. To be effective, the system needs continuous monitoring of both the purely civilian nature of deconflicted sites and

the monitoring and reporting of all attacks, including near-misses. There must be immediate investigations of attacks and accountability for potential war crimes.

The fourth point is on cross-border and cross-line relief. As Martin Griffiths again mentioned, the United Nations-led cross-border operation to the north-west must continue beyond July. It cannot be replaced by us in a non-governmental-organization-led response or by cross-line programming at this time. An essential lifeline to millions of Syrians and the protection of thousands of humanitarian workers are at stake.

The Security Council therefore needs to ensure a continued United Nations-led cross-border response from Turkey, while also improving conditions for cross-line responses out of Damascus and ensuring a continued transparent accounting of aid delivery in Syria. I urge the Council to engage with all parties in control of territory to reduce bureaucratic impediments to a cross-line response.

Fifthly, on water, millions of Syrians are devastated by severe drought and the reduction of water from the Euphrates River. The bombing of a water station on 2 January has worsened critical access to water for people in Idlib city. We call on all parties to ensure that water infrastructure is not attacked.

We urge for unimpeded access for the maintenance of the northern Allouk water station to ensure its continuity for half a million people reliant on that water. We ask all actors to respect water-sharing agreements and to ensure that water is not used as a political bargaining chip.

The sixth point is that we must rebuild civilian rubble. Civilians affected by war have the right to assistance and essential services, irrespective of who controls the territory. That is similar all over the world. Yet any longer-term programming for the rebuilding of homes, schools and services inside Syria has become highly politicized, in particular what may be termed reconstruction.

Children's schools and basic services should not be held hostage to progress in political negotiations elsewhere. We urge a rethink by donor Governments, development agencies and the private sector. Counter-terrorism measures and sanctions have similarly prevented the timely supply of critical machines, training, commodities and consumables.

We therefore welcome the recent United States Government amendments on humanitarian general licences, but we need action on bank de-risking challenges and help to reduce the impact of sanctions on fuel, electricity and the public and private sectors.

The seventh and final point is on solutions for refugees. The first Syrian refugee babies — and we were witnesses to that — were born in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and in Jordan's Zaatari camp. Those babies are now 10 years old. They have never seen the land of their ancestors. Their chances of reclaiming the property of their families are reduced each year. After more than a decade of crisis, displaced Syrians deserve solutions and hope.

But there are still no real relocation programmes to third countries; there is little chance of integration where refugees have received protection; and conditions inside Syria are still not conducive to a mass return. Human rights groups have documented how some returnees have been detained and tortured. Hundreds of thousands have only rubble and destitution to return to, and there is no system for monitoring, assisting, protecting and supporting those who do return.

We call for the cooperation of all members of the Council to give options for Syrian refugees. Remember that the Syrian refugees who recently sheltered in the 73-year-old Shatila camp for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon met the fourth generation of refugees, Palestinians born there, because the Security Council did not do what it should have done for the Palestinians to enable them to return in the 1950s.

We need independent monitoring of returns and conditions in areas of return in Syria according to international standards in a scale-up and diversification of legal aid programming.

I shall end there. We are ready to do our part to rebuild hopes and futures for Syrian children, but we need the Council's help to do so.

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

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Norway.

I will deliver this statement as co-penholder together with Ireland.

Let me first thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for his briefing and for all the efforts of the United Nations and partners to alleviate the

humanitarian suffering in Syria under extremely difficult circumstances. I am also grateful to Jan Egeland for his compelling account. The efforts of the Norwegian Refugee Council are critical to saving and protecting lives in Syria.

The humanitarian needs of the Syrian people must be the overriding imperative for our work in the Council on this agenda item. The unanimous adoption in July 2021 of resolution 2585 (2021) meant that the United Nations and its partners could continue to deliver life-saving humanitarian aid across the border from Turkey into north-west Syria. On a monthly basis, millions of people are provided with humanitarian aid, from health care to food baskets, tents and shelter, and livelihood opportunities. In 2021 alone, almost 10,000 trucks brought vital assistance across the border.

As co-penholders, Ireland and Norway have repeatedly emphasized our support for all modalities to provide humanitarian aid to meet the needs of people across Syria. Our sole objective is ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches all people in need. That includes also by cross-line deliveries to the north-east and the north-west. We therefore welcome the recent humanitarian convoys from the World Food Programme and other United Nations agencies across the conflict line into the north-west. We call on all parties to facilitate their continuation.

However, as reported by the Secretary-General last month, the cross-line convoys are not able to replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operation. The cross-border humanitarian operation remains the critical lifeline for millions of Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance in the north-west. Right now the severe winter in Syria is causing flooding, windstorms and heavy snowfall. Children are dying while trying to stay warm. There has also been a reported increase in air strikes on civilian infrastructure. On 2 January, an air strike hit the Arshani water station outside the city of Idlib. The station can no longer provide water to the 225,000 people who rely on it, and on 20 January an attack on Afrin city reportedly killed six civilians, including children.

We further deplore the recent incidents of humanitarian workers being attacked, including the tragic killing of a humanitarian paramedic in north-east Syria. We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian consequences of the recent attack on the prison in



Hasakah city, which reportedly killed civilians, including children, and caused displacement.

The conduct of hostilities in urban and other populated areas in Syria is causing unacceptable large-scale and protracted harm to civilians and civilian objects. The destruction of critical civilian infrastructure deprives the population of essential services such as water, energy, health care and education, causing grave long-term consequences for the lives and future of the people of Syria.

We call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law, including the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks and the obligation to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure. Effective de-confliction mechanisms can be a practical tool in that regard.

The severe humanitarian situation in Syria has been further exacerbated by the economic, coronavirus disease and food crises, and we have serious concerns about harmful practices and negative coping mechanisms such as child and forced marriages and sexual exploitation and abuse. Children born following conflict-related sexual violence and their mothers are in a particularly vulnerable situation. It must be a priority to stop and prevent sexual and gender-based violence and to respond to the needs of survivors. The humanitarian imperative will remain the guiding principle for our work as penholders on this file, and we trust in the Council's cooperation to that end. Above all else, our common goal should be to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

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

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

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Martin Griffiths for his overview of the humanitarian situation in Syria. We also welcome Jan Egeland to today's meeting and thank him for his balanced assessment of developments on the ground.

