



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

Provisional

9003rd meeting

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New York

President: Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Dai Bing
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Oye
Ghana	Mr. Anyanah
India	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland	Mr. Gallagher
Kenya	Mr. Kimani
Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): 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; Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and His Excellency Mr. Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: I brief the Security Council today from Geneva at the end of the fourth day of the seventh session of the Small Body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. The Committee has been meeting since Monday and concludes this session with its fifth and final day of meetings tomorrow, on Friday.

Before the Committee began to work this week, I recalled that Syria remains one of the gravest crises in the world and that there is a clear need for progress towards a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Having this month passed the grim milestone of 11 years of conflict, and with the needs of the long-suffering Syrian people increasing, I appealed to the Committee's members to work this week with a sense of seriousness and the spirit of compromise that the situation demands.

This week, the Committee members have discussed draft constitutional texts on four titles of constitutional principles. Let me mention them here — basics of governance, State identity, State symbols and regulation and functions of public authorities. Today they are discussing the last title. These are important subjects,

and deliberations — as one might suspect — have not been easy.

We are now at an important moment in the week's deliberations. In accordance with the co-Chairs' agreement that led to the convening of this session, the delegations are expected to submit revisions to reflect the content of the discussions, which are then to be discussed by the Committee members tomorrow.

We will therefore see if the next 24 hours help to move us forward. There are significant differences, but it is possible to find and build on common points if the will exists to do so. Serious attempts should be made by all delegations in order to begin to narrow differences. That requires taking on board aspects of points made by other delegations and entertaining compromise formulations that could, in time, attract support within the Committee, in accordance with its decision-making procedures. A constitution-making effort that actually starts to explore compromises could help build trust and confidence in this process — something sorely lacking at present among the Syrians.

Turning to the situation on the ground, Martin Griffiths will brief the Council on the growing humanitarian needs and the continued effects on the Syrian people of the destruction of so much of the country and the collapse of Syria's economy. I urge all concerned to take measures to reverse those negative trends, to expand cross-line and cross-border assistance, and to enhance efforts for early recovery to build resilience.

Beyond the humanitarian sphere, there is much else that could be done to build trust and confidence, something that I continue to explore with all actors. After all, it is clear that no one actor or existing group of actors in Syria can determine the outcome of this conflict. A military solution is an illusion. That was always the case, but it is now plain for all to see.

There have been no shifts in the front lines for two years now. Yet this past month, violence has continued between the various Syrian actors, two listed terrorist groups and involving five foreign armies, too. With front lines frozen, there is every reason to try to de-escalate militarily and build a true nationwide ceasefire. Likewise, with listed terrorist groups still a threat, the parties share an interest and a duty to cooperate among themselves.

Syrians on all sides continue to be affected by the plight of the detained, the abducted and the missing. Any credible attempt to build trust and confidence must include serious steps forward on this issue — an issue that has been a priority of mine from day one and continues to be.

There is also much more that could be done by the Syrian Government on the one hand and by outside actors on the other to address the very real concerns that Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons express — the very concerns that prevent most from returning: safety and security; lack of livelihoods and work opportunities; lack of adequate housing as well as concerns over housing, land and property rights; military service requirements; and inadequate basic services.

I believe that in areas such as those, and potentially others, too, it should be possible to identify concrete, reciprocal, verifiable measures that could be taken in parallel and that could begin to shift conflict dynamics, and, in the process, to explore how a broader political process could be constructed to tackle all the issues mentioned in resolution 2254 (2015).

I have already received some ideas, and I continue to develop others. There is now a need to deepen the discussion, and I will be carrying forward the consultations with that objective. The constructive international diplomacy needed to support that effort has not been made easier by recent heightened international tensions, but I will keep working on this.

Let us also remember the impact of the Syrian conflict on the region. I am pleased that the Council is hearing a briefing today from Assistant Secretary-General Hossam Zaki of the League of Arab States. Regional input and support for the United Nations-led effort to facilitate a political settlement will be critical, as will contributions from many other international stakeholders. That is why I continue to consult widely. This past month I held consultations in Geneva with the envoys of several States, travelled to Washington, D.C., to brief officials of a number of States who met there under United Nations auspices, and travelled to Antalya, Turkey, where I was able to meet the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Russia, among other interlocutors.

I also continue to consult widely with the Syrians as I pursue my mandate and to value the insights and inputs I receive. The Women's Advisory Board met this

past week and a half outside Geneva, and they continue to provide me with their perspective and ideas on the political process. Offering a gendered perspective, members of the Board underlined ways to ensure that the aspirations of all Syrians are considered as the political process continues. I welcome their willingness to engage on tough questions.

Earlier this month, we also convened in Geneva the Thematic Working Groups of the Civil Society Support Room on the topics of civic space and values, as well as on the economy, recovery and development perspectives. Participants were keen to support our efforts to promote a functioning political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015). Many are involved in local peacebuilding projects to promote a society based on the common civic values of participation, plurality, equality, non-violence and respect for rights and freedoms. They expressed their distress at the economic situation, which nourishes the war economy, and called on donors not to forget Syria and to invest in early-recovery efforts.

In concluding, I wish to emphasize once again that I continue to rely on all members of the Security Council to support my efforts, in accordance with my mandate, to bring about the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), to restore the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, and to enable the Syrian people to realize their legitimate aspirations.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: This month marks 11 years of war, destruction and humanitarian crisis for the people of Syria. Such devastation finds few parallels in recent history.

More than 350,000 people have been killed and nearly 14 million displaced from their homes. Basic services have been destroyed. Five million children born since the start of the conflict have known nothing but hardship, nothing but war. Those are terrible, sobering figures.

Civilians continue to be killed or injured along front-line areas of north-west and north-east Syria, despite, as Geir has been saying, no significant movement in the front lines. In February alone, 18 civilians were killed in north-west Syria, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We continue to be concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Al-Hol, where some 56,000 people live. Incidents resulting in death and injury, including of children, continue, as we have discussed in this Chamber before. The protection of camp residents, most of them women and children, must be front and centre. At the same time, we need to maintain the civilian character of the camp. I take this opportunity once more to call for the full repatriation of third-country nationals from camps in north-east Syria.

Each month the situation for Syrians becomes bleaker, as Geir has also mentioned. This month is no different. As we reported here last month (see S/PV.8978), 14.6 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, more than at any time since the start of the conflict. The graph keeps getting worse.

Today's crippling economic crisis continues to push humanitarian needs to new heights. Very high levels of food insecurity, with 12 million people considered food-insecure, are at risk of rising further. The Syrian pound is reaching record lows, reducing purchasing power.

The war in Ukraine is leading to soaring food and energy prices globally. That is expected to have a particularly negative impact on the region, including in Syria. Already food prices have hit record highs each month over the last five months; they have gone up and up and up. Basic commodities are expected to become not only less affordable but also less available. Families are increasingly unable to cover basic expenses with their incomes, as we have discussed here before, and the situation is only worse now. All that exacerbates an already problematic humanitarian situation. Already, as many as one in four children in some areas are stunted, resulting in irreversible physical and cognitive harm.

Sadly, that also aggravates existing protection concerns. As in every crisis, the vulnerable suffer the most. For example — and I find this to be an extraordinary report — 71 per cent of communities have reported instances of child marriage and 84 per cent of those communities report the use of child labour. Against that backdrop, while we focus on life-saving interventions, as Mr. Pedersen mentioned, we must also intensify our early recovery efforts. People must be allowed to lead dignified lives and see a better life for themselves and their children. We have seen positive work in early recovery across all sectors, from health to education to water and sanitation, including from your authorities, Madam President.

Our 2022 humanitarian response plan is nearing finalization. It includes \$1.1 billion of projects, which is a little more than 25 per cent of the overall requests for humanitarian aid to Syria, that will contribute to early recovery and resilience — much more than was the case last year. There are 570 projects in the plan are focused on early recovery and resilience. That includes, for example, 66 per cent of education requirements, 45 per cent of water, sanitation and hygiene requirements, and 22 per cent of health requirements. I am very pleased that the programming has increased on early recovery and resilience. We hope that this will also lead to generous funding.

