



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

*Provisional*

## 9083

rd meeting

Wednesday, 29 June 2022, 3.35 p.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Hoxha . . . . .	(Albania)
<i>Members:</i>	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China . . . . .	Mr. Xing Jisheng
	France . . . . .	Mr. Benaabou
	Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Mibissa
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
	India . . . . .	Mr. Raguttahalli
	Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Moran
	Kenya . . . . .	Mrs. Toroitich
	Mexico . . . . .	Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco
	Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye 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 the meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Omar Alshogre, Syrian Emergency Task Force.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Last week, the Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths briefed the Security Council on the very grave humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.9068). As they underlined, the three prongs of the framework of resolution 2585 (2021) — crossline, cross-border, and early recovery — have been absolutely essential to bringing life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian assistance to all parts of Syria during the past extremely difficult year for the Syrian people. With humanitarian needs growing and civilians in desperate need, it is essential for the Council to renew this framework for an additional 12 months.

As the Secretary-General has stated, that is a moral imperative. And, at a time of global turmoil, the Council's unity on humanitarian issues in Syria would also signal that the main stakeholders in this conflict can firewall key aspects of the Syria issue from their differences elsewhere in the world and cooperate. It would be a kernel of the constructive diplomacy on Syria that I have long called for, and it would be absolutely essential, if we are to move along the path of implementing my mandate as set forth in resolution 2254 (2015). Indeed, a political settlement of the conflict is the only sustainable way to end the suffering of the Syrian people.

To focus on a political way forward, it is vital that tensions and the dangers of military escalation are

contained. In a number of flashpoints, we are seeing ongoing and even increasing violence. Afrin and the north-east are seeing a significant escalation in hostilities, with clashes and drone strikes, exchanges of fire and recent statements by Türkiye about a new military operation. As the Secretary-General's spokesperson stressed, Syria does not need more military operations but, rather, a political solution and more humanitarian assistance.

The north-west has seen exchanges of rocket fire and reports of pro-Government air strikes pick up again, along with a United States strike on Al-Qaida affiliate Hurras Al-Din and infighting among armed opposition groups in Afrin and northern Aleppo.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other listed terrorist groups continue to launch attacks and claimed responsibility for killing Syrian army soldiers this month. Killings and violence attributed to ISIL continue in Al-Hol camp, where conditions remain dire, underlining the need for progress on repatriations.

The south-west has seen multiple security incidents. This month also saw reports of Russian air strikes near Al-Tanf on an armed opposition group partnered with the United States. Meanwhile, strikes attributed to Israel appear to be increasing in scale and scope. Let me echo the Secretary-General's concern, as expressed by his spokesperson, about the reported strikes on Damascus international airport on 10 June.

Let me remind the Council of the firm position of the United Nations that directing attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure is strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. Let me also remind the Council of the firm position of the United Nations on respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence. Let me note also that there is a risk that a miscalculated move in any of those flashpoints could lead to a broader conflict in a volatile situation.

As we have seen time and again, conflict can escalate fast in Syria. If it does, mass civilian displacement and suffering are sure to follow, with the potential for wider regional instability. That is why we are concerned by the violence across all of Syria's fault lines and any intention to carry out new operations. That is why we reiterate our call for a nationwide ceasefire, a cooperative approach to countering listed terrorist groups and a focus on supporting the political process.

Let us also not forget the acute economic crisis in Syria resulting from more than a decade of war and conflict, corruption, mismanagement, the Lebanese financial crisis, the coronavirus disease, sanctions and, now, the war in Ukraine. Earlier this month, the World Bank reported that Syrian economic activity had halved in size between 2010 and 2019, and we know for sure that the situation has not improved since then. The Bank warned that that economic crisis may lead to increased social unrest in Syria.

Let us also not forget that creating conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified refugee returns is a core element of resolution 2254 (2015). A recent survey by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions found that 92.8 per cent of refugees living in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq do not intend to return to Syria within the next 12 months. Given the causes cited by refugees themselves, a wide range of actions would be required to create such conditions, addressing the many obstacles to returns in terms of the security situation, livelihoods, basic services, housing, military service and protection.

In the light of realities such as those, I have long been proposing that we work, step for step, on a series of confidence-building measures to deal with many of the most immediate concerns of the Syrian people and advance towards a safe, calm and neutral environment and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). I have continued bilateral engagements with the Syrian parties and international stakeholders on various entry points in that regard, sharing and receiving some ideas.

As I informed the Council in closed consultations last month, when I was in Damascus in May I identified to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria, Mr. Mekdad, a number of topics on which I thought we could have deeper discussion on actions that the Syrian authorities could take — topics that he undertook to consider.

As the Council is aware, I have long called on the parties to take unilateral action on a meaningful scale on the tragic issues of the detained, the abducted and the missing, including in the framework of confidence-building and moving step for step. That issue, immense in scale, is a continuing and central feature of the trauma of the Syrian people. We need to do more than the one-to-one simultaneous release operations that have resulted from the Astana working group and which saw another 10 detainees — five on

each side — released just before the Astana meeting held on 15 and 16 June.

Bearing that in mind, I briefed the Council in closed consultations last month on my engagement with Foreign Minister Mekdad on the presidential decree of 30 April and its implementation. My Office in Damascus has since followed up on that engagement. I have also engaged with human rights organizations, victims and family associations and civil-society contacts who have also shared their assessments, including estimates of many hundreds so far released but no recent reports of further releases.

We continue to stress the potential of the decree and the importance of its comprehensive implementation if that potential is to be realized. This opportunity should not be missed. We hope that there will be further action by and communication with the Syrian Government on this issue and on the other topics for confidence-building measures.

In parallel, there are a number of topics in which others, including outside players, could take positive steps, too, regarding Syria and advancing resolution 2254 (2015). I am continuing to engage key players on what such steps could look like and have appreciated their readiness to engage.