Today is our first meeting since the six-month extension of resolution 2585 (2021), in early January. At this stage, we considered it more important to maintain and step up the emerging new trends in the organization of humanitarian aid in Syria, and we chose not to focus on the small amount of work that had been done. It is

no exaggeration to say that that is based on our trust in the Security Council as a whole, as well as our desire to give the newcomers to the Council an opportunity to contribute to this common cause. The United Nations mandate for cross-border supplies of humanitarian aid to Syria through the Bab al-Hawa crossing now runs through 10 July 2022.

A significant number of problems need to be tackled now; we have no time to waste. The problems that need to be solved to ensure balanced United Nations humanitarian efforts in Syria are vast. In concrete terms, over the next five and a half months we have a number of critical tasks to accomplish.

First, it is important to ensure that the established mechanism for cross-line aid deliveries not only works effectively and without interruption but is also expanded, especially to those areas that are inaccessible through the cross-border mechanism.

As far as we know, the critical nature of that step, especially given the difficult winter in Syria, is clear, and therefore any delay in the dispatch of humanitarian convoys, including to Idlib, cannot be regarded as anything other than deliberate sabotage and a deliberate threat to the lives of ordinary Syrians. At the very minimum, the existing clear operational plan articulated in October 2021 by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should be implemented in full. So far we have seen little progress in that respect. We hope that our colleagues in the Security Council will adopt a principled stance on that issue.

Once again, we reiterate the need to ensure a United Nations presence in the north-west of Syria, which will enhance control of the distribution of humanitarian assistance to those in need.

It is extremely important to step up efforts to rebuild infrastructure facilities in order to ensure basic living conditions for Syrians. Humanitarian organizations are already exhausted in their efforts to explain a simple fact: no amount of humanitarian aid can effectively replace hospitals, power plants, factories and schools that are running smoothly. The contributions of donors to these areas of work will not only help to normalize the situation of ordinary people in Syria but also make the cost of the humanitarian work itself cheaper while increasing its impact. In our view, it is very difficult to argue with this simple mathematical logic. We would like our colleagues in the Security Council to redouble their efforts accordingly.

In our further work on the Syrian humanitarian file, we must not turn a blind eye to the negative impact that sanctions and coercive measures have on the lives of ordinary Syrians. Jan Egeland spoke about this today. From time to time, the Secretary-General also mentions this topic in his reports. We hope that António Guterres will pay more attention to it in his reports until the problem in Syria is completely eradicated.

And in our view, there are plenty of grounds for the Secretary-General to do that. The most recent evidence of this is contained in the recent reports of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, which directly spoke about the destructive impact of sanctions on agricultural production and on the supply of drugs and medical products to the country. The only people affected are ordinary Syrians who lack food and medical treatment. Responsible United Nations entities are writing about this. We are grateful to them for their integrity and honesty in fulfilling their professional duty.

Unfortunately, the beginning of the year was marked by a real disaster at one of the prisons in Al-Hasakah. Considering the scope of this tragedy and the emerging threats to the security of the region as a whole, we have requested a separate meeting of the Security Council to be held immediately after this meeting. We trust that this will allow us not only to voice our evaluation of what happened, but also to understand what is happening in these trans-Euphrates areas that are still being illegally occupied by the United States.

**Mrs. Hackman** (Ghana): My delegation welcomes the insightful briefing by Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. We also thank Mr. Jan Egeland, the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, and commend his organization's extensive humanitarian work amid the difficult circumstances of the conflict. Let me also welcome to this meeting the representatives of Syria, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At the outset, let me reiterate my delegation's unreserved condemnation of the attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on the Ghweiran prison and the ensuing escalations in the north-eastern city of Al-Hasakah, which has resulted in civilian casualties and the displacement of over 45,000 people. Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes,

constitutes a threat to international peace and security and is unjustifiable and unacceptable.

Ten years of conflict in Syria has had a profound and painful impact on the lives of the people, particularly women, children and elderly persons. As we have heard from today's briefings, the situation is defined by violent escalations, air strikes and shelling, grave economic conditions, food shortages, a water crisis, and the bitter, wintry cold of sub-zero temperatures. These precarious humanitarian conditions, intensified by the coronavirus disease pandemic, should drive our collective commitment to prioritizing life-saving humanitarian assistance to the millions of Syrians in need. There is a most urgent need to scale up food and non-food aid across the whole of Syria in response to what is indeed a humanitarian emergency.

As other members of the Security Council have rightly pointed out, a political solution is a *sine qua non* to ending the humanitarian crisis in Syria once and for all. This would require the parties to respect a nationwide ceasefire and allow progress on the political track through dialogue and consensus. The international community must lend its full support to the accelerated implementation of the road map outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) to ensure a comprehensive and lasting solution to the multifaceted crisis in Syria.

Secondly, we welcome the renewal of the cross-border mechanism authorizing United Nations aid delivery through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing until 10 July 2022. This renewal is our act of humanity in offering a lifeline to the 3 million vulnerable people requiring urgent humanitarian assistance in the north-west of Syria. In the face of the compounding crisis, we believe that all modalities of delivery must be deployed to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. We deplore the use of humanitarian aid as a weapon of war and call on the parties to allow unimpeded and sustained access to the communities in need.

My third point relates to the protection of civilians and critical infrastructure. In December last year, air strikes and shelling in the north-west killed three civilians, including two children, and injured 16 civilians, including four women and six children. On 2 January 2022, the Arshani water station that provides water to nearly a quarter million people in Idlib was also substantially damaged by an air strike.

Ghana is also concerned about the safety of the hundreds of children who were recently caught up in

the attack at the Ghweiran prison. We urge all parties to the conflict to prioritize civilian protection and adhere to their international obligations to protect children and civilian infrastructure.

Lastly, we support the call for increased humanitarian funding, including support for early-recovery and livelihood assistance. Comprehensive support to the people of Syria must respond to present needs and extend to laying the foundations for post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development.

In closing, I must emphasize that the collective support of the members of the Security Council and the international community is crucial to ensure sustained and effective assistance to the Syrian people as they grapple with this monumental humanitarian crisis.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): Let me thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Mr. Egeland for their valuable information on the situation on the ground.

At the outset, we fully support the efforts of the United Nations and civil society organizations, which, as we heard in today's briefings, provide life-saving assistance to the men, women and children of Syria.

After nearly 11 years since the start of the Syrian crisis, the humanitarian situation remains catastrophic. The figures are staggering. More than 14 million people depend on humanitarian aid. More than 12 million people in Syria, which equals 60 per cent of the population, have trouble meeting their basic daily food needs. Further, over 90 per cent of the population has been pushed below the poverty line — the majority of them women and children, many of whom are especially vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities. More than 12 million people are displaced internally or are refugees abroad, and they must battle with the harsh winter cold to survive. Further to the 500,000 victims, around 100,000 people have been unlawfully detained or have disappeared.