One important component of early recovery programmes that needs to be expanded is mine clearance. Mines and explosive ordnance killed approximately 805 people in Syria in 2021 and injured nearly 3,000 more. Around half of the population in Syria is estimated to live in areas contaminated with explosive ordnance. That, too, is a shocking statistic. Access to electricity is also critical to enabling early recovery. At present, one-third of Syrian households receive fewer than two hours of electricity a day. Public services, of course, are similarly underserved. The United Nations continues to engage with all parties on how to ensure that the situation of ordinary Syrians, which I have been describing, is not further exacerbated by the unintended impact of sanctions.

We cannot fail the Syrian people, yet that is exactly the risk we face. There are two areas I would highlight that may protect us from those risks.

First, as I already mentioned, we need funding, including for those early recovery programmes, in particular. Last year, our humanitarian response plan received 46 per cent of funding, which in itself is a relatively good statistic, but in a very grim environment. We are acutely aware of the rapidly rising humanitarian needs across the world, some due to man-made conflicts, others due to climate shocks and extreme weather conditions. With needs on the rise, the requirements for funding have skyrocketed. The funding environment is challenging but we cannot allow insufficient funding to be the cause of further hardship for Syrians, in particular their children.

Secondly, we must ensure full humanitarian access to people in need, wherever they are. I echo the call of the Secretary-General to maintain the consensus on renewing resolution 2585 (2021), authorizing cross-

border access for the United Nations and its partners. The Council has acted in unison on that issue since last July, and it is my sincere hope and that of the Secretary-General that the same spirit of cooperation will remain on that issue.

We continue to work with the parties concerned to reinvigorate cross-line access to the north-west. It is not an easy task. I am hopeful that before the end of the month of March, we will see another inter-agency convoy delivering aid to people in need in that area. In the north-east, the United Nations must be able to coordinate the humanitarian response from within the country through its hub in Qamishli.

Ultimately, now more than ever before, we need action to show the people of Syria that they have not been forgotten, as they fear they have been. We also need to deliver aid that is so urgently needed by those communities, families and statistics.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zaki.

Mr. Zaki (*spoke in Arabic*): The eleventh anniversary of the Syrian crisis coincides with serious global upheavals, which add to the challenges facing the international community and its plans for responding to the humanitarian crises. The Syrian crisis is not expected to be immune to this grim situation, which poses a threat to international peace and security.

We continue to hope that diplomacy will prevail over weapons and war. However, our concerns are growing every day, given the increasing number of people displaced by the war in Ukraine, which adds to the significant responsibilities of the international community. These include the need to address humanitarian challenges and crises that continue to grow in tandem with the armed conflicts escalating across the world.

The Syrian conflict has created a humanitarian catastrophe that has affected all Syrians, regardless of their location. The crisis has had intergenerational impacts. It has led to an increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, along with a deteriorated economic and humanitarian situation, rising poverty, worsening public health care caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the destruction of health-care institutions and the impact of sanctions,

which prevent them from discharging their basic humanitarian tasks.

It is regrettable that 90 per cent of Syrians now live below the poverty line and that some 12.5 million suffer from food insecurity. The conflict has displaced more than 12 million Syrians — approximately 50 per cent of the population. It is unfortunately a unique situation in our modern history. More than 14 million Syrians now require humanitarian assistance, in addition to the tens of thousands who are missing or have been detained.

The League of Arab States is aware of the grave consequences of this crisis on the stability of the Middle East and the Arab world in general. We have followed its repercussions and painful effects on Syria's neighbours, in particular those hosting Syrian refugees, notably Lebanon and Jordan. They have been overwhelmed by the need to provide aid and basic services to Syrians who have been displaced, despite the significant burden on infrastructure and vital sectors, in particular education and health care. Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita. Jordan has hosted more than 1 million Syrians since the start of the conflict, which adds to the burdens of a country that already lacks resources.

The League of Arab States hopes that the sixth Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, scheduled for May, will alleviate the protracted humanitarian crisis and mobilize the necessary support for host countries of Syrian refugees.

Support for refugees and IDPs is a responsibility shared between the international community and host countries, without discrimination on the basis of colour, race or religion, as we regrettably have seen recently. Refugees and IDPs of an armed conflict are humans, first and foremost, whose normal lives have collapsed through no fault of their own. Supporting, showing solidarity with and extending aid to them are core responsibilities of the entire international community. We hope that all stakeholders will play their role in that regard.

The Council of the League of Arab States, meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers, adopted a decision on the Syrian crisis on 9 March. The most important elements of that decision, which forms the basis for the Arab position on the humanitarian crisis in Syria, are as follows.

First, there is growing concern in the Arab region about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the possible catastrophic impact of ongoing violence across Syria, despite the lack of change on the front lines in the north-west and north-east of the country over the past 20 months.

There is a need for stability and for addressing insecurity, as well as assassinations and drug smuggling, especially in the south of Syria, to allow refugees to return voluntarily to their homes and to cease the deteriorating situation in the south.

Secondly, there is a legitimate concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Al-Hol and Rukban camps. International and Syrian stakeholders are called upon to assume their responsibilities and allow for the safe passage of humanitarian assistance into Syria, while stressing the need for the return of all Rukban residents to their homes and completely evacuating and dismantling the camp.

Thirdly, there is genuine and justified concern about any new arrangements on the ground that may threaten Syria's territorial integrity. All attempts to impose demographic changes and create a new reality on the ground in Syria are categorically rejected, as is the continued violation by Israel of Syria's air space.

Fourthly, the Council of the League of Arab States welcomed resolution 2585 (2021), on renewing the humanitarian assistance mechanism. We call on donor countries to disburse their pledges expeditiously, as announced in previous pledging conferences.

We express our genuine concern about the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the Syrian crisis, both on the ground and in terms of the way in which the Council deals with the situation in Syria. Given the grave challenges that the world order is facing as a result of the war in Ukraine, we stress once again that addressing urgent humanitarian needs by the international community should not be waning and that addressing the humanitarian situation by the Council should not cease due to political considerations.

Therefore, the League of Arab States hopes that the humanitarian aid mechanism will continue to function across borders to Syria and that it will be renewed in July free from any politicization of the issue. We believe that renewing resolution 2585 (2021) is vital for the fate of millions of Syrians in need.

In conclusion, I emphasize that the humanitarian crisis in Syria will be resolved only through a comprehensive political settlement based on the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) in a manner that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people towards deciding on their future freely. A political solution is the only means to end the conflict and create a safe and neutral environment that ensures the safe, dignified and voluntary return of millions of IDPs and refugees.

In that context, the League of Arab States reiterates its support to the efforts of Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and we pledge to continue cooperating with him.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Zaki for his briefing.

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

Ms. Juul (Norway): I deliver this statement is on behalf of Norway and Ireland, co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file.

We thank the briefers — Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General Zaki — for their sobering accounts on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Marking 11 years of conflict, death and despair in Syria is a tragic milestone that sees the humanitarian situation continuing to deteriorate. The coronavirus disease, economic crisis and drought are fuelling the misery, with increasing food prices on top of that. Twelve million people in Syria are food insecure. Families face an unthinkable choice between buying food or buying fuel for heating in the cold winter.

The number of refugees, internally displaced people and those in need of life-saving aid remains shockingly high. Those behind the figures include fathers, mothers and millions of innocent children who have never experienced anything other than conflict. Negative coping mechanisms, such as child, early and forced marriages, are increasing. Instead of going to school, many children are forced to work. A staggering 3 million children are out of school this month. Children are paying the highest price for this conflict.

While millions of Syrians have found refuge in neighbouring countries — and we thank those countries for their generous hospitality over all these

years — over 14.6 million of those who remain in Syria need humanitarian assistance and protection. They need food, water, health services, electricity, shelter, education and jobs.