We continue to convene the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee, which, if approached the right way, could contribute to a political settlement to implement resolution 2254 (2015). I last briefed the Council during the eighth session of its small drafting body, which concluded on 3 June. The co-Chairs agreed that the ninth session would convene in Geneva on 25 July. Formal invitations have been sent accordingly, and we are taking logistical steps to move ahead with the session.

I told Committee members at the conclusion of the eighth session that I appreciated the tone and substantive nature of the dialogue in the room. But I was also honest with them that I saw real challenges relating to the pace of work and to the inability of the members to identify and conclude areas of initial provisional agreement, even on points where there was potential consensus in the room.

I met with the co-Chairs together at the end of the session to discuss what could be done to address those challenges. They have welcomed the fact that I share ideas on ways to expedite the work and produce results and continued progress, and I have done so. I

am looking forward to them reverting to me with their reactions or any other ideas.

As my regular briefings to the Council suggest, a daunting set of challenges faces the Syrian people. I was reminded of that when I was briefed on the results of my team's regional outreach with Syrian civil society. Syrians briefed my team extensively on political developments, the socioeconomic situation, humanitarian and protection issues, women's rights, the inclusion of youth in the political process, local governance and social cohesion initiatives. What united all of those voices was the need to see urgent action to implement a comprehensive political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Today I have warned of the risks of further escalation, and I have urged everyone to find the unity and sense of purpose to contain those risks, support humanitarian objectives and promote concrete steps on the path to a settlement. My message is simple: do not forget Syria, find unity on Syria and help the Syrians begin to emerge from this tragic conflict.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Alshogre.

**Mr. Alshogre:** I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me this chance to amplify the voice of the Syrian people. This is the first time since I left Syria that I face the people who supported the regime in killing my father, in killing my oldest brother, in killing my youngest brother, in killing my childhood friends.

When the soldiers came to our home to kill my family, my Mom heard one of them speaking Farsi. He was an Iranian officer sent to kill our hope — our hope for democracy. That is when the people of Syria realized that we have more than one enemy and we need more than one friend.

I stand before the members of the Security Council today holding 14 messages sent to them by 14 Syrians representing all of Syria's 14 governorates. Each of them wants to tell Council members the following.

Rama from Dara'a governorate says to members: "You have the power to turn our nightmare into a dream so, please, do it."

Ali from Damascus asks: "Isn't it surprising how powerful you are, but powerlessly you act in the face of our enemy?"

Sarah from Homs says to members: "My daughter is severely sick; can any you help fly her out to a safe hospital anywhere in the world?"

Yasir from Hama say: "I lost everything on your watch; and you just like to blame things on other members. You blame on Russia, just to push the responsibility away from you."

Hiba from Latakia says: "Syria has never been scarier than now; even the supporters of the regime are being arrested by the regime and tortured and killed."

Just so members know, I am not going to filter the voices of the Syrian people. I am telling the Council exactly what they said. And here it comes.

Kareem from Idlib says: "You have been acting so lame since 2011. I lost everything I ever loved and had. Fuck you for not being useful, for not being respectful of human lives and human rights!"

Sana from Aleppo says: "All we need is protection. I am tired of being afraid of the sky. I don't want it to drop more bombs."

Shero from Al-Hasakah says to members: "Don't let Russia, China and Iran play you; act like you understand your position of power. You sit on the Security Council, not on a carousel in Disneyland."

Ranim from RifDimashq says: "I am claustrophobic. Whenever they bomb, I have to go and hide in the basement or in a tiny room, and I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I just wants this to end."

Shadi, a very young person from Quneitra, says: "I recently tamed a cat — who is right now, in this conflict, my world. So please help me keep her safe and alive. Her name is Judy."

Mariam from As-Suwayda says: "It always seems impossible until it is done." I know she stole the quote.

Khaled from Al-Raqqa says: "While you may think that the war in Syria has ended, it has not. People are still being targeted. People are still being killed."

Lubna from Deir ez-Zor says: "There is only one way to end the war in Syria, and that is by bringing the Al-Assad regime to justice."

The last, and fourteenth, message is from Tartus, my hometown, which I wrote myself. Since the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, Russia has vetoed more than 15 Security Council draft resolutions concerning the conflict in Syria. Among other things,

the draft resolutions covered human rights violations, the use of force against civilians, toxic chemical weapons and calls for a meaningful ceasefire. Russia did that to provide political cover for the Syrian regime and to protect Moscow's strategic interests and arms deals with the Syrian State.

My question is: what is wrong with members? Did they shut off their humanity entirely? How do they sleep at night? How do they look their children in the eye? And they should not dare tell me anything about the sovereignty of the Syrian regime. That is by now just too lame an argument.

The Iranian regime and the Iran-backed militias did not get enough from killing the brilliant minds in Iraq, such as Ehab Al-Wazni and Hashim Al-Hashemi, who were key leaders of the opposition to Iran's brutal regime. Killing them was not enough. They therefore crossed the border, came to Syria and slaughtered, raped and burned humans, animals and trees. If anyone wants proof of that, they need only search [atrocitiestracker.org](http://atrocitiestracker.org), a project of the Syrian Emergency Task Force that sheds light on the evidence and the testimonies of the families and victims of Iran, Syria and Russia in Syria and Iraq.

Earlier this year, a member of the Council welcomed the Syrian dictator, Bashar Al-Assad, into its home. Does the United Arab Emirates not have any respect for the people who have been suffering for years, for everyone who died under torture in Syria and for every mother who lost a child? Does it not have any respect for those people? Normalizing Al-Assad is a crime. Tourists and travellers from around the world must know of the support of the United Arab Emirates for the killing of children and women in Syria.

I will make sure that they find out and understand how completely devoid of morals the leadership of the Emirates is. And when the people know, where will they hide? Behind Burj Khalifa? It is not big enough to hide their shame. Shame on the United Arab Emirates. And shame on Jordan, the country that does not allow pregnant women in Rukban camp to go to a safe Jordanian hospital to give birth. Shame on them both; they are insulting the great people of the United Arab Emirates and of Jordan.