We strongly believe that saving lives must be the number-one priority, but there is more to saving a life than just to provide food and medicine, when even this is a challenge. The people of Syria need education, they need freedom and rights, they need hope. People need an end to the conflict, early-recovery support and respect for their fundamental human rights.

While there is no political solution in sight and the Government neglects the needs of its people, cross-border assistance remains life-saving for millions of

people in need in the north-west of the country. The Security Council has shown many times that it has the power to take action and to make change. When the Council is united, it can make a difference to the lives of millions of people. This is why cross-border assistance is so important and why it must continue. We urge the Council to reopen the Al-Yarubiyah and Bab Al-Salaam border crossings, in addition to preserving Bab Al-Hawa, in order to allow aid workers to do their work and reach those millions of people I have mentioned with basic aid.

We welcome the latest report of the Secretary General on cross-border assistance (S/2021/1030). We fully support the recommendations and measures contained therein. We strongly believe that the measures need to be extended through all available corridors.

The measures need to be extended through all available corridors. We call on the United Nations and its Member States to take the necessary actions to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including as it relates to the protection of civilians. We call on all parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for all civilians in need.

Finally, people in Syria must be protected. We should support the Syrian people in what they need, what they deserve and what they are entitled to, in terms of humanitarian assistance and protection. Albania will continue to support the Syrian people as they pursue their future in peace and justice and hopes that the voice of the Syrians will be heard.

**Mrs. Toroitich** (Kenya): I thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Mr. Egeland for their briefings and welcome the participation of Syria, Iran and Turkey in this meeting.

Earlier this week, we had the benefit of holding a high-level open debate on wars in cities and protection of civilians in urban settings (see S/PV.8953). I am certain that as delegations prepared their statements, several — if not most — recalled the destruction that the cities and towns of Syrian have suffered.

Syria stands as the clearest evidence of the Security Council's struggle to rise above narrow interests to offer hope to a battered and brutalized people. We remain gravely concerned about the deteriorating security across parts of the north-west, north-east and south of Syria. Syrians are facing severe protection concerns,



with shelling and air strikes that have resulted in deaths, injuries, displacement and destruction of civilian property. We condemn, among others, the attack on the Arshani water station in January, which disrupted the provision of water to thousands of people.

Also worrying is the persistent insecurity in Al-Hol camp, where 56,000 people, most of whom are women and children, reside in a constant state of fear due to rampant attacks. Kenya calls on countries to repatriate their citizens in order to ease tensions in the country. We reiterate the importance of protecting civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure. All parties should honour the nationwide ceasefire.

Turning to the economic situation, the statistics are alarming, with 50 per cent of households being food insecure and 75 per cent of households buying food on credit. Furthermore, unilateral coercive measures have contributed significantly to the grim economic situation and the inability of the Government to provide for the vulnerable members of society. We call for the lifting of such measures, especially when humanitarian operations are affected.

It is against that backdrop that Kenya is certain that all means that ensure access to humanitarian assistance are crucial, especially during these winter months. We commend the continuous delivery of the most essential supplies, including the distribution of coronavirus disease vaccines through the cross-border mechanism.

Kenya also welcomes the development and operationalization of the six-month plan to upgrade cross-line assistance in order to ensure sustained and predictable deliveries to underserved parts of north-west Syria. We encourage continued engagements for sustaining timely approvals for all parties, as well as the consideration of an intersectoral delivery in order to ensure that medical supplies are also included in future deliveries. We also call on stakeholders to scale up funding for early recovery programmes that will improve livelihoods and build resilience for thousands of Syrians.

As we deliberate, month after month, and often repeat our unsettled and moving positions, the Syrian people are not being heard. The Syrian people need an international community that speaks with a single voice on offering humanitarian relief. We call on and encourage members to recapture the spirit that led to the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021) in order to

facilitate consensus and collaborative approaches for reconciliation through a Syrian-led and -owned process.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Jan Egeland for their briefings.

Time and again, we come to the same conclusion — civilians continue to pay the price of the conflict and to suffer through another winter. Close to 14 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, as was mentioned today, 90 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line and, as Mr. Egeland stated earlier, the majority of Syrian children have only known war. We must urgently and immediately implement a ceasefire at the national level, with United Nations monitoring. The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is an absolute priority.

Humanitarian personnel must also be protected. It is unacceptable that they are still being targeted, as occurred recently in Al-Hol camp. The recommendations issued by the Panel of Experts to improve the deconfliction mechanism are useful in that regard, and they must now be put into action.

The rise in humanitarian and medical needs make it more essential than ever to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access, which is also critical in order to ramp up the coronavirus vaccination campaign, including in north-east and north-west Syria. All parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian regime, must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The developments shared by Mr. Griffiths with regard to cross-line convoys are indeed positive, and we fully support the implementation of the inter-agency plan of the United Nations. But let us be clear — a cross-border mechanism will be necessary until aid can reach all populations in need throughout the territory.

The European Union and its member States will continue to ensure impartiality, independence, neutrality and transparency with regard to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Those principles are not currently being respected by the Syrian regime.

Attempts to accuse Europe and its partners of conditioning humanitarian assistance or instrumentalizing that aid or sanctions should fool no one. I recall here that the European Union and its member States are the primary donors to the humanitarian response in Syria, including in the regions controlled by

the regime. Since 2011, €25 billion have been mobilized by Europe in response to the crisis. European sanctions are targeted and contain robust provisions for ensuring the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid to the intended recipients.

Without a political solution well under way, there is absolutely no reason to normalize relations with the Syrian regime. Without a political solution, our positions on the lifting of sanctions and reconstruction remain unchanged. The States that are calling to rebuild Syria should start by bolstering their contributions to the humanitarian response.

Syrian refugees will be unable to return while the regime continues to oppose their return, threaten their lives and deprive them of their property. It is crucial that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have access to all returning refugees.

Finally, the regime's crimes will not go unpunished. France will continue to fully support mechanisms to fight impunity.

**Mr. Xing Jisheng** (China) (Spoke in Chinese): I thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Mr. Egeland for their briefings.

The Syrian humanitarian file is considered on a monthly basis in the Security Council and, every time, the briefings have been deeply worrisome. The economic crisis has already affected every aspect of Syrian society. Food and oil prices are soaring, while people's incomes are constantly in decline. At the same time, the coronavirus disease is rapidly spreading. Certain parts of the country are suffering, from severe water shortages. The refugees and displaced persons are in dire need of an increase in winter supplies.