We must use all modalities to ensure that we reach out to everyone with humanitarian needs across Syria. For millions in the north-west, the humanitarian cross-border mechanism remains the critical lifeline for the provision of food, medical assistance and shelter. The humanitarian cross-border mechanism is an irreplaceable tool for the reliable delivery of large-scale humanitarian aid, month after month. It is also the modality that best ensures monitoring and transparency.

The needs are massive and the humanitarian imperative must be at the core of the response. That is why we have been supportive of the six-month plan of the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid across the conflict line to the north-west. We urge all parties to facilitate access and contribute to progress in those cross-line deliveries. We also want to use this occasion to commend the humanitarian organizations — international and local — that are staying and delivering across Syria, despite the extremely difficult circumstances. We call on all parties to allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need.

Violence continues, including air strikes, shelling and the killing and maiming of civilians. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. Yet, since the start of the conflict, there have reportedly been 751 attacks on educational facilities and personnel. Those attacks are clearly contrary to resolution 2601 (2021), on the protection of education in armed conflict, which was adopted unanimously by the Council.

Finally, 11 years on, we must continue to stand together with the Syrian people in overcoming the desperate situation. Our key objective must be protecting and assisting the Syrian people. We welcome and support the increased focus on early recovery in humanitarian programming. While continuing to address immediate humanitarian needs, we reiterate that only a credible political process can give the Syrian people back their future. We call on all Council members to do their part to that end. The Syrian people have suffered enough.

I will now make a statement in my national capacity on the political situation.

Eleven years is 11 years too long for the Syrian people to have experienced upended lives and delayed futures. We urge all parties — both Syrian and external — to do all they can to reach a lasting political solution to end the war. Resolution 2254 (2015) must be implemented fully.

Norway will continue supporting the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, and we are encouraged that the Constitutional Committee is meeting for its seventh round of negotiations this week. We call on all participants to contribute constructively, in good faith and with flexibility towards concrete outcomes and progress on a reformed Constitution as an important part of the political process.

We also welcome the United Nations Special Envoy's consultations with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and Civil Society Support Room, and we would like to emphasize their important roles. Further, we reiterate our support for the Special Envoy's step-for-step approach, as a way of engaging all sides in identifying and carrying out reciprocal steps towards a political solution.

Let me also highlight the issue of persons who are missing or have been unlawfully deprived of their liberty. In Syria, they are inextricably linked, and arbitrary detention is widespread. So many Syrians — not knowing what happened to their family members — are personally affected by the countless numbers of missing and detained persons. Progress on this issue is critical. We call on all parties to allow humanitarian actors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, to visit detention centres and carry out their important work, providing information to the families of victims.

Before concluding, let me reiterate Norway's commitment to the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). As we have seen the last few months, the group is still active and represents a real threat. The continued lack of a political solution allows them to operate. We must not let ISIL take advantage of the situation to further strengthen its position.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. Martin Griffiths, and the Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Hossam Zaki, for sharing their views.

We welcome the commencement of the work of the seventh round of the drafting commission of the Constitutional Committee on 21 March in Geneva. We continue to see no alternative to advancing the political settlement process led and carried out by Syrians themselves with the mediation of the United Nations and without external interference or imposing artificial deadlines and strictly within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). In this regard, we hope that methodological reservations will not interfere with the successful completion of this round of the Constitutional Committee and that the work will be based mainly on a dialogue between the Syrian delegations and their readiness to reach an agreement on constitutional reform. We call on Geir Pedersen to focus on this particular area without being distracted by other initiatives.

Progress on the political track is also particularly needed now because the situation on the ground remains tense and potentially explosive. The main security threats in Syria and for the entire region are associated with the mobilization of terrorists who have taken refuge in territories not controlled by Damascus — in Idlib, east of the Euphrates and in Al-Tanf. The solution to this problem lies in continuing to wage an uncompromising fight against internationally recognized terrorist groups, primarily the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, as well as ending the illegal foreign military presence that violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and in the cessation of arbitrary Israeli air strikes.

The root causes of the general volatile situation lie in the West's continued policy of pandering to terrorists in an attempt to use them for their own aims. The latest manifestation of the dangerous consequences of this approach was a large-scale terrorist attack on Al-Sina'a prison in Al-Hasakah. During the operation to clear that prison and its urban environment of ISIL militants, United States aircraft and armoured vehicles were used, and measures to protect civilians were disregarded. The massive exodus of civilians from the combat zone is eloquent evidence of this: more than 45,000 people left the area, according to OCHA.

Despite the fact that Washington presents its military presence as a counter-terrorist operation, we fail to see any active measures to combat terrorists there. Moreover, according to available information, ISIL and other extremists from east of the Euphrates

are being transferred to other hot spots where it is beneficial for the United States to sow chaos. We also believe it is important to recall that the United States and its allies have repeatedly used the far-fetched pretext of destroying chemical weapons to, in violation of international law and the United Nations Charter, launch massive missile and bomb strikes on the military and industrial infrastructure of the Syrian Arab Republic. It would seem that this is what the rules-based order promoted by Western colleagues looks like.

Given the foregoing, and also in view of the fact that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in the context of the situation in Ukraine, has abandoned the customary neutral language that is appropriate for an international official, we ask Mr. Guterres to be consistent and finally provide his assessment of the compliance of the presence of United States and other forces in Syria with the United Nations Charter. We expect him to publicly name those who are illegally occupying Syrian territory, primarily in Al-Tanf, and indicate who is responsible for the situation in internally displaced persons camps outside the control of Damascus. Otherwise, we will regard the silence of the Secretary-General as a vivid example of double standards.

Further, we would also like to remind the Secretary-General that we never heard his assessments of the United States bombings in Raqqa, Hajin and Baghouz. According to the United Nations itself, there is not a single medical facility left in Raqqa that was not damaged as a result of the hostilities. The bombing of Baghouz killed at least 80 people, mostly women and children. Following the emotional assessments of what is happening in Ukraine — assessments that have been made on the basis of unverified or even unconfirmed information no less — the Head of the United Nations is simply obligated to call a spade a spade in the context of the ongoing United States occupation of Syrian territory, based on information confirmed by international agencies.

On the humanitarian track, we share Martin Griffiths' assessment that every year the international community is letting Syrians down more and more. The implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), which was meant to mobilize comprehensive humanitarian assistance to Syria, is stalling. The planned cross-line convoys from Aleppo to Sarmada have been blocked by militants in Idlib. At the same time, according to information we are receiving, the Al-Nusra Front is

openly saying that until the next extension of the cross-border mechanism in July, which it is, for some reason, convinced will happen, it will not let domestic convoys through to deliver assistance to approximately 43,000 people in need.

There is also no access to the other three Turkish operation zones. Even coronavirus disease vaccines cannot be delivered. All of this is being accompanied by an attempt on the part of our Western colleagues to link the obligations of Member States under unanimously adopted resolution 2585 (2021) to political preconditions. In parallel with the politicization of humanitarian assistance, Europe and the United States continue to suffocate Syria with unilateral sanctions, which are having a detrimental effect on the humanitarian situation and are significantly hampering the efforts of relevant organizations, including through the chilling effect and overcompliance by banks, insurers and economic actors. Again, have we not decided that using starvation as a method of warfare is unacceptable and contrary to international humanitarian law?

We should not lose sight of the task of assisting Syrian internally displaced persons and the return of refugees, which remains on the agenda. The receiving countries, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, are openly saying that their ability to host further refugees is limited. For our part, we consider it necessary to ensure the fundamental right of refugees to return, as provided for by resolution 2254 (2015), under the strict condition of coordinating such efforts with Damascus.

As we are all aware, the mandate of the cross-border mechanism expires this summer. Only one of the provisions of resolution 2585 (2021) is being implemented today: the cross-border humanitarian shipments. It seems no one intends to implement any of the other provisions. Yet, at the same time, Damascus has proven that deliveries to Idlib across the contact lines are quite possible, so humanitarian aid can reach the civilian population directly from the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. We urge Council members not to forget this point and not expect us to turn a blind eye to failures to comply with resolution 2585 (2021), which are becoming more and more egregious.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General Zaki for their briefings.