Recently, the United States Government has limited itself to empty statements, with no action. It is supposed to be the leader of the democratic world. I do not even see it in the global arena anymore. It will never be able

to protect its democracy, the rights of its women and its schoolchildren if it ignores human rights elsewhere. It is all connected. Together with a lot of people, I used to think of America as the greatest country in the world. Now we actually need proof of that.

And there are other members. We have Brazil, Mexico, Ireland, Gabon, Kenya and Ghana, which we actually do not see taking a clear stand. They should take a clear stand against dictatorship to support the people who need their help. It is now time to stand in solidarity with the people of Syria, who are fighting for freedom and dignity.

Türkiye and Lebanon have been very generous in welcoming so many refugees. For that we are no doubt very grateful. However, Syrians currently face discrimination, racism and insults on a daily basis. We would like to ask the Governments of Türkiye and Lebanon, as well as the Governments of other countries that host Syrian refugees, to show greater responsibility in honouring those who seek refuge in their countries. The people of Syria will remember those who were good to them, as well as those who were bad to them.

As I address the Council today, there are millions of people who depend on humanitarian aid in north-western and north-eastern Syria. Those innocent people are held hostage by Russia, which continues to hold hostage all cross-border points, including Bab Al-Hawa.

The reason I have been shaming members for the past five minutes is because I know that the Council has the power to do much, but it chooses not to. Here are three actions that members can take to prove to their citizens that they care about human rights and mitigate the suffering of the Syrian people.

First, members should put as much pressure as possible on Russia to extend the mandate for Bab Al-Hawa and open all other cross-border points to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid. That should not be a negotiation; we are talking about humanitarian aid.

Secondly, they should follow Germany's lead in using copious amounts of evidence to prosecute the Syrian regime and its allies. That step could help to slow down or prevent the normalization of a regime that continues to insult Council members on a daily basis by committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Thirdly — and perhaps the most difficult but most important thing to do — members must fight with us,



the Syrian people, to set free every mother, father, brother, sister, neighbour and friend being held captive for simply taking to the streets, demanding their rights and asking for accountability and justice.

*(spoke in Arabic)*

To all Syrians, including widows and widowers, who hope to see freedom: freedom will come.

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

I would like to recall that, in accordance with the rules of procedure and the practice of the Council, briefers do not pose questions to member States; it is the other way around.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

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

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: We thank you, Mr. President, for the practical demonstration of how an irresponsible choice of briefers representing civil society can turn a serious discussion into a low-grade talk show and farce.

We would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen, for the overview of the political situation in Syria. We believe that the ninth session of the small drafting body of the Constitutional Committee, which is scheduled to be held at the end of next month, will be a very important event. We are convinced of the need to continue to direct intra-Syrian dialogue with the assistance of the United Nations, in line with the resolution 2254 (2015).

We believe that progress on the Syrian political settlement track is urgently needed now, as the situation on the ground remains tense. The main security threats to Syria and the region as a whole are posed by groups the persistent large-scale presence of terrorists who have found refuge in areas not under the control of Damascus, such as Idlib, areas across the Euphrates River and Al-Tanf. However, we believe the root causes of the explosive situation lie in the current policy followed by the countries of the West of flirting with

terrorist elements in an attempt to use them for their own geopolitical purposes.

In that context, we are convinced that the way to resolve the Syrian crisis is by ending the illegal foreign military presence, which violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and by the unconditional cessation of regular air strikes by the Israeli Air Force. The most recent strike, on 10 June, targeted the Damascus International Airport. The airport sustained serious material damage, namely, the runway was damaged, which led to the grounding of all flights, including United Nations humanitarian service flights.

We regret that, due to the politicized and biased positions of Western delegations, the draft Security Council press statement that we proposed was rejected. Time and again, we see the extent to which the politicized stances of Council members reflected on their principles.

At the same time, there is currently a serious deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation. According to United Nations estimates, the number of those in need has reached a record 14.6 million people. That is evidently the direct result of the suffocating unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union. That situation persists almost one year after the unanimous adoption by the Council of resolution 2585 (2021), which was intended to alleviate the humanitarian suffering and needs of the Syrians, inter alia, by conducting early recovery projects.

The acute problem of the return of refugees remains. The host countries — Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye — do not hide the fact that they have reached their limits with regard to further accommodating the refugees. Meanwhile, Western countries stubbornly refuse to help Syrians return home. They prefer to pay for refugees to stay in the host countries. For our part, we deem it to be necessary to ensure the fundamental right of refugees to return home, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), provided that such efforts are carried out strictly in coordination with Damascus.

In that regard, we would like to highlight the decree of the President of Syria, Bashar Al-Assad, establishing an amnesty for Syrian citizens convicted of terrorist activity and crimes committed prior to 30 April 2022, except for crimes that resulted in a loss of life. That decision by the Syrian leadership, in

addition to the January amnesty for objectors, creates a favourable environment for Syrian citizens who wish to return home.

Damascus has also demonstrated its willingness to take concrete steps to foster civil reconciliation and work on issues related to detainees and missing persons. In other words, the Government of Syria is working to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

Russia has also made a considerable contribution to the overall settlement. Along with our partners in the Astana format — Iran and Türkiye — we held the eighteenth international meeting on Syria in Nur-Sultan, which culminated in the adoption of a joint statement that was circulated as a Security Council document.

We note the successful operation that led to the simultaneous release of detainees on 13 June as part of the special working group established with the assistance of the Astana format. That operation proved the willingness of the parties to expand cooperation under the auspices of the working group. It is a unique mechanism that has proven its worth and effectiveness in building trust among the Syrian parties.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and, as always, for all his hard work to encourage a political process that might bring the conflict to an end.

I also want to extend a special thanks to Mr. Alshogre for his powerful testimony today, which was both compelling and painful to hear. It was also important for all of us to hear the voices he brought to us. The only message I could possibly hope to leave him with today is that the United States is very proud, as a country, to have been able to take him in after what he experienced and stands firmly with the Syrian people.