The Syrian Government has taken a series of measures to develop its agricultural sector, help and support small and medium-size enterprises and engage in energy cooperation, which have yielded positive results. Yet the joint efforts of the international community continue to be required to address the serious consequences of the protracted civil war, terrorism and unilateral sanctions.

The international community must help Syria respond to the challenges related to its economic and humanitarian reconstruction endeavours in an integrated manner. It is important both to provide Syria with emergency humanitarian assistance, including, inter alia, vaccines, food, water, supplies and services,

and actively move forward Syria's economic recovery and post-war reconstruction.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies have carried out large-scale humanitarian assistance operations throughout Syria. China appreciates that. We welcome the two cross-line WFP humanitarian assistance operations in north-west of Syria. We hope that the third and fourth cross-line deliveries will go smoothly.

China appreciates the Syrian Government's active cooperation in the cross-line assistance operations and urges the relevant de facto local authorities in north-western Syria to provide access and security guarantees for the cross-line deliveries, facilitate the distribution of supplies and jointly implement the United Nations six-month plan for cross-line humanitarian assistance for north-western Syria.

China welcomes the early-recovery and livelihood projects in Syria carried out by United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We hope that the United Nations will step up investment in this regard to help the Syrian people become self-sufficient. The countries concerned should immediately lift their unilateral sanctions and economic blockade on Syria to create the conditions necessary to enable humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. There should be no political strings attached in providing assistance to Syria.

China knows that the Security Council's mandate concerning the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing has been extended to July. I would like to reiterate that humanitarian assistance must be carried out on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country concerned, and the cross-border mechanism should gradually be transitioned to the cross-line mechanism. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1030) mentions, cross-border assistance operations involve complex environments, and the risk of humanitarian supplies being diverted cannot be ruled out. We urge the United Nations to strengthen the monitoring of the cross-border mechanism to ensure the humanitarian nature of the cross-border assistance operations.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): I thank the Under-Secretary-General and Mr. Egeland for their updates.

As we enter 2022, the twelfth year of the conflict, the Syrian crisis continues to deteriorate. As we have heard today, the humanitarian costs are clear — 13.4 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance across Syria. We will talk specifically about the very concerning situation in north-eastern Syria a bit later. In north-western Syria, there are 3.4 million people whose humanitarian needs can currently only be met by the scale of assistance provided by the United Nations cross-border mandate.

Daily air strikes and artillery shelling continue, with 35 air strikes recorded in one week over the New Year period, including increased attacks against civilian infrastructure. Civilians are being killed, maimed and forcibly recruited in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. We are particularly concerned about the continued use of siege and starvation as tools of war, as well as grave violation of children's rights. In that context, I wanted to touch on the work of the Independent Senior Advisory Panel on Humanitarian Deconfliction in the Syrian Arab Republic and reflect on the executive summary of their work that was published yesterday.

As the Security Council knows, the Panel was set up to build on the work of the United Nations board of inquiry, which investigated some of the appalling attacks against facilities either on the United Nations deconfliction list or supported by the United Nations in Idlib in 2019.

As the board of inquiry set out in April 2020, it was highly probable that the Syrian regime and/or its allies were behind attacks against four civilian facilities — a school, a health-care centre, a hospital and a childcare facility. The United Kingdom has continued to call for accountability for those crimes and has condemned similar attacks throughout the conflict, including the attack on Al-Atarib hospital last year.

It is clear from the summary of the Panel's work that there remains a lot more to do. It is, of course, essential that the United Nations implement the Panel's recommendations in Syria and beyond. Fact-finding, investigations and accountability in the case of abuse and attacks are particularly important, but any mechanism that sets out to support the protection of civilians and the facilitation of humanitarian aid depends on armed

actors taking their obligations seriously, including through participation in the deconfliction mechanism. Without that, the necessary relationship of trust between armed actors and humanitarians is impossible.

By targeting schools, hospitals and emergency first responders, the Al-Assad regime and Russia have demonstrated scant regard for international humanitarian law throughout the conflict. The protection of civilians is paramount. We reiterate the obligation incumbent upon all parties to make every effort to avoid civilian casualties, including by avoiding the use of indiscriminate weaponry in urban environments, and the United Kingdom will continue to call for those violating international humanitarian law to be held accountable for their crimes.

**Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation too thanks Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Mr. Egeland for their briefings, and we express our great appreciation for their tireless efforts, as well as for not losing hope.

Mexico condemns the escalation of violence in Al-Hasakah and notes its concern about the humanitarian consequences of the new wave of violence in the north-east of the country, about which we also spoke yesterday (see S/PV.8955). We echo UNICEF's call for ensuring the protection and evacuation of the children inside the prison, but I will leave my comments on that situation for our next meeting a little later.

Together with the 45,000 people who have been displaced as a result of the clashes, we cannot let ourselves forget even more staggering statistics — 14 million people depend on humanitarian aid. How much longer will this go on? And what is to become of the girls and boys living in the Al-Hol and Roj camps, to cite only one example, who have unfortunately paid the greatest price as they have known nothing but war since their birth and who will surely be the ones who will have to rebuild their country? What will conditions be like then? What will their psychological state be? In these meetings, we have spoken little about the mental and spiritual health of the victims, which we will need to revisit as soon as possible.

As for the other end of the country, in the north-west, we appreciate the update provided on the progress of the six-month plan for cross-line humanitarian crossings, while recalling their central role as needs continue to rise. Winter has already had even greater deadly consequences for the displaced people in the

north-west. The six-month plan will help alleviate the situation, but it is not a long-term plan in the absence of a much broader reconstruction plan. Much more is required than an early recovery project to rebuild people's lives. I also thank our briefers for having provided us with very useful information concerning the deconfliction mechanism That is certainly encouraging in terms of preventing attacks and allowing the humanitarian community to carry out its activities in less adverse conditions.

But all of that will remain insufficient without a political will that leaves no room for impunity, as has already been said. Mexico will continue to lend its support to the accountability mechanisms of various organizations to that end.

**Mr. Ragutthalli** (India): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for his briefing today. I also thank Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, for his insights.

The humanitarian situation in Syria has not seen any significant improvement in recent months. The over a decade-long crisis has had an immeasurable socioeconomic impact on the population. Nearly 14 million people are in need humanitarian assistance, of whom 9.8 million are being covered by various initiatives, including those of the United Nations.