Eleven years after the beginning of the Syrian uprising and the start of the Al-Assad regime's brutal war on the people of Syria, some in the Security Council want to move on, arguing that the Council spends too much time discussing this issue. That would be a terrible mistake. Syria remains one of the largest and most complex humanitarian crises globally. We are still seeing active conflict and forced displacement. Some countries want to pretend that the conflict is over, but the Syrian people, sadly, know better than anyone else that this is not possible.

So, let me be clear — the United States will not normalize relations with the Al-Assad regime and we urge States considering engagement or already engaging with the regime to weigh carefully the horrific atrocities visited by Al-Assad on Syrians over the past decade, as well as the regime's continuing efforts to deny much of the country access to humanitarian aid and security.

I would like to focus today on three aspects of the conflict in Syria: the need for concerted political engagement by all sides, the importance of a nationwide ceasefire and the need to reauthorize and expand the cross-border humanitarian mechanism to address the dire humanitarian situation.

First, as we heard, we meet as the Constitutional Committee is convening its seventh round in Geneva. We urge all parties to engage meaningfully, constructively and in good faith. We expect all sides to offer revised draft texts tomorrow in an effort to find common ground, rather than arrive intending to provoke the other side. It is time for all sides to comment on one another's proposed texts. We fully support the work of Special Envoy Pedersen to advance progress towards a political solution in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We also recognize and commend the role of Syrian civil society organizations, including civil society members of the Constitutional Committee, in forging a political solution. And in the spirit of the ongoing Commission on the Status of Women, we want to welcome again the work of women-led groups to end the violence in their country, and we appreciate their attention to the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and children.

Secondly, we remain concerned about ongoing violence in Syria and reiterate the call for a nationwide ceasefire. Russia has fuelled and perpetrated the conflict

in Syria with reckless attacks impacting civilians and infrastructure. We are watching with horror as Russia uses some of the same barbaric tactics in Ukraine. Russia's relentless disinformation, including debasing the work of the Security Council and falsely alleging that other forces are responsible for these cruel attacks — whether in Syria or Ukraine — defies all credibility. It is disgraceful.

We are also deeply troubled by reports that Russia has recruited Syrians to fight on its behalf in Ukraine. This would demonstrate Russia's true disdain for the Syrian people. Russia has hundreds of thousands of troops, but would instead send Syrians to die in President Putin's war of choice.

Thirdly, we remain focused on the humanitarian situation. As we heard from Under-Secretary-General Griffiths, an estimated 14.6 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance — a 9 per cent increase since 2021. This humanitarian crisis is the consequence of a conflict initiated by the Syrian regime and made tragically worse by that regime's continued interference with the international humanitarian response. This interference includes the rampant corruption of regime officials, endemic schemes to siphon aid, the regime's practice of favouring preferred communities and connected procurement companies, and its manipulation of exchange rates.

Given the vast needs, our collective efforts must be focused on expanding aid access so it can reach all Syrians. This includes north-eastern Syria, where the availability of essential goods, including medical supplies, has decreased markedly since the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing. The United Nations is facilitating the robust transparent delivery of humanitarian aid into north-western Syria through its cross-border mechanism, which follows one of the most comprehensive risk-management frameworks globally. It is essential that the Security Council renew and expand the cross-border mechanism authorized in resolution 2585 (2021) in July 2021.

We continue to support efforts to facilitate cross-line aid, including by Turkey, but cross-line aid deliveries simply cannot match the volume of humanitarian assistance that is delivered cross-border. Moreover, cross-line aid remains a risky endeavour, as the regime and its backers continue to attack civilians and civilian infrastructure in north-western Syria and other parts of the country. We recommend that any

remaining sceptics of the cross-border mechanism visit Bab Al-Hawa to witness for themselves the incredible volume of life-saving work made possible through cross-border assistance.

Lastly, I would just like to respond to my Russian colleague's comments regarding United States-caused civilian casualties. Russia's allegations of United States-caused civilian casualties through our counter-terrorism efforts are brazenly hypocritical, given Russia's well-documented history of deliberately attacking Syrian civilians, with utter disregard for human life. Russia itself has also supported regime attacks on critical infrastructure, including the Arshani water station in January. I think Russia's criticism is just a means to deflect attention from its own crimes in Syria and elsewhere.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen, Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Zaki for their briefings.

The war in Syria has been going on for 11 years. The date 15 March marked a sad anniversary — the eleventh anniversary of the peaceful uprising of the Syrian people, who demonstrated for freedom, political reforms and a Government that respected human rights. The regime responded with staggering brutality and repressed the protests with bloodshed.

Yesterday, the Syrian women's movement organized a meeting on justice, on the sidelines of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. These women collected the testimonies of victims of sexual violence in Syria. These testimonies complement the studies conducted by the United Nations. Their conclusions are clear — sexual violence is a systemic practice of the regime.

Bashar Al-Assad is guilty of war crimes. To ignore these crimes is to jeopardize the possibility of a lasting peace. That is why we oppose efforts to normalize the situation. The reintegration of Syria into the League of Arab States will not put an end to foreign interference or to regional instability. France will continue its fight against impunity. Those responsible for all crimes must be held accountable for their actions.

The Syrian people continue to pay the highest price for this conflict. Since 2001, more than 350,000 civilians have lost their lives. Nearly 14 million people have been forced to flee. They are still unable to return

to their homes without fear of violence, arbitrary arrest and torture.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate; 14.6 million people are now in need of assistance. Europeans have always answered calls for help and have been by far the largest providers of aid in Syria since 2011. Food insecurity is increasing and the loss of supplies from Ukraine will exacerbate this situation.

International humanitarian law is not an option; it is an obligation upon us all. The protection of civilians remains an absolute priority. It is also essential to guarantee full humanitarian access. The cross-border mechanism continues to save lives. It will be needed so long as assistance does not reach all people in need. The Secretary-General has been clear that preserving this mechanism is a moral and operational imperative. Progress on cross-line access must continue, but let us be clear — it cannot replace the cross-border mechanism. Only a political solution will make it possible to establish a lasting peace.

The Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). It remains the only way for the Security Council to reach a political solution to the conflict together. No single actor holds the key to ending this conflict.

We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy to advance the implementation of the road map. Progress must finally be made in political process and every actor must assume its responsibilities, first and foremost the Syrian regime and its Russian ally.

The Constitutional Committee was created in September 2019. After more than two years, it must produce concrete results. Without a political solution, the French — and European — position on the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction remain unchanged.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and the Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, His Excellency Mr. Hossam Zaki, for their briefings.

The small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee is holding its seventh round of meetings in Geneva, which China welcomes. Eleven years of war have shown that a Syrian-led and -owned political process is the only way out of the Syrian crisis.

China calls on all parties in Syria to make good use of this hard-won opportunity to candidly and constructively exchange views, enhance mutual trust and build consensus. Ahead of the session, the co-Chairs had reached an agreement on improving the working methods of the Body's meetings. China looks forward to the Constitutional Committee proceeding smoothly, independently and without external interference in order to achieve positive outcomes.

The Syrian political process cannot justify the imposition of unilateral coercive measures. China commends the Syrian Government for its active governance efforts and for carrying out national reconstruction in multiple areas in order to address the negative impact of unilateral sanctions on its economy and people's livelihoods.

Over the past period, the Syrian Government has vigorously promoted reconciliation, ensured agricultural production, supported the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, completed a number of housing projects and expanded vocational education for youth, with positive results. Recently, the Syrian Foreign Minister discussed with the head of the United Nations Mine Action Service the issue of clearing landmines left over from the war. It is our hope that the two sides will strengthen cooperation, continuously improve Syria's security environment, create conditions for national reconstruction and promote the early restoration of the normal order in the country.

China has followed closely the humanitarian situation in Syria. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths stressed, the current humanitarian relief efforts should focus on supporting early recovery and reconstruction projects, ensuring the continuous operation of water, electricity, education and medical facilities and the provision of basic services, which are also required by resolution 2585 (2021).