We were reminded yesterday of the stark realities of the horror of the Syrian conflict by a number that was released by the United Nations: 306,887 — that is the number of civilians who have been killed since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011 to the end of March 2021. It is of course more than a sobering statistic for all of us. Those people had hopes and dreams; they had hobbies; and they had families and many loved ones, as we just heard. The human scale of the conflict should shock us all, and we should all be compelled to redouble our efforts to find a solution to the crisis.

The United States fully supports the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the

Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and efforts to ensure accountability for all those crimes.

We urge enhanced efforts towards the implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), including by addressing the issue of arbitrarily detained and missing persons. Each month, the United States notes its concern about the more than 30,000 Syrians who are arbitrarily detained or missing. We very much appreciate Special Envoy Pedersen's focus on that issue. We take note of the Al-Assad regime's decree of 30 April and reiterate our calls for further information on that announcement.

However, to be clear, to date the regime has released only a few hundred prisoners — a small fraction of those who remain detained by the regime. We urge the Al-Assad regime to fully, transparently and effectively implement the decree so that a much larger proportion of detainees can be released. We also urge the regime to coordinate directly with the International Committee of the Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations to ensure that those efforts are humane and transparent.

The amnesty should not be used to justify or encourage refugee returns before there are real conditions in place that facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Safety and security, including such concerns with regard to the rule of law as we see today, remain major obstacles to any potential returns, and I believe they explain the statistic that the Special Envoy shared with us on the percentage of refugees who want to return.

We reiterate our call for a nationwide ceasefire, which is another key aspect of resolution 2254 (2015). We are also concerned about any potential decision by Türkiye to take military action on the Syrian side of the border. Nothing should be done to break the ceasefire lines that have already been established.

We appreciate the Special Envoy's efforts on the Constitutional Committee. We know that he shares our disappointment that, after eight rounds and more than two years, there have been no significant outcomes from those discussions. The clear responsibility for that lack of progress lies solely with the Al-Assad regime, as it continues to stall the chance for any fruitful dialogue through its intransigence.

It would be helpful to take stock of the process to date and determine how best to take it forward. We hope that the ninth round of talks, to be held in Geneva next month, will offer an opportunity to make some of the long-overdue progress that the Syrian people deserve.

Finally, the United States looks forward to working collaboratively with other Security Council members in the coming days to reauthorize and expand the mandate for the United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism into Syria. As we heard, the mechanism provides a critical lifeline of assistance. Cutting off that assistance would be devastating for millions of Syrians, so we urge all fellow members to support and strengthen that essential lifeline for the Syrian people.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that the only way to end the dire humanitarian crisis is through a credible, inclusive political process as described in resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. Xing Jisheng** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and appreciate his efforts to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions and promote the political process in Syria.

The core group of the Syrian Constitutional Committee recently held its eighth session, at which substantive dialogue was held on the text of a draft constitution. In view of the highly complex and sensitive nature of the Syrian dossier, the very fact that the caucus meeting was held at all is a positive development. China firmly supports the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2014), and calls on all parties in Syria to actively cooperate with the Special Envoy to strive for substantive progress on the draft constitution. The Constitutional Committee should remain independent and free from external interference.

Progress cannot be achieved in the Syrian political process without an enabling environment. China therefore welcomes the amnesty announced recently by Syria, which is conducive to creating favourable conditions for domestic reconciliation in the country.

Significant progress in the political process is inconceivable while Syria continues to be subjected to foreign invasion and illegal occupation. The Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic recently sent consecutive communications to the President of the Security Council that condemn the violation of

Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity by certain countries. We urge those countries to immediately cease related activities. We also call for the immediate withdrawal of the foreign troops stationed in the country without the consent of the Syrian Government.

The eighteenth round of talks in the framework of the Astana process was also held recently. China supports the countries concerned in their efforts to de-escalate the conflict through enhanced coordination.

Terrorism must be eradicated. China is concerned about the widening scope of terrorist attacks south of Damascus by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The international community should crack down firmly on terrorist forces in Syria, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and should denounce any double standards.

Syria is a founding member of the League of Arab States and an important member of the Arab world. China welcomes the strengthened interaction between Syria and other Arab countries in the diplomatic, economic and trade spheres. China looks forward to Syria's early return to the Arab family, which will be conducive to forging coordinated peace-promoting efforts in the region and an early settlement of the Syrian question.

The mandate of the Syrian cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism will expire in July. China hopes that the Security Council, with full respect for Syria's sovereignty and the ownership of the Syrian Government, will hold a comprehensive discussion on such issues as cross-border and cross-line aid, early recovery and unilateral sanctions. That discussion must promote efforts to strive for consensus and eliminate, in a targeted manner, the obstacles facing humanitarian assistance in the search for feasible solutions to post-resolution 2585 (2021) arrangements.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho** (Brazil): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his informative briefing.

In 2015, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015), endorsing a road map for a peace process in Syria and setting a timetable for United Nations-facilitated talks between the Government and members of the opposition. In 2022, after seven years of intense human suffering and displacement, as well as the destruction of essential civilian infrastructure, we still have not achieved any real progress in implementing resolution 2254 (2015).



The Constitutional Committee has already held eight sessions, and its members seem either unable or unwilling to bridge their differences in most areas in order to come up with concrete results. Meanwhile, terrorism remains a very serious threat on the ground, with spillover effects across the region. Humanitarian needs are at their peak, with millions of people relying on international aid to meet their most basic needs. Needless to say, the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons is also deteriorating with each passing day.

When the authorization of cross-border humanitarian operations expires on 10 July, the Council will once again have to take a very important decision on the matter, with a clear impact on the lives of millions of people, especially women and children. Brazil agrees that at this time we have no choice but to continue supporting the provision of international humanitarian assistance to all those in need in Syria through all feasible modalities. It is important to stress that cross-border assistance is by no means a long-term solution, but rather a temporary measure to alleviate the humanitarian needs of part of the Syrian population.