In recent times, the economic situation in the country has become dire, with increasing shortfalls in essential items such as wheat and barley. Further, prices continue to rise and the removal of subsidies on fuel gas and depreciation of the Syrian pound has worsened the situation. The ongoing winter season has also compounded the people's miseries, particularly women, children and the elderly.

The fundamental reason for the aggravating humanitarian situation in Syria is a lack of progress on the political track. Yesterday, we had an opportunity to deliberate on the recent political developments. In that regard, we reiterate the need for commitment by all parties, in particular the external players, to a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and United Nations-facilitated political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We also believe that a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire is paramount to the interest of the Syrian people. While cross-border operations are predictable and important, they cannot continue to exist in

perpetuity. We therefore encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other United Nations agencies to expend efforts to enhance cross-line operations. In that regard, we take positive note of recent efforts on crossline operations, however more concerted efforts are required as we move towards the end of the one-year authorization of cross-border humanitarian assistance.

In order to help the people of Syria in these difficult times, the international community needs to constructively look at promoting projects to create jobs and economic opportunities for the Syrian people. In the face of the falling production of food staples and issues related to water shortages in the region, including those brought about by the actions of upstream countries with regard to water flow in the Euphrates, the collective concerns of the Syrian people need to be treated with the utmost seriousness.

We cannot discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria in isolation without referring to the growing activities of terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Da'esh. The attack on a prison in Al-Hasakah city by ISIL/Da'esh last week demonstrates the severity of the problem.

The resulting hostilities have also displaced nearly 45,000 people. India has been consistently highlighting how external players have contributed to the growth of terrorist groups in Syria. The continuing neglect of the issue by the international community will cause irreparable damage to our collective fight against terrorism. The situation in the internally displaced persons camps housing women and children also remains serious. We strongly condemn the killing of a humanitarian worker in the Al-Hol camp earlier this month.

Taking into consideration the difficult socioeconomic situation in Syria, which has been further compounded by the global coronavirus disease pandemic and the onset of winter, there is an urgent need to scale up humanitarian assistance. In that regard, we are concerned that humanitarian assistance to Syria was in fact reduced in 2021. We urge OCHA to harmonize the data related to early recovery and resilience projects in a comprehensive manner so that a holistic view is obtained.

In conclusion, for our part, India has continued to extend developmental assistance and human resource development support to Syria through grants and lines



of credit for various projects, the supply of medicine and food, artificial limb fitment camps, a next-generation information and communications technology centre and capacity-building training programmes. Since the beginning of the conflict, India has always stood by the Syrian people and will continue to do so.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank Mr. Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, for his valuable opinions.

The provision of aid to Syrian civilians remains a priority, particularly in the north-west and in the south of Syria. That also applies to north-eastern Syria, where the recent Da'esh offensive in Al-Hasakah has resulted in a wave of internal displacement, impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid.

In addition to the repercussions of hostilities on the humanitarian situation, repeated water service disruptions, the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the severe cold winter have also exacerbated the suffering of millions of Syrians.

With so many humanitarian crises accumulating in Syria for more than a decade now, I would like to focus my statement today on the following issues.

First, in relation to humanitarian operations, we welcome the continuation of the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria for an additional six months until July, in line with resolution 2585 (2021). We commend last year's resumption of the cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance into north-western Syria for the first time since 2017. As a result, two shipments of aid from the World Food Programme have been distributed, the latest of which commenced on 16 January, in coordination with the Syrian Government. We also support the development and implementation of the six-month plan of the United Nations to regularly deliver and distribute humanitarian aid across conflict lines to north-western Syria.

Secondly, the provision of medical supplies to the Syrian people remains a priority, especially the provision of vaccines against COVID-19. The percentage of people fully vaccinated against COVID-19 is less than 5 per cent. That requires greater focus from the international community, particularly in the camps.

For its part, my country has sent more than 97 tons of medical aid to Syria, in addition to more than 200,000 vaccine doses. We have also completed a vaccination programme for nearly 12,000 Syrian refugees in the Emirati-Jordanian refugee camp in Mrajeeb Al-Fhood and other camps in Jordan.

Thirdly, we encourage the United Nations and Council members to put greater effort into supporting the early recovery of civilian infrastructure and vital sectors, including education and health, which have been impacted by the conflict. Early recovery will help not only in supporting the provision of basic services, but also in supporting the economy, thereby reducing the assistance required to meet urgent needs in Syria. Regarding the increase in international support for early recovery projects, we hope that efforts will be made to address the issues that are obstructing the financing of those projects.

In all aspects of the humanitarian response, Syrian women must be supported and protected and their resilience strengthened, especially in camps where women and girls are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

In conclusion, we stress that the only way to end the suffering inflicted upon the brotherly Syrian people is by making progress on the political process. That requires at present a focus on reaching a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The United Arab Emirates will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Geir Peterson, and his initiative in that regard.

**Mr. Costa Filho** (Brazil): Continuous violence, an acute economic crisis with escalating hunger, a raging pandemic, systematic human rights violations and a stalled peace process — that is the gloomy scenario described by the briefers today and yesterday (see S/PV.8955) and by the latest reports presented to the Security Council on the crisis in Syria.

I thank Mr. Martin Griffiths and Mr. Jan Egeland for the comprehensive description of the situation on the ground. We also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for the report (S/2021/1030) presented last December, in compliance with resolution 2585 (2021), which gave a comprehensive overview of the work of the United Nations in delivering humanitarian assistance following a careful assessment of the needs on the ground.



Brazil supports the United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2585 (2021), as essential to provide help to some of the most vulnerable people in Syria. As a bitter winter exacerbates the already terrible situation of people living in camps and informal settlements across Syria, the continuous flow of life-saving international aid should continue.

Brazil underlines the importance of keeping those humanitarian operations under detailed and close monitoring and of seeking ways to facilitate the increase in cross-line operations in a regular and predictable way. We also reiterate the call on all parties to comply with their obligation to ensure free and unimpeded humanitarian access, which must comply with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Brazil reiterates the Secretary-General's call for a national ceasefire to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population and its condemnation of indiscriminate attacks, the deliberate targeting of civilians and critical civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, the targeting of humanitarian workers, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and summary killings. We once again call on all parties to refrain from harming civilians and comply with international humanitarian law.

The continued and growing presence of terrorist groups in Syria is of particular concern, especially for its spillover effects on the entire region. We are alarmed by UNICEF reports of nearly 850 children who are in detention in Hasakah, some as young as 12 years old, threatened by the recent episode of violence. We call on the parties to ensure that children's rights are fully respected. Children, both boys and girls, should be kept safe and should not be part of the conflict. Brazil echoes the concerns over the situation of foreign children in camps and underlines the importance of giving due attention to the issue of the repatriation of children to their home countries.