China opposes attaching political preconditions to reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. We welcome the efforts of the Syrian Government, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners to continuously increase the scale and frequency of cross-line humanitarian relief operations and call on relevant parties to give timely approval for such operations and to support and ensure the safety and security of humanitarian relief teams.

I would also like to stress that Syria's oil resources belong to the Syrian people and that troops illegally in Syria should immediately stop stealing and smuggling oil out of the country.

China commends the United Arab Emirates for inviting Assistant Secretary-General Zaki to give a briefing, which embodies enhanced communication and cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. Syria is a founding member of the Arab League and an important member of the Arab world. Syria's return to the big family of the League of Arab States will help forge synergy for promoting regional peace and facilitating the early settlement of the Syrian issue. It is China's hope that more and more Arab countries will resume dialogue, engagement and cooperation with Syria. China will continue to support Arab countries in seeking strength through unity within the framework of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General Zaki for their briefings.

Last week marked the eleventh anniversary of the Syrian conflict. We commend the Syrian people, who courageously and peacefully took to the streets to demand freedom, political reform and a Government that respects and upholds human rights. The Al-Assad regime met those demands with a brutal assault against them that continues today. This year's anniversary coincides with the appalling Russian aggression against Ukraine. Russia's inhumane and destructive behaviour in both conflicts is deplorable.

As we have said many times, there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. We continue to support the United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-led political process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). We urge Council members to continue to call for a nationwide ceasefire, unhindered access to aid and conditions for the safe return of refugees. We commend Geir Pedersen for his continued efforts to facilitate a sustainable resolution to the conflict. He has our full support.

After more than a decade of conflict, the Syrian humanitarian situation remains bleak, with 14.6 million Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance — more than 80 per cent of the population. In addition, 6.8 million Syrians are registered as refugees and 6.7 million are displaced within their own country. Our hope is that Syrian refugees will eventually be able to return to

their homes. But we agree with the United Nations judgment — conditions do not currently allow this. It is essential that international law is respected and that any refugee returns are voluntary, safe and dignified.

It is a sad fact that as long as the conflict continues, humanitarian aid will continue to be vital for millions of vulnerable Syrians. That is why the United Kingdom is clear in its position and commitment to the cross-border mandate, under resolution 2585 (2021). The Council must be prepared to act and support the renewal of the resolution in July. In the meantime, we call on all parties to fulfil their international obligations and ensure access to humanitarian aid.

The United Kingdom continues to oppose engagement with the Al-Assad regime in the absence of behavioural change. Ceding legitimacy to Al-Assad's unreformed, unrepentant and unreliable regime for nothing in return, will undermine efforts to end the conflict and, instead, prolong the suffering in Syria.

Finally, on the Syrian Constitutional Committee talks taking place in Geneva this week, we encourage all parties, especially the Syrian regime, to meaningfully participate. Urgent progress is needed, and we urge the regime's backers to redouble their efforts to find a way forward.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I would like to join others in thanking Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and the Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Hossam Zaki, for their insightful briefings.

It is now 11 long years since the conflict started, and it is still profoundly disturbing to see how Syria continues to sink. Eleven years ago, the Syrian people took to the streets to call for an end to the kleptocratic repressive Al-Assad regime, and the regime responded by killing them. Today, there is no space for aspiration or hope in Syria. The Al-Assad regime has disfigured Syria. It is disturbing to listen to the data shared by the briefers on the humanitarian situation.

We express our concern about the continuing suffering of the Syrian people and the dramatic and worsening humanitarian situation. We stress the importance of unhindered access to life-saving humanitarian assistance through all modalities, including the reauthorization of cross-border humanitarian aid delivery, to which there is no

alternative, as well as cross-line aid and early recovery projects consistent with resolution 2585 (2021).

We continue to call for a nationwide ceasefire and respect for international humanitarian law. We underline the need for the Council to act on expanding cross-border access to alleviate the suffering of Syrian people.

All parties to the conflict must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including ending attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access to civilians trapped or displaced by fighting.

We urge continued support to Syrian refugees and host countries until Syrians can voluntarily return home in safety and dignity, in line with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees standards.

All returns of refugees and other displaced Syrians must be in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement. The Syrian authorities must ensure the protection of all returnees.

Resolution 2254 (2015) provides the basis for a real, inclusive political transition, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. The full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) must therefore be an absolute priority for the Council, a priority that the Syrian regime has disregarded in the past and continues to disregard as we speak.

The Constitutional Committee is the only existing platform to envisage and pursue a political transition, but so far it has produced mainly disappointment. That is primarily due to a lack of genuine involvement and investment on the part of the Syrian regime. The Constitutional Committee is meeting in Geneva for its seventh session, which we hope yields concrete results, but we do not anticipate any tangible progress.

We reiterate that absent constant pressure from the Council and in the absence of any timetable or deadlines, the Constitutional Committee risks becoming a smokescreen for inaction and for maintaining the current status quo.

In conclusion, we support the tireless work of Special Envoy Pedersen in consulting with key stakeholders to move the political process forward. He also deserves the full backing of the Council to put

pressure on the Al-Assad regime to advance with the political process.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Ghana and Kenya.

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and His Excellency Mr. Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, for their briefings. We also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey.

Our statement will focus on the political, security and humanitarian situation in Syria.

Eleven years after the armed conflict in Syria, the situation remains grim and deeply concerning. We are reminded that unnecessary violent conflict has claimed thousands of lives; generated millions of refugees and internally displaced persons; ignited a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions; and impoverished the entire population of a country that once knew peace and progress.

Today Syria is struggling to regain its footing under the most difficult of circumstances. Its people need our support, particularly in their quest for a political solution that takes into consideration their peace and security.

The A3 is pleased to note that the Special Envoy convened the seventh round of the Constitutional Committee meeting, which is ongoing this week in Geneva. We commend the parties on the resumption of those crucial discussions and encourage a constructive engagement on the revisions of the draft text, which will, hopefully, yield tangible progress.

We hope that the parties can make commitments to hold more regular meetings in the coming weeks to create momentum in the quest for a lasting solution.

The A3 is in support of other innovative efforts aimed at moving the political process forward. Those include addressing the situation of detainees, including facilitating the release of the detained vulnerable, particularly the elderly, women and children, as well as clarifying the status of missing persons, which would be a significant confidence-building measure.

We take note of the Special Envoy's ongoing consultations on a step-for-step approach. It is important

that that approach be implemented in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.

The A3 encourages the role and support of regional actors and reaffirms the need to bear in mind that resolution 2254 (2015) remains the foremost road map to achieving the desired political solution to the Syrian crisis.

We must emphasize that all political initiatives should be inclusive and take into account the voices of the widest spectrum of Syrian society, including women, youth, minority groups and civil society.

On the security situation, the A3 condemns the unrelenting violence that continues in the front lines in north-west Syria. Despite the temporary pause in attacks in recent weeks, we are deeply concerned by the frequent shelling and air strikes as well as mines and unexploded ordnance.

We underscore the imperative for decisive collective actions to combat Security Council-listed groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. That is the foremost way to ensure that the victims who have endured suffering for far too long get justice.

As we have stated before, there is no military option to ending the Syrian crisis. We therefore reiterate our call on all parties to adhere to the nationwide ceasefire.

We also stress the imperative for the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

That leads me to the humanitarian situation. The A3 remains gravely concerned by the millions of people in dire need. To reach those people, the cross-border aid mechanism, complemented by cross-line deliveries, should be sustained. In particular, we look forward to more frequent cross-line deliveries in a predictable manner.

We call for urgent and special attention to be accorded to the people residing in Rukban, in south-west Syria. Their humanitarian situation is worsening, and assistance to them must not be impeded. To ease the colossal humanitarian burden in camps, we call on States to repatriate their citizens, especially women and children in camps, including the Al-Hol camp, in a

safe and dignified manner, in line with the standards of international humanitarian law.