With regard to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, we note with concern that sanctions continue to affect the ability of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to operate in Syria. Brazil adds its voice to the Secretary-General's appeal to all the relevant parties to find ways to address the challenges that various humanitarian actors in Syria face in ensuring reliable access to financial services.

The members of the Constitutional Committee must once and for all understand the responsibility that is in their hands and their important role in guaranteeing Syria's future. As we look forward to the ninth session of the Constitutional Committee, scheduled for late July, Brazil reiterates the call for all members to work with a sense of compromise and responsibility and stresses the importance of genuinely seeking avenues on which to move forward.

At our previous meeting, Mr. Pedersen noted that the 3 April amnesty decree was potentially a confidence-building measure between the parties (S/PV.9022). I thank the Special Envoy for his update on that issue. As we continue to closely follow the decree's implementation, Brazil calls on all parties to stop torture, ill treatment, forced disappearances and all other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We strongly support all families in their quest to determine the fate of Syria's missing persons, including those forcibly disappeared, abducted or arbitrarily detained. The recent news about the exchange of prisoners in the framework of the Astana process is welcome. Brazil would like to thank all those involved in the negotiations that led to that agreement and all those who are working to implement it.

I reiterate Brazil's position, which has remained unchanged since 2011: only a Syrian-owned and -led United Nations-facilitated process, with due regard for preserving Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, will alleviate the immeasurable suffering that this conflict has inflicted. A military solution remains elusive, and unilateral sanctions will lead only to more violence and broader volatility in the region. All the parties concerned must exercise the utmost restraint and avoid further escalation. They must refrain from harming civilians and increase efforts to comply with international humanitarian law.

I want to conclude by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen once more for his continuing efforts to move us away from the current stalemate in the realization of the political process envisioned in resolution 2254 (2015). We also commend him for his efforts to continue involving the Syrian Women's Advisory Board in the peace process. A political agreement cannot be sustainable if women's voices are not heard.

**Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco (Mexico)** (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his very thorough briefing and his tireless efforts.

Today I will focus my remarks on three issues: the political process security and refugees and missing persons.

With regard to the political process, we take note of the recent Astana format meeting. We regret, however, that the eighth session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee did not achieve any progress. We therefore hope to see a reversal of that trend at the ninth session, to be held at the end of July in Geneva in accordance with the terms of reference. We urge the parties to engage constructively and, in doing so, to make progress in the discussions.

In that regard, my delegation reiterates its support for Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to move towards a political solution and commends his regular consultations with civil society. We want to underscore, as others have done here today, the crucial need for

women to participate in all phases of the Syrian political process in order to achieve a sustainable solution.

With regard to the security issue, we are obviously concerned about the announcement of a new military intervention in northern Syria, in particular the attempt to justify it under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. That would be totally contrary to the provisions of international law, specifically with respect to the use of force and self-defence, and if it were to occur it would undermine Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

We call for all the parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from an escalation of tensions that could lead to the further displacement of civilians and exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation. It is time to foster dialogue and cooperation among neighbours, including to coordinate counter-terrorism activities.

We are also deeply concerned about the resurgence of hostilities in the north-east, as well as the continuing instability in the southern part of the country. In that context, we condemn the recent attack on Damascus International Airport.

With regard to refugees, we acknowledge the efforts of the receiving countries. Unfortunately, the conditions have yet to be secured to facilitate the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees. We encourage continued support for humanitarian organizations and increased funding to support host communities.

On the other hand, while we recognize that some detainees have been released, given the magnitude of cases under consideration the number of those who have been freed is very limited. We call on the Syrian authorities to release all arbitrarily detained persons, starting with women, children and the elderly. At the same time, the whereabouts of missing persons must be determined, and humanitarian organizations must be granted access to detention centres. We look forward to the Secretary-General's final report on that issue.

It is important to make progress on all of those matters in order to create confidence and an environment conducive to political dialogue, as well as to move towards reconciling and rebuilding Syria's social fabric.

Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate that it is important for the Council to reauthorize the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing in the coming days in order

to meet the growing needs of the more than 11 million Syrians for whom there is no other alternative.

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

We thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and welcome his continuous engagement with the various stakeholders in Syria as part of his efforts to facilitate and encourage a much-needed political solution to the conflict in that country. We also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye in this meeting.

As highlighted in today's briefing, the state of affairs in Syria remains concerning and requires the full and continuous attention of the international community. We must continue to give the country the lifeline it requires for a lasting resolution of the conflict. We believe that a political solution is the most promising path to peace and security in Syria. That requires the immediate establishment of a nationwide ceasefire, as well as an inclusive and pluralist dialogue on the way forward that takes into account the interests of Syrians and culminates in the eventual restoration of State authority over the entire Syrian territory.

We are concerned about the slow progress in the work of the Constitutional Committee, which did not record any tangible outcomes after a number of proposals were discussed in the last round of negotiations. Although we welcome the dialogue between the parties, we call for more constructive engagement on the substance of the constitution and the need to explore ways to expedite action on the sticking points that will lead to concrete results for the people of Syria. We stress that those issues need to be taken into consideration, especially when the Constitutional Committee reconvenes on 25 July.

The need to advance a broader political process is ever-more crucial. Confidence-building measures, such as the release of detainees and the determination of the plight of missing persons, would contribute to enhancing the process. More detainees need to be released, with special attention paid to the elderly, women and children. It is essential for such issues to be addressed as expeditiously as possible, otherwise peace will remain elusive for the people of Syria.

The amnesty granted by the Syrian Government is an important step towards reconciliation, and we believe

that it can contribute to confidence-building measures. We stress that is an area that could be positively leveraged by the Special Envoy's step-by-step approach to get key Syrian stakeholders, with the support of the international community, to make concessions in exchange for reciprocal actions from others, which is in the country's long-term interests. We therefore look forward to receiving additional information on the implementation of that approach.