We also draw attention to the potential harmful consequences of unilateral sanctions on the civilian population in a scenario of acute economic crisis and escalating hunger. We call for a thorough and permanent review of such measures with the aim of bringing relief to the population and supporting early recovery actions.

Brazil remains convinced that only a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, United Nations-facilitated political

process, with due regard for the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity, will bring lasting peace and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population.

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): The situation in Syria has brought us here again today to address the humanitarian issues. The briefing by Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and the moving message from Jan Egeland paint a devastating picture of the extent of the needs and the tremendous humanitarian challenges in Syria.

For the past 10 years, the Syrian people have been facing a crisis that has become internationalized. It is undoubtedly the greatest crisis of refugees and displaced persons in our time, worsened by the coronavirus disease pandemic, widespread military operations, in particular in the north-east, massive population displacements in the north-west, economic sanctions, air strikes by some belligerents and the collapse of the economy. With a growing mistrust among the warring parties that undermine efforts to reach an agreement on a new Constitution, there is unfortunately no viable prospect for hope on the near horizon for more than 11 million Syrians in need of humanitarian aid.

Despite that unspeakable situation, humanitarian aid flows to Syria are in sharp decline. The international pledges made at the Brussels conference on Syria in June 2020 remain far below expectations. That has resulted in an increase in the number of people living in food, insecurity, a lack of basic services, a clear reduction in access to drinking water, sanitation, health care, education and employment opportunities, which has reduced the vast majority of the Syrian people to living under the poverty threshold.

That situation is humanly untenable and morally unacceptable, even more so for women and young girls, who are exposed to sexual abuse in camps. The international community must be mobilized even more for Syria. In that context, the implementation of resolutions 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) is crucial to ensure that the available humanitarian aid reaches those who need it most.

In that regard, I would like to echo the appeal just made by Mr. Egeland reiterating that that humanitarian aid should not be subject to politicization. I express Gabon's support for the Secretary-General's report on cross-border aid (S/2021/1030).

Transparency and the involvement of all stakeholders at all levels, from the planning to the operational deployment of humanitarian aid, is essential in order to gain and maintain the trust of people and local authorities, particularly in the context of cross-border operations. Likewise, it is important to continue to establish and maintain measures to ensure the effective, traceable and rational delivery of aid. That requires strengthening norms and follow-up measures, adopting mandatory indicators, guidance documents and follow-up and assessment strategies tailored to the Syrian context.

While we note with interest some progress on the ground with regard to the opening of new border crossings for humanitarian aid, enabling many people to emerge from isolation, especially in the north-west, we must continue to work to perfect the network system for monitoring the implementation of United Nations projects through specialized agencies and third-party actors, as well as assessment and risk-reduction measures that enable adjustments on the ground.

In that regard, the agreement among the various parties regarding cross-line operations in that area authorized by the Syrian Government clearly give greater hope of increased momentum in addressing the concerns of refugees and internally displaced persons considering returning home and providing humanitarian aid to those who returned voluntarily. In those various configurations, what is important is to increase their independence and minimize their communities' need for aid. We therefore must support the deconfliction mechanism.

In conclusion, I would highlight the courage of humanitarian workers and express my country's support for the various humanitarian organizations and their personnel, who, often under extremely difficult conditions and sometimes risking their own lives, continue to provide a ray of hope to the Syrian people on the ground and to help the victims. Indeed, their belief is that these are, after all, desperate human beings — people who should not have to continue to pay the price for unresolved conflicts.

While we await a resolution to deadlocked political processes, their lives must continue. The Council must help them to live in dignity.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank you, Madam President, as well as Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for the sobering

briefings on the vast humanitarian needs in Syria. I also thank Jan Egeland for his update and for the work of the Norwegian Refugee Council to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria and for Syrian refugees in the region. I also want to thank Jan for his work on the Senior Advisory Panel on humanitarian deconfliction in the Syrian Arab Republic. I know that the report was just released yesterday; we look forward to studying it and its findings.

Today I would like to discuss three aspects of Syria's humanitarian situation: the crisis that this cold winter presents; expanding all modalities for getting aid and vaccines to the Syrian people; and protecting Syrian refugees.

First, as the Syrian people grapple with freezing temperatures and inclement weather, millions need basic supplies for winter — tents, blankets, coats and heating fuel. How is it that after the 11 frigid winters since the beginning of the Syrian uprising, the Syrian people continue to face the same dangers from the same conflict and the same inaction? This winter is somehow even worse — exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the economic crisis and the escalation in violence. Food needs are at their highest levels since the crisis began, and millions of people cannot reliably access sufficient and safe water across northern Syria. The prevalence of water-borne diseases has risen sharply.

The United States remains the single largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syria. But collectively, as a Council, we must do more to alleviate this ongoing humanitarian emergency. Everyone needs to step up their financial support to aid the estimated 4 million Syrians in need of winterization support. The Council must therefore pursue every opportunity to maximize the reach of humanitarian aid in Syria. Failing to do so would further immiserate a people who have suffered far, far too much already.

That leads me to my second point: we support all modalities that bring aid to the Syrian people throughout the country, including both cross-line and cross-border deliveries. We are encouraged by the cross-line missions conducted in north-west Syria. But they were dangerous, difficult undertakings that took months to coordinate. That is why cross-line aid is a complement, not a substitute, for cross-border aid. Cross-line deliveries simply cannot match the scale of cross-border assistance. We need to be honest about that

reality and respect the conclusions of the United Nations stating as much. Dozens of reports from the Secretary-General and dozens of testimonies from humanitarian organizations have made that crystal-clear. At the very least, that means recognizing that cross-border assistance is indispensable, and we must renew and expand the authorization for cross-border humanitarian access this summer.

The Council must work together to ensure not only that Bab al-Hawa stays open but that all cross-border options are available to meet humanitarian needs. If we put politics aside and focus exclusively on the needs of the Syrians, that simple act would get essential items, including medical supplies, to those who are in desperate need. Medical supplies are particularly important right now in Syria, which has one of the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the Middle East and across the entire world. In north-west Syria, only 2.9 per cent of the population was fully vaccinated as of the end of December 2021. The Security Council sent a unified message when it adopted resolution 2565 (2021) in February 2021, which extends strong support for facilitating COVID-19 vaccine access in areas affected by armed conflict and post-conflict situations, and during complex humanitarian emergencies.