The A3 is concerned by the increase in global food prices as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, which is plunging already fragile and food-insecure countries, particularly those in conflict situations, deeper into vulnerability. It is essential to undertake measures to mitigate the humanitarian impact of the situation in Ukraine, including by ensuring that the international community's humanitarian response remains adequately funded.

Furthermore, and given the dire economic situation marked by vast food insecurity, we urge all actors to support economic recovery measures as a key component of the longer-term peace that Syria and the region need.

The A3 also encourages support for the early recovery and livelihoods activities under the United Nations humanitarian response, which is fundamental to assisting Syrians in getting back to their normal lives.

To conclude, the A3 underscores that consensus on both the political and humanitarian tracks is more crucial now than ever before. All concerned parties, including foreign Powers, must put their multiple competing interests to the side and demonstrate that the multilateral system can still be relied on as an effective mediator of global peace and security.

Once again, we reaffirm our respect for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. The A3 stands in solidarity with the people of Syria in their quest for peace, which can be delivered only by a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, with international support.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Hossam Zaki for their briefings. I also welcome the delegations of Syria, Iran and Turkey.

There can be no doubt that the highest price for these 11 years of conflict has been paid by the civilian population. Approximately 14 million people have been forced to leave their homes, and more than 350,000 have lost their lives. With every day that passes, the international community's debt to the Syrian people grows as a result of not having been able to put an end to the suffering of millions of people.

These 11 years have torn deep rents in the social fabric. The role of civil society is key in rebuilding social cohesion in the country. We therefore commend the efforts of the Special Envoy to maintain regular contact with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, as well as with other Syrian social organizations.

We will never tire of emphasizing that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The only path is that of political dialogue to which all parties are committed. It is for that reason that we welcome the convening of the seventh session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee, which is currently under way. We reiterate our call on the parties to be serious and committed as they participate in the work facilitated by Special Envoy Pedersen.

The Constitutional Committee is one of the paths to progress in the political transition, social reconciliation and, eventually, in the building of lasting peace. It is one of the components of resolution 2254 (2015) — the road map to lasting peace in Syria.

We take note of the most recent report 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 (see A/76/690). We call on all Member States to cooperate with it. We also emphasize the efforts of national courts to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for atrocities.

On the humanitarian front, it is alarming that the needs of the population are at their highest level since the beginning of the conflict. The rising cost of the basic food basket causes families to be faced with difficult decisions that no one should have to make. Furthermore, we note other factors that could have negative repercussions on the food supply, such as the increase in oil prices and the impact that the conflict in Ukraine might have on the basic grain supply.

In the light of this situation, the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing remains vital for the survival of millions of people in the north-west. Mexico also acknowledges the value of cross-line operations. It is for that reason that my country agrees with the Secretary-General that both mechanisms are necessary and complement each other. With that in mind, the least we can do is preserve the consensus that was reached last year with resolution 2585 (2021). As Secretary-General Guterres said, it is a moral and humanitarian imperative.

There is no doubt that other elements, such as early-recovery projects, are also key in mitigating the effects of more than a decade of conflict and contribute to building resilience in the country.

I conclude once again by reiterating the importance of a national ceasefire. Streets, hospitals and schools in Syria are not battlefields, and those spaces must be respected and protected.

Mr. Gallagher (Ireland): I, too, would like to thank our three briefers today for their informative briefings.

I will confine myself to speaking on the political situation, as the Ambassador of Norway already spoke on behalf of Norway and Ireland as co-penholders on the humanitarian file.

This month marked 11 years of conflict in Syria — 11 years and more than 350,000 people dead; 11 years and, at least, 100,000 disappeared; 11 years and a country devastated. Syrian children have paid — and continue to pay — the heaviest price. Almost 13,000 children in Syria have been killed or injured since 2011, and a generation of Syrian children has grown up knowing nothing but war. If we continue on the current trajectory, the multitude of worst-case consequences for Syria will be an inevitable reality. It is critical now more than ever before that the parties adhere to a permanent nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Ireland fully supports the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen on the political track. We welcome the convening of a seventh round of talks of the small body of the Constitutional Committee this week in Geneva. We wish Mr. Pedersen well with tomorrow's concluding meeting. However, unless there are genuine attempts to narrow differences, especially by the Syrian authorities, progress will not be possible.

I also thank Mr. Pedersen for the update on his ongoing contact with all parties towards a lasting political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). I repeat Ireland's call on all parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, to cease all indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, I reiterate our call for the release of those arbitrarily detained, for the fate and whereabouts of all those forcibly disappeared to be revealed and for independent monitors to be ensured access to all places of detention.

This month we marked International Women's Day. I would like to pay special tribute to the women of Syria, who have shown incredible resilience and leadership, including in their local communities. Syrian women have an indispensable role to play in shaping the future of their country. They must be fully and meaningfully included in all aspects of the political process. Their participation is key to securing sustainable long-term peace. I thank Mr. Pedersen for his ongoing engagement with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board.

Grave violations of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law, including torture and sexual and gender-based violence, continue to be documented across Syria. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and 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 play a role in documenting those crimes, which is essential for the pursuit of justice and accountability.

I would like to underscore Ireland's unwavering commitment to fighting impunity and ensuring that those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria be held to account. Truth, justice and accountability are the right of the Syrian people. They are essential for any political solution to be sustainable, build trust and ensure that violations never occur again.

In conclusion, the international community, and in particular the Council, has a duty to ensure that the victims and survivors in Syria are never forgotten and to send an important message that justice will prevail and war crimes, wherever they have been committed in the world, will not go unpunished.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their informative updates.

I also welcome the Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to the Security Council and thank him for sharing the League's insights into the Syrian crisis.

I welcome the delegations of the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Council.

Brazil looks forward to hearing the outcomes of the discussions of the seventh session of the small body of

the Constitutional Committee, convened this week in Geneva. We very much hope that a spirit of cooperation and commitment to progress will prevail during the talks, in line with its drafting mandate established by resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, Brazil restates its conviction that only a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led United Nations-facilitated political process, with due regard for the preservation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, will bring about lasting peace and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population. We thank Mr. Pedersen for his tireless efforts to engage key international actors and for his genuine efforts to foster trust among the parties in order to move us away from the current stalemate.

The enduring worsening of the situation on the ground serves as a clear reminder that it is high time for the political dialogue to show practical results to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people. As the conflict in Syria enters its twelfth year, the protection of civilians remains a significant concern. Food insecurity has reached its highest level on record, and electricity provision is severely compromised, affecting basic services. Brazil echoes the calls for an immediate nationwide ceasefire and for early recovery initiatives that can rebuild civilian infrastructure essential for the provision of basic services, such as health, education, electricity, water and sanitation.

We support assessments of the impact of sanctions on the daily lives of the civilian population, particularly on vulnerable groups. Humanitarian exemptions for any sanctions must be strictly observed so as to ensure that they do not undermine access to food, shelter or essential health supplies for those most in need.

Countering terrorist activity in Syria should continue to be a priority, and we must not forget that poverty and political instability constitute fertile ground for extremist forces.

Life-saving international aid to the Syrian people, especially those living in camps and informal settlements, is still paramount, both in cross-line and cross-border modalities. Brazil underlines the importance of keeping cross-border humanitarian operations under close monitoring, as well as of collaboration between all parties for the expansion of cross-line operations, so that they can be conducted in a safe, regular and predictable manner.

To conclude, I reiterate that Brazil fully agrees with the Special Envoy in his understanding that a military

solution is an illusion, evidenced in practice by frozen front lines and a persistent stalemate on the ground. All parties must accept that reality and start working to put an end to the gruesome conflict.

Mr. Ragutthahalli (India): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Pedersen, Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General Zaki of the League of Arab States for their updates.

A few days ago, we marked another tragic anniversary in the Syrian conflict. India has been consistent in its stand since the beginning of the conflict that imposing external solutions cannot help in the resolution of the conflict. It is for the Syrians themselves to determine and decide what is best for Syria and their own future.