We recall the important role of women in the consolidation of the political climate in Syria and welcome their involvement in the peace process, particularly in the context of discussions within the Syrian Women's Advisory Board.

The A3 is troubled by the presence of mercenaries from certain countries in Syria, as it undermines regional and international security, and it wishes to stress that Syria should not be used as a ground on which other States settle their scores. The situation in the north-west remains precarious, and air strikes and terrorist activities continue in the north-east, particularly in Raqqah governorate.

Also, the Al-Hol camp, in which thriving terrorist cells are reported to be operating, is of concern to us, as their activities continue to worsen the security situation and endanger lives, particularly those of women and children. In that regard, we reiterate the need for decisive collective action to combat Security Council-listed groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

We call on all State and non-State actors in Syria to exercise maximum restraint. In that respect, we call on neighbouring countries to desist from actions that would create more instability in Syria. What is needed now includes a political solution, a cessation of hostilities and the need for respect for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which must be upheld by all countries.

The A3 encourages the efforts made by regional and international actors towards achieving political stability in Syria in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). That resolution remains the most important road map for the much-desired political solution to the crisis in Syria. We reiterate the need for unity of the Council in the renewal of resolution 2585 (2021), which would be a critical step forward in complementing the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

The A3 reiterates its continued support for a comprehensive and durable political resolution of the crisis, in solidarity with the Syrian people in their quest for peace, urges all parties to the conflict to cease their fire and encourages all stakeholders and actors in the region to show a greater commitment to finding lasting solutions to the conflict through the political process. In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

**Ms. Moran** (Ireland): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and for his briefing and his clear, insightful updates, which we really appreciate. I also want to thank Mr. Omar Alshogre for being with us here today. Civil society has a critical challenge function, which is important even when it is uncomfortable.

As we heard from the Special Envoy, violence has continued across Syria, particularly in the north-west, and remains a serious concern. It is atrocious that 72 civilians, including 12 children, were killed in the months of April and May. Indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are violations of international humanitarian law.

We call on all actors to comply fully with their international legal obligations. I reiterate Ireland's call for a nationwide ceasefire across Syria to protect human lives and help build trust and confidence on the political track. Ireland condemns the attack on a civilian bus in Raqqa on 20 June, which killed 13 people, including two civilians. That was another stark reminder of the threat posed by terrorism and the need for sustained, comprehensive efforts to counter it.

The footage of a massacre that took place in 2013 in the Tadamon neighbourhood of Damascus, which was published in *The Guardian* in April, was very shocking. The footage revealed the brutality of the perpetrators. It is even more disturbing that the families of the victims discovered the fate of their loved ones in that way.

The release of that video reminds us of the absolute necessity of ensuring accountability for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria. It also highlights the importance for the Government and other parties to share information on the fate of the missing and the disappeared. Withholding information deliberately prolongs the suffering of the hundreds of thousands of family members, who often risk arrest, extortion and abuse in the search for their missing loved ones.

We continue to call on the Syrian Government and other parties to release all those arbitrarily detained, including children, women and the elderly, and for unimpeded access for all independent monitors to places of detention. We take note of the Syrian Government's amnesty decree in April and stress that all releases must be conducted in a transparent and verifiable manner.

Ireland continues to support a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court and, in the absence of such, strongly supports United Nations efforts, including through 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. We believe that more can be done to support victims and survivors, as well as their families, who have spent far too long in limbo.

The continued suffering of innocent children in Syria is an affront to all of humankind. Those who have survived the past 11 years of conflict have had their childhoods taken from them, and it is the responsibility of the Security Council to ensure that Syria moves towards a sustainable and inclusive peace.

We will continue to support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts, including through the Constitutional Committee and his step-for-step approach, in pursuit of the implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

It is imperative that the Syrian conflict's disproportionate impacts on women remain a focus. Women from all parts of Syria's society must be empowered to fully and equally participate in the political track, including through, but not limited to, the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. In that regard, Ireland would be happy to receive an update on the Special Envoy's engagement with the Advisory Board. Ireland and the European Union remain committed to ensuring that the situation in Syria remains high on the international agenda. We assure Council members that Syria is not forgotten.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Omar Alshogre for their briefings.

We appreciate the Special Envoy's updates, including on the previous session of the Syrian Constitutional

Committee. It is positive that the delegations were able to discuss the submitted revisions to the text and that areas of common ground were identified. We do, however, share the Special Envoy's view that there is a need for more expediency in the Constitutional Committee's work, as well as strengthened efforts by all parties to produce concrete results. We welcome its newest round of negotiations, to be held in July.

Norway continues to urge the members of the Committee to contribute constructively and with a spirit of compromise. We note that the Syrian Women's Advisory Board also met recently in Geneva. Its contributions to the process are important. Norway is pleased to support its work and will continue to urge the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the political process.

Let me now turn to the Syrian authorities' announced amnesty decree. The issue of detainees and missing persons in Syria is a matter of great concern. We are closely following the implementation of the amnesty decree, and we call for more information from the Syrian authorities about the scope of the amnesty and what systems will be put in place to verify, systematize and provide transparency.

We worry about the escalations we have seen in the northern parts of Syria. Such escalations of violence lead to increased human suffering for the population. We urge all actors to contribute to de-escalation and uphold international law.

Let me conclude by paraphrasing the Secretary-General, who recently reiterated that the only way to end the humanitarian tragedy in Syria is through a truly nationwide ceasefire and a political solution that enables the Syrian people to determine their own future. We urge the Syrian parties and the countries involved in Syria to move forward towards an inclusive political solution — one that will first and foremost benefit the Syrian people, as well as neighbouring countries and the broader international community.

**Mr. Benaabou** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Omar Alshogre for their briefings.

As the war continues, so does the Damascus regime's oppression of the Syrian people. The evidence gathered on the Tadamon massacre, perpetrated in April 2013, leaves no doubt about the Syrian regime's repeated and systematic war crimes and crimes against humanity.