This is a complex humanitarian emergency if there ever was one. I saw it first-hand during my visit to Bab al-Hawa last year. So let us make progress on our shared goal of facilitating vaccine access and work with United Nations agencies and other partners to get those vaccines across the border.

Thirdly and finally, I would like to reiterate our deep appreciation to all States that are hosting Syrian refugees, particularly Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Those countries are strengthening regional and global stability by providing protection to those who are currently unable to return safely to their homeland. Let us be clear: forcing or coercing Syrian refugees to return to Syria would endanger their lives and subject them to possible torture, arbitrary detention and death. It is simply inhumane to force Syrians to return home right now. Any and all returns must be safe; they must be voluntary, informed and dignified.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is a threat to international peace and security. It should animate the Council to pursue political solutions to this conflict. In the meantime, we must do everything—everything—in

our power to alleviate this humanitarian suffering and ground our actions in the needs of the Syrian people.

**The President:** The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I wanted to take the floor to express our surprise at the statements to the effect that Russia's non-participation in the deconfliction mechanism is not acceptable and violates the norms of international humanitarian law. It was very surprising to us to be accused by the United Kingdom, whose armed forces have struck Syria more than 4,000 times, as well as Iraq. During one of those attacks on Raqqa, in August 2017, dozens of peaceful citizens died, as confirmed by the the leadership of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. However, London explained it as follows:

“The risk of the murder of civilians cannot be fully excluded. That is because of the inhumane actions of our enemy, which is using people as human shields”.

Russia has always been guided by the belief that the issue of the deconfliction of civilian objects and the humanitarian assistance being provided must be resolved by the United Nations in direct cooperation with the legitimate Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Member of the United Nations.

We have repeatedly noted that it is unacceptable to accord protected status to certain objects in Idlib to which the United Nations has no access, meaning that it cannot determine whether those objects are being used as directed or have been taken over by terrorists and converted into military facilities.

I think that, more than anyone, our Syrian colleagues would in fact be able to describe what the situation is with regard to de-conflicting.

**The President:** I wish to again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The suffering of millions of Syrians is on the increase these days as a result of the extreme cold in Syria. They are finding it very difficult to

meet their basic needs, in particular to obtain fuel for heat, electricity, food, medicine and health care. This situation is the result of the blatant economic terrorism and collective-punishment policies underlying the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union on my country, Syria, in grave violation of all international legal standards and the provisions and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The catastrophic impact of this illegal and inhumane siege has touched all aspects of life in Syria. It greatly limits the ability of the Syrian Government and its institutions to provide for basic needs. It has also prevented the implementation of many of the humanitarian cooperation programmes and projects between the Syrian Government and its partners, such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and dozens of foreign non-governmental organizations licensed to operate in Syria, including projects reaffirmed by resolution 2585 (2021).

The unethical practices of some internationally influential countries opposed to Syria prove the falsehood of their claims that they are concerned about the humanitarian situation in my country and reveal their politicization of the basic principles of humanitarian work by using it as a blackmailing tool to apply pressure in pursuit of their anti-Syrian political objectives.

Western countries that are permanent members of the Security Council, together with their allies, have impeded efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. They have withheld funding for the humanitarian response plan. The fulfilment of their pledges during the past year did not exceed 45 per cent of the overall amount required by the United Nations. They have obstructed the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2585 (2021) on taking practical steps to meet the urgent needs of the Syrian people, enhance cross-line access inside Syria and implement early-recovery projects to provide education, health and water. They have also deliberately impeded the adoption of the Strategic Cooperation Framework between the Syrian Government and United Nations to support my country's efforts to achieve the goals of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, guarantee that we are not left behind and provide favourable conditions for a dignified, voluntary and safe return of the displaced to their homes.

A few days ago, on behalf of my country's Government, I addressed to the Council two identical letters on the crimes perpetrated by the terrorist Da'esh organization and the separatist Syrian Democratic Forces militia, as well as the United States occupation forces in Al-Hasakah governorate, in north-eastern Syria, which claimed the lives of innocent civilians and injured many others, including women and children. Those crimes have led to the destruction of many civilian facilities and infrastructure, as well as to the collective displacement of thousands of Syrian families into areas under the control of the Syrian State, seeking safety. What has happened in Al-Hasakah over the past few days shows the inability of the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international organizations to efficiently meet this challenge, despite the fact that the Syrian Government launched an urgent appeal on 22 January and provided them with many facilities so that they can carry out their work.

The Syrian Government has borne the brunt of the burden imposed by the practices of parties to these events, despite our limited capacity even to meet our own needs, owing to the coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people. The Syrian Government has made every effort to urgently respond to the needs of the displaced by providing them with shelter, food, medicine, relief items and heating supplies in this extreme cold weather.

Some representatives mentioned in their statements the targeting of public civilian health and education facilities. They took advantage of the summary work published by the Independent Senior Advisory Panel on Humanitarian Deconfliction in the Syrian Arab Republic to make false claims and demand accountability. Since these delegations seem to have forgotten the crimes of the illegal global coalition that led to the destruction of the entire city of Al-Raqqa and other cities, which claimed the lives of many Syrians, the crimes carried out by the United States occupation forces in Al-Hasakah a few days ago should awake their memory.

In just a few hours, the United States Air Force destroyed facilities at the Al-Furat University, another educational institution, a bakery, a fuel station among other sites. These attacks claimed the lives of many innocent people. Should those behind the attack not be held accountable for that?



The crimes of the United States occupation forces and their affiliated organizations in the north-east complement the crimes of the Turkish regime forces and their terrorist affiliates in north-western Syria, notably Al-Nusra Front/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which has been designated by the Council as a terrorist group. Although we have made several requests over the past few years to move against these terrorist groups, the Security Council remains unable to shoulder its responsibilities, given that some Western countries continue to go along with Erdoğan's regime, which knows very well how to blackmail and deceive. They provide him with protection from any accountability for his crimes of murder, plunder, confiscation of lands, displacement, demographic changes, Turkification, deprivation of drinking water, trade in the suffering of refugees and the displacement of Syrians. Most of these crimes are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

My delegation reaffirms our position rejecting the so-called cross-border mechanism as a violation of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. The mechanism allows Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist affiliates to continue to control Idlib and detain its residents as hostages and human shields. My delegation also stresses that internal access, through close cooperation with the Syrian Government, is the best way to meet needs throughout Syria. The Syrian Government's efforts, as well as the facilities and approvals granted, should be commended and appreciated. On the other hand, terrorist groups, separatist militias and their sponsors are impeding internal access in order to find pretexts for extending the cross-border mechanism and continuing the violation of Syrian sovereignty.