The Special Envoy has been making efforts to bring all sides together and facilitate the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We support his proactive diplomacy, especially his recent efforts to reinvigorate the United Nations-led process. To that end, we welcome the convening of the seventh session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva earlier this week. We hope that the three sides will come to a preliminary understanding on the four principles, namely, the basics of governance, State identity, State symbols and the regulation and functions of public authorities. India has also been consistent in calling for support for regional efforts to find a long-term solution to the conflict. The progressive normalization of Syria's relations with its Arab neighbours in recent months is an encouraging development.

On the security front, we remain concerned by the overall situation in Syria. While the front lines remain unshifted, violence has continued in several places, particularly in the north-western and north-eastern parts of Syria. There have been reports of shelling, skirmishes and security incidents across front lines, including increasing incidents of ceasefire violations. There is an urgent need for serious efforts towards a comprehensive ceasefire in Syria. We believe that the withdrawal of foreign forces is essential to realize that objective.

India has also been repeatedly calling for attention to be paid to the looming threat posed by resurgence of terrorist groups in Syria. United Nations-designated terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, are gaining in strength not just in Syria, but in Iraq as well.

We reiterate that the global fight against terrorism cannot — and should not — be compromised for narrow political gains.

As the conflict in Syria enters its twelfth year, the basic needs of the Syrian people continue to be unmet. While the focus of the international community is shifting to the humanitarian crisis arising due to the conflict in Ukraine, it is important that we not lose sight of Syria and the suffering of the Syrian people.

There is considerable scope for expanding cross-line operations in the north-west. We continue to encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies to expend efforts to enhance cross-line operations. We also continue to believe that it is critical to achieve progress on the implementation of resolution 2585 (2021), concerning early recovery and infrastructure, not only on humanitarian grounds but also in the context of building trust and confidence. The support of the international community to address the economic and humanitarian challenges remains integral to the success of the political process.

In conclusion, for its part, India has continued to extend developmental assistance and human resource development support to Syria. We welcome the fact that Syria joined the International Solar Alliance last month. India will continue to support the people of Syria in their endeavour for peace, stability and economic recovery.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

I would like to thank both Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their important briefings. I also welcome the participation of Mr. Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and thank him for his briefing, which highlighted the impact of the Syrian crisis on neighbouring Arab countries. We would like to note that the previous briefing by the League of Arab States to the Council on Syria was in 2012 (S/PV.6710). It is important to strengthen cooperation between the Council and the League to find Arab solutions to Arab crises, including in Syria, since its stability is an essential pillar of Arab security.

To address the political situation, the United Arab Emirates believes that there is an urgent need to find practical and effective solutions to end the Syrian crisis,

especially considering that the war in Syria has entered its twelfth year, resulting in more than 6.5 million refugees worldwide. That can be done by adopting a practical and logical approach. We seek diplomatic solutions to crises and call for an effective Arab role to discuss ways to solve the Syrian crisis, instead of merely managing it. The Syrian President's recent visit to the United Arab Emirates is a result of that approach.

We continue to support the efforts of the United Nations to reach a political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), including the efforts of Mr. Pedersen to converge regional and international political views on addressing the effects of the Syrian crisis. We also welcome the convening of the seventh session of the Constitutional Committee, as well as the positive developments regarding the agreement to discuss the constitutional principles, in the past few days.

Further progress requires all parties to continue engaging in dialogue in good faith and to take tangible steps in that direction. As we call for strengthening the Arab role in Syria as part of efforts to end the crisis, we also renew our rejection of foreign interference in Syria, the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of which must be respected.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, we again emphasize that it is unacceptable to leave the Syrian people — including those who are displaced — to face horrendous conditions in which they lack the most basic needs, such as electricity, food and drinking water. Syrian children have been particularly affected by those conditions, as most of them have lived through the atrocities of war and its consequences. The worsening of the economic situation affects every Syrian citizen. The World Food Programme reports that food prices in Syria have risen to unprecedented levels over the past few months, causing the humanitarian situation to deteriorate further.

With regard to the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) across Syria, providing medical supplies to the Syrian people remains a priority. Approximately 6 per cent of the people have been fully vaccinated, which requires greater attention from the international community. In this regard, the United Arab Emirates has completed the construction of two field hospitals in Damascus and Aleppo to treat those infected with COVID-19. Additionally, we have also supported a vaccination programme for Syrian refugees in Jordan,

which sought to vaccinate 12,000 refugees in the Emirati Jordanian camp in Mrajeeb Al-Fhood, as well as in the camps at Zaatari, Azraq and AlHadiqa.

We also underscore the importance of providing support to Arab countries affected by the Syrian crisis, especially by assisting them in the provision of basic services to refugees. These are the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Republic of Iraq, the Lebanese Republic and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

My country emphasizes the importance of continuing the delivery of humanitarian aid across the border into Syria in accordance with resolution 2585 (2021). All concerned parties on the ground must cooperate to ensure that humanitarian aid across the conflict lines reaches all those in need.

In conclusion, a political solution to the Syrian crisis is still possible, especially when we combine efforts to overcome current obstacles. We must move away from merely managing the crisis towards solving it, in order to meet the aspirations and basic needs of the brotherly Syrian people.

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*): This month, multiple countries hostile to Syria have rushed to issue statements commemorating what they falsely called the eleventh anniversary of the Syrian revolution. In reality, however, it is the eleventh anniversary of the aggression by the United States, Britain, France and their allies against Syria, through their terrorist proxies, secessionist organizations and economic sanctions, coupled with an immense propaganda campaign that spreads lies, disinformation and fabrications.

Syria, against which they waged this war, is the epitome of history and civilization, coexistence and tolerance, resistance and heroism, as well as progress and development. It has been targeted by the forces of evil, hatred, destructive obscurantism, and by forces of ignorance, underdevelopment, treason and disloyalty, in order to obstruct the Syrian renaissance, destroy its development gains, shed the blood of its people who have defended Syria's dignity, sovereignty and unity, and undermine its regional and international role.

Yes, the Syrian people did start a revolution, not 11 but 100 years ago, when they rebelled against the Ottoman occupier, then against the French colonist, until they gained their full independence through their bravery and heroism. After that, they launched a revolution against injustice and obscurantist ideas, ushering in a phase of comprehensive transformation leading to decades of stability and laying the foundation for development and modernization in Syria.

“Expressing concern” is a phrase often used by these countries in their statements. What we really should be concerned about are the practices of United States occupation forces, their support for secessionist militias in the north-east of Syria, and their collaboration with those who would violate Syrian sovereignty and steal national resources. We should be concerned about the practices of the Turkish occupation forces, their support for terrorist groups in the north-west of Syria and their audacious interference in the internal affairs of Syria. The grave concern we must all be expressing should be over the continued and repeated hostile Israeli practices against Syrian sovereignty, the casualties and damage they leave in their wake, and the direct threat they pose to the security and stability of the region.

Do their statements contain any expression of concern over such practices that violate the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions? Of course not.

“Stop the violence” is another phrase that makes regular appearances in these countries’ statements. Not only do they incite violence every day through pressure, intimidation and manipulation of societal values, but they also fuel violence with their hostile practices by recycling terrorist operatives and foreign thugs whom they bring in from all over the world. Now these countries refuse to bring them and their families back to their countries of origin to prosecute them.

Over the past 11 years, they have shed tears over the suffering of the Syrian people, but they deny that this suffering is a result of their failed policies, aggressive actions, inflammatory statements and hypocrisy. The humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people started when those countries undermined the security and stability enjoyed by Syrian citizens; when they used criminal and terrorist operatives to wreak havoc and spread fear and terror to destroy our infrastructure and development gains; and when they imposed unilateral

coercive measures while they repeatedly threatened to impose more.

These aggressive practices are the reason for the waves of displaced persons and refugees. They obstruct the efforts of the Syrian Government to create the conditions necessary for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of these displaced persons and refugees to their homes, which would put an end to their suffering and to the deals and blackmail of the Turkish regime. Today, these countries are obstructing all local, regional or international efforts to rebuild what their dirty war has destroyed and to launch early recovery projects that would allow Syrians to be more resilient and to stay in their country rather than migrate or seek refuge, and that would encourage those who have left to come back.

Those countries are calling for a political solution in Syria, but this is hypocrisy and political bidding. They are pushing for a solution in accordance with their own perspective — one that does not respect the will of the Syrian people and their national choices and that would perpetuate the Syrian crisis and obstruct the achievement of a genuine solution. These countries are interfering in what is within the exclusive purview of the Syrian people. They are imposing military and political frameworks that are inconsistent with the historical, societal and cultural values of the Syrian people, as well as the challenges they are facing. And when they speak of accountability and impunity, they do not in any way mean accountability for their own crimes, their own aggression, their own violations and their own support for terrorism. From the point of view of those countries, justice is a selective concept to be achieved by inadequate politicized mechanisms imposed through pressure to serve their own interests and agendas or by manipulating the fundamentals of international law and resorting to distorted interpretations and other immoral concepts. To those countries we say that shedding the blood of the Syrian people, destroying their achievements and stealing their resources are crimes for which they must be held accountable. Those crimes will not go unpunished.

My delegation has had to give a comprehensive overview of what Syria had been subjected to over the past 11 years. At the same time, we are committed to making every effort to improve the humanitarian situation and to provide basic health and education services for improving the living conditions of Syrians. We are also committed to working with the United

Nations and international partners, including by enhancing the delivery of humanitarian aid from within Syrian territories, implementing early recovery projects and creating conditions conducive to a dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons to their homes.

The Syrian Arab Republic is committed to achieving a political solution that is based on an inter-Syrian national dialogue and a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, free of any foreign interference, that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people and fully respects the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The Syrian Government has made commendable efforts to achieve reconciliation and peace, including through local reconciliation in a number of cities and areas in Syria. The amnesty decrees issued by the President of the Republic have allowed thousands of Syrians, both within and outside Syria, to return to their normal lives.

My delegation welcomes the convening of the seventh session of the Constitutional Committee. We commend the positive and constructive engagement of the Syrian delegation and its commitment to fulfilling the aspirations of the Syrian people. We reject any foreign interference in the work of the Committee and any attempt to obstruct its work. We also reject the imposition of predetermined outcomes or artificial timelines.

In conclusion, peace, security and stability will be restored in the Syrian Arab Republic only if these Western countries abandon their hostile policies against my country, if they stop sponsoring terrorism, if they take back the foreign terrorist fighters and their families who are nationals of these countries, if they end their occupation and illegal foreign presence on Syrian territories, if they lift the stifling and immoral economic blockade imposed against us, and if they support the efforts of the Syrian Government to achieve development and reconstruction.

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

Mr. Keçeli (Turkey): We too thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. We also thank Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, for his remarks.

Last week was the eleventh anniversary of the beginning of the Syrian war — 11 years of war that inflicted irreparable damages throughout the country, a horrific war that the Al-Assad regime started against its own people, who wanted to live in a democratic and free society; 11 years of war that inflicted irreparable damage throughout the country; a man-made disaster which has left no single Syrian family untouched and which has taken a tremendous human toll and has caused immense suffering to this day, as civilians continue to be the daily victims of brutal violence and indiscriminate attacks by the regime and its backers.

The only way to end this bloodshed in Syria is an inclusive political settlement on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). The Constitutional Committee is the only mechanism put in place to advance the political track, yet it has been subject to the regime's delaying tactics and obstructions while the Syrian opposition has displayed strong commitment throughout the process. The seventh round of the Constitutional Committee is being held this week and must produce tangible results this time. These meetings should also be held more frequently and in a results-oriented manner. We will continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen for a political solution.

It is critical that additional initiatives align with the letter and spirit of resolution 2254 (2015) and support its implementation. Let us also underline that there can be no place for illegitimate formations and terrorist elements in the political process. It is absolutely clear that this would be rejected by the Syrian people. Ceasefire violations in Idlib and an interruption of the delivery of international humanitarian aid to this region would unleash a new humanitarian crisis and obstruct any efforts for a durable settlement of this crisis. Let us reiterate that the search for a military solution is a futile adventure and will have severe consequences, first and foremost, for the regime itself.

Turkey will continue its fight against terrorism and separatism in Syria with utmost determination. Owing to its persistent wrongdoings and ill-advised strategies, Da'esh remains a greater threat to neighbouring countries than anyone else. We have on countless occasions highlighted the mistake of subcontracting the fight against Da'esh to another terrorist organization, namely, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), dominated by the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG). We invite countries that support the PKK/YPG-led SDF to see the ethnic

cleansing and the war crimes committed by that terrorist organization in northern Syria. Ignoring these facts is incompatible with any humanitarian value. It is also a flagrant contradiction and inconsistency in the fight against terrorism. This approach will in no way bring stability to the east of the Euphrates.

We would like to take this opportunity to once again put on record that our request for a United Nations investigation into the attack on Al-Shifa hospital by the PKK/YPG terrorist organization remains unanswered to this day.

We cannot allow the humanitarian situation in Syria to be overshadowed by other new or protracted humanitarian crises. The international community has an obligation to compensate for the recent decrease in humanitarian financing for the Syrian crisis. This is necessary in order to improve the conditions of the millions of displaced people living under difficult circumstances, especially in Idlib, and to avoid a new humanitarian catastrophe.

The burden on the shoulders of the neighbouring countries should also not be forgotten. Turkey has been doing more than its share for years now, providing temporary protection to close to 4 million Syrians and serving as the single transit point for United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria. We will continue to facilitate cross-line aid deliveries as well. Yet, given the extremely precarious humanitarian situation growing worse every day, there is no alternative to cross-border aid in scope and size.

Above all, we need the international community to act in a principled and responsive manner to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria and to produce lasting solutions.

As usual, will not be answering the lies that we just had to hear from the representative of the Syrian regime.

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

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Syria's humanitarian situation remains alarming. The United Nations estimates that 14.6 million Syrians need humanitarian aid. This represents a 9 per cent increase over 2021. The coronavirus disease pandemic has exacerbated the country's already fragile humanitarian situation.

Given this dire humanitarian situation and the fact that significant parts of Syrian civilian infrastructure have been destroyed, the imposition of unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian people has had disastrous consequences on all aspects of their lives and runs counter to certain aspects of resolution 2585 (2021) relating to early recovery projects, which are critical to strengthening Syrians' resilience and allowing displaced people to return home. Those measures have also impacted the efforts of national and international organizations in Syria. Those illegal and disruptive measures must end immediately.

Claiming to care about the difficult humanitarian situation in Syria while backing unilateral sanctions against the Syrian people is extremely hypocritical. The Security Council must work diligently to ensure that resolution 2585 (2021) is properly implemented in a balanced and effective manner, particularly in terms of early recovery projects and the lifting of unilateral sanctions. We once again condemn the robbery of the Syrian people's natural resources, particularly oil and agricultural products, in areas occupied by foreign forces. That criminal act is an obvious violation of Syrian territorial sovereignty, relevant Security Council resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations. The Syrian crisis cannot be resolved without ending the occupation and uprooting the terrorist threats.

Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity cannot be jeopardized in the name of fighting terrorism. All occupying and uninvited foreign forces, including those of the United States, must therefore leave the country immediately and without any conditions.

We strongly condemn the Israeli regime's repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Israeli attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Syria on 7 March constitute clear violations of international humanitarian law. We call on the Security Council to hold this regime accountable for such acts of aggression and malice, as well as for its blatant threats to use force against other countries of the region, thus endangering regional peace and security. We support the continuation of intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva, which are now taking place under the auspices of the Syrian Constitutional Committee.

In that context, we welcome Mr. Pedersen's continued efforts to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion. There is no alternative to pursuing a Syrian-led and-owned settlement, with

United Nations assistance, one that is free from outside influence and pressure and has no artificial deadlines. We maintain contacts with the Syrian Government, the United Nations Special Envoy and our partners in the Astana format in order to end the crisis and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I shall now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion in informal consultations.

The meeting rose at noon.