With regard to the amnesty decree issued unilaterally by the regime, we note that the United Nations has not yet been able to pursue any verification process for it; neither data nor lists have been shared with the Organization. Under those conditions, that amnesty has no basis in reality and does not in any way constitute a first step. Let me remind the Security Council that 120,000 people are still listed as being detained in the regime's jails. The regime has also adopted a new law on cybercrime that allows it to make new arbitrary arrests.

I would also like to recall that the regime's systematic use of sexual and gender-based violence in detention centres, including against returning refugees, has been documented by the United Nations and civil society.

All of those facts demonstrate that it is futile to believe that normalizing relations with the regime can create stability in Syria or in the region.

I would also like to add that the announcement about a possible new Turkish military operation in northern Syria is worrisome. We must refrain from taking any action that would aggravate the crisis in the country and threaten the stability of the region or the efforts of the Global Coalition against Da'esh.

There can be no lasting peace without a solid political process. The latest meetings of the Constitutional Committee have not yielded any tangible progress. The regime no longer wants the meetings to be held in Geneva, even though that was the meeting place agreed on by the Syrian people — all Syrians, including the opposition — and it is specified in the Constitutional Committee's terms of reference. We have no choice but to denounce that new obstructive tactic as a blatant manoeuvre to turn the Constitutional Committee into an empty shell. We urge the parties and their allies to do everything possible to move forward in good faith and allow the negotiations and drafting to begin in earnest.

As we say every month, without a political solution that is securely established and verifiable on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015), the French and European positions on the lifting of sanctions and on reconstruction and normalization will remain unchanged.

As the Council knows, France will continue to tirelessly combat impunity in Syria. Perpetrators, particularly of war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable for their actions. That is essential for building a lasting peace.

Finally, France's position is clear: at a time when humanitarian needs are more significant than ever before, it is essential that we renew the cross-border mechanism for a minimum of 12 months, as requested by the Secretary-General, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. I call on all members of the Council to demonstrate unity and responsibility in that regard.

**Mr. Raguttahalli (India):** I join others in thanking the Special Envoy for his briefing.

We note that the previous session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee deliberated on the four proposed constitutional principles: unilateral coercive measures, State institutions, the supremacy of the constitution and transitional justice. While the parties have not reached common ground, we need to examine the reasons for the lack of any major progress over the past two years.

External factors have proved detrimental to the overall political process. The level of engagement to date has not been able to bridge the trust deficit among the stakeholders involved. We reiterate again that it is for the Syrians to determine and decide what is best for Syria and their own future. The positive outcome of the previous session is that all sides have agreed to meet again in the last week of July. We hope that the three parties will engage constructively and purposefully at that meeting, with a sense of compromise.

The Special Envoy has been making efforts to engage with all sides and facilitate the political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We believe that his efforts, particularly his step-by-step approach, should be supported. The success of that approach will depend on tangible relief reaching the people of Syria through the easing of measures that affect their daily lives. We need to avoid linking humanitarian and developmental assistance with the progress of the overall political process. There is also an urgent need to scale up assistance and ensure that humanitarian agencies receive the necessary funding to fully execute their plans.

India has been consistent in calling for support for regional efforts to find a long-term solution to the conflict. We have welcomed the progressive normalization of Syria's relations with its Arab neighbours. Any acts that compromise Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity will have a negative



impact on the political track. In that regard, the recent announcement of military action is deeply concerning.

On the security front, we remain concerned about the overall situation in Syria. As pointed out in the Secretary-General's 60-day report (S/2022/492) and again by the Special Envoy, violence has persisted in the north-west of Syria; there have been air strikes, as well as mutual shelling and clashes. There is an urgent need for serious attempts to establish a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire in Syria. We believe that the withdrawal of all foreign forces is essential to realizing that objective.

India has also repeatedly reiterated the looming threat posed by the 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, continue to gain in strength, not just in Syria but also in Iraq. We reiterate that the global fight against terrorism cannot and should not be compromised for narrow political gains. The credibility of the international community's collective fight against terrorism can be strengthened only by ensuring the accountability of terrorists and terrorist groups.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that India is committed to extending developmental assistance and human-resource development support to Syria. Our support for the people of Syria in their endeavour to obtain lasting peace and stability remains steadfast and unwavering.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his thorough briefing. We agree with him that reaching consensus on the renewal of the cross-border mechanism would send a positive signal to the Syrian people.

We take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of Ms. Najat Rochdi as Deputy Special Envoy for Syria. We would also like to thank Ms. Khawla Matar for her tireless efforts and dedication to achieving peace and security. In the context of this meeting, and despite what we have heard today, we affirm that all of our actions are aimed at relieving the suffering of the brotherly Syrian people.

A constitution fundamentally defines the relationship between the nation and its people and is the main reference for laws and legislation. It also maintains the unity of the State, guarantees the rights of its citizens and promotes their language, culture and aspirations. In

the context of Syria, resolution 2254 (2015) identified the constitutional process as one of the main pillars for reaching a political solution to the crisis. Therefore, the Constitutional Committee represents the only platform for advancing a constructive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue, without foreign interference or dictates, in order to advance the political process.

Despite significant disagreements about some of the texts it considered at its eighth session, the Constitutional Committee took some positive steps towards finding common ground on a number of other texts. Accordingly, we stress the importance of focusing on common ground in order to build confidence among all parties and overcome points of disagreement. In that context, my country welcomes the agreement to hold the ninth session on 25 July.

In the context of confidence-building efforts among the parties, we welcome the Syrian President's recent issuance of a general amnesty for non-lethal terrorist crimes, which has led to the release of hundreds of detainees. We encourage all parties to continue to take such steps during the upcoming period. We also agree with the Special Envoy's assessment that the general amnesty has the potential to be a positive step. We believe that such a step is necessary and could be built upon to support sustainable peace and a decisive solution to the Syrian crisis.

With regard to the significant escalation of hostilities in northern Syria, especially in the areas of Tall Rifaat, Manbij, Ayn Issa and Tall Tamr, my country reaffirms its rejection of any foreign interference, including acts of aggression in northern Syria, given the aim of preserving Syria's unity, independence and territorial integrity. The United Arab Emirates also totally rejects any efforts to alter the demography of Syria, as that would threaten the security and stability of Syria and the region as a whole and undermine the future of the political process.

In order to reach a comprehensive political solution, we need to overcome all security obstacles, most importantly by addressing the causes of insecurity. The Da'esh terrorist organization continues to launch attacks in Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah, eastern Homs and Hama, such as the recent attacks in Raqqa that claimed many victims. In that regard, the United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned about attempts by that organization to expand its activities and get close to Damascus, which would have repercussions for the civilians and the security and stability of Syria.

In conclusion, we look forward to the brotherly Syrian people overcoming all their current challenges and achieving a long-awaited peace while creating a more stable and hopeful reality for the younger Syrian generation.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy and Mr. Alshogre for their powerful briefings today.

Bashar Al-Assad falsely claims that the situation in Syria is improving. He is trying to play on conflict fatigue to encourage normalization. We must be vigilant against that. The 12 years of suffering and terror that the Syrian people have been subjected to must not be forgotten. They deserve justice, accountability and hope for a future based on the political reforms set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

This is not just about past crimes. The terrible conditions in Syria continue to deteriorate, as set out in the latest report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/50/68). As we have heard, more than 300,000 civilians have died as a direct result of the conflict. That is a devastating number of innocent lives lost. We have seen no evidence that the regime is either able or willing to respect human rights or govern in the interests of all Syrians.

The United Kingdom therefore continues to strongly oppose efforts to engage the Al-Assad regime in the absence of behavioural change. We must not accept any slide into normalization without genuine, verifiable reforms, an end to attacks on civilians, answers for families and, ultimately, accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. As part of that, we urge a clear-eyed assessment of the regime's motives in its portrayal of its recent amnesty. We also urge a continued focus on the more than 100,000 people who are still arbitrarily detained.

Precipitous normalization undermines the international community's collective leverage and will ultimately prolong the crisis and the suffering of millions of Syrians. As we have said many times, a political solution is the only way to end the conflict. And given the regime's consistent intransigence, such a solution will only be possible through concerted international efforts and the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). Special Envoy Pedersen therefore retains our full backing, and we remain committed to working together with him in his efforts to bring about peace

in Syria, including through a United Nations-facilitated step-for-step initiative.

Finally, it is useful to hear from the Special Envoy, as we heard from the Secretary-General last week, that the renewal of the mandate for cross-border humanitarian support is essential. We look forward to all members of the Council engaging responsibly on that over the coming days.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and his relentless efforts to put an end to the conflict in Syria and to bring lasting peace to that country, ravaged by war, marred by misery and with no clear prospect towards peace in sight.

We heard the pain and anger in the voice of Mr. Alshogre, in his own words as well as in the testimonies from individuals from all parts of Syria — the voices of those who are trapped in a nightmare with no end in sight; those who feel lost because they are lost; those who feel powerless because they are powerless; and those who look for help because they need help — all the help that they can get after the past 11 years, which have inflicted an almost unimaginable degree of devastation and loss on the Syrian people.

We heard in his words, some of them not usually used in this Chamber, the true picture of a country in distress and of a population in anguish. As that dramatic situation leaves little or no room for hope, it is only fitting that the horrific humanitarian situation is the central preoccupation of our work here in this Chamber. Therefore, the renewal of the cross-border mandate next month is of paramount importance to preserving that lifeline for millions of Syrians, as the Secretary-General recently told the Council and as was echoed today by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The most recent amnesty should not allow the regime to use its people as hostages, seeking to bypass resolution 2254 (2015) in an effort to secure international acceptance and extract concessions from the international community while maintaining the status quo. That does not bear the hallmarks of transparent action aimed at building trust. We still do not know who has been released and where or how many more innocent Syrians are being held in captivity, and we do not know how many have been killed. What we

know instead is the anguish of the thousands of Syrian families that have been searching for their loved ones for more than a decade, most of them in vain.

The Constitutional Committee is the most tangible sign of progress for the political transition in Syria, yet it has met eight times without being able to produce any results. Despite the commendable efforts by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pedersen, the Constitutional Committee continues to be disappointing. It must not make a mockery of Syrian aspirations. No one should be allowed to undermine all efforts to move the political transition forward.

We know that a genuine political transition is essential, as enshrined in the spirit and the letter of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), if there is to be any real, meaningful hope of averting a further catastrophe in Syria. We call on all those involved to show goodwill and genuine commitment, including through a clear timeline, with clear deliverables, if we are to put any faith in the process. We also support the equal, full and meaningful participation of women in the process. Otherwise, we risk further betraying the trust of the Syrian people.

In concluding, I want to emphasize that Albania sees no alternative to full accountability for the crimes committed by all parties involved if Syria is to ever step back from the abyss and return to being a prosperous, important and peaceful country. No sustainable future can be built on impunity. No lasting peace can ever have crimes as its foundation. We should not support the politics of erasure in Syria. Transitional justice must therefore be at the heart of efforts to move towards a genuine political transition that leads to a free and democratic Syria — a Syria for all, not just for a few.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I would like to once again draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

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

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Government has made significant progress during the last few months, which is

unprecedented and proves the Syrian Government's keenness to support national reconciliation and local settlements. That unwavering approach has proved efficient in enabling Syrians to return to normalcy and in harnessing their potential and energies towards building Syria's future, achieving stability and ensuring progress.

I have informed the Council about the amnesty decree issued by the President of the Republic on 30 April; it is exceptional in legal, social and political terms. That decree has benefited large numbers of detainees and judicially wanted persons within and outside the