Before I conclude, I would like to mention the suffering of our citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan as a result of the practices of the Israeli occupation authorities, including oppression, terror, arbitrary arrest and the confiscation of land. My delegation calls on the Council to condemn the holding of a meeting by the Israeli Government in the occupied Syrian Golan on 26 December 2021, and its declaration that it seeks to double the number of Israeli settlers there, in blatant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. My delegation also looks forward to the Security Council taking urgent action to put an end to the recurrent Israeli attacks against the sovereignty of the Syrian territories and to implement

its resolutions to ensure the withdrawal of Israel from all the Syrian Golan to 4 June 1967 borderline.

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

**Mr. Keçeli (Turkey):** The Syrian people are once again caught between violence, starvation, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and a harsh winter. This year, the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance has risen to 14 million people.

Earlier this week, the United Nations Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis provided an insight into the current needs in north-west Syria. He made an appeal for safer, more dignified shelters as 150,000 Syrians contend with sub-zero temperatures. Turkey has our own national project to alleviate shelter needs in Idlib, but we continue to encourage other international stakeholders and donors to prioritize funding such projects.

The United Nations cross-border mechanism is a lifeline to 3.4 million people in the north-west. There is simply no alternative available in scale or scope that could address the increasing needs in the north-west. The lives of millions of vulnerable people depend on the aid channelled through the single border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa, where the most scrutinized monitoring system in the world is in place.

Last year alone, almost 10,000 trucks left Turkey to deliver life-saving assistance to 2.4 million people. More than 90 per cent of the trans-shipped cargo contained food items. The remaining materials were used to aid in providing shelter, sanitation, nutrition and education. In addition, over 1.9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines were transported into Syria using this cross-border mechanism. Turkey is proud to cooperate with the United Nations and humanitarian partners so as to ensure that the cross-border remains operational.

Under-Secretary-General Griffiths alluded to the recent developments in cross-line deliveries and their distribution through the newly established distribution method. Turkey is fully committed to contributing to the implementation of resolution 2585 (2021) in all its aspects, including cross-line access. We interpret the current United Nations requests with that understanding. This also requires the effective engagement of the United Nations with local actors on the ground.

As noted in resolution 2585 (2021), early recovery projects can broaden humanitarian activities. It is



important that those projects are implemented without discrimination throughout Syria based on the needs assessment of the United Nations.

Continued funding to the Organization's humanitarian response activities is essential. Last year, the United Nations appealed for \$4 billion to aid the Syrian people. It received less than half of that. Humanitarian assistance is needed because the Syrian regime, Da'esh and the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) continue to violate international humanitarian law. For over a decade, the Syrian people have demonstrated resilience, and we cannot abandon them now.

The effectiveness of the humanitarian response is also undermined by the ongoing ceasefire violations and attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in Idlib. Recent examples include the destruction of a United Nations supported farm and the attack against the Arshani water station, which interrupted access to water for almost a quarter million people in the region. While the Al-Assad regime continues to attack its own people, terrorist organization PKK/YPG pursues the same evil agenda by committing war crimes in northern Syria.

Humanitarian assistance is just a band-aid with which we are trying to treat the cancer. The United Nations has become the aftermath intervention service in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and South Sudan. The international community throws money to keep the problems at bay.

We need to address the root causes of conflicts. In the case of Syria, the root cause of the conflict is clear — the restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms by the Al-Assad regime. The humanitarian crisis will continue unless we address the political problem and achieve a political settlement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The Council must act united in doing what is right for the people whom we have pledged to serve. We are not going to honour the lies and baseless allegations of the regime with an answer. Their presence here is an affront to the Syrian people who lost their lives at the hand of the regime.

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

**Ms. Ershadi (Iran):** The relatively calm situation in Syria in 2021 has further enabled the safe and

dignified return of refugees and displaced persons and has accelerated reconstruction efforts.

Yet, the suffering of the Syrian people continue and alleviating their anguish requires more efforts in various areas. Obviously, nothing is more important and urgent than ensuring Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. That can be done through ending the occupation of Syria and the aggressions of the Israeli regime against Syria, confronting threats posed by terrorists, as well as removing unlawful inhumane sanctions against the Syrian people. Concurrently, the ongoing activities for the effective implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), particularly with respect to water, sanitation, health, education and shelter, as well as early recovery projects, must be redoubled and accelerated.

We fully support the Secretary-General's call to further expand early recovery efforts in Syria and share his view that such efforts are critical to the continued success of the humanitarian response in the country. In that context, the guarantors of the Astana format, in their meeting in December, called for improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and accordingly, urged the international community, the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies to enhance their assistance to the whole of Syria through early recovery and resilience projects. As the Secretary-General has rightly stated, such activities are key to preventing a further increase in the number of people in need, as well as reducing immediate and protracted humanitarian needs and, therefore, reducing dependence on external assistance.

Serious efforts are also needed for the removal of unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria. Those unlawful measures have prolonged the suffering of the people and adversely affected the work of international and national humanitarian agencies there.

Given the dire humanitarian needs in Syria, where, according to United Nations reports, significant parts of the civilian infrastructure have been destroyed or are disintegrating, the Security Council must seriously push for the full, balanced and effective implementation of resolution 2585 (2021).

Resolution 2585 (2021) was adopted with the aim of addressing the urgent needs of the people of Syria, a country in a situation of complex humanitarian emergency, as stated by the resolution. That has yet to happen. At the same time, the Syrian people are, in fact, the ones who should practically feel and, accordingly,

confirm the usefulness of this resolution and the full realization of its objectives.

We call for an increase in funding and allocation of humanitarian aid to cross-line operations in Syria. It is extremely disappointing that, due to the lack of cooperation by other sides, progress on the cross-line operations in areas not controlled by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is much lower than expected.

It is also important to ensure that aid entering Syria through cross-border operations reaches the actual beneficiaries and does not fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

In 2021, 10 Syrian detainees were released, thanks to the efforts of the Working Group on the Release of Detainees/Abductees, Handover of Bodies and Identification of Missing Persons, established

by the Astana format. It was a positive development, which must continue in 2022 on a larger scale. Iran will continue to contribute to such efforts and urges all parties to cooperate in advancing that noble humanitarian objective.

We call for the facilitation of the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons and, at the same time, warn about attempts to discourage them from returning home, including by disseminating inaccurate information about current conditions in Syria.

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

*The meeting rose at 5 p.m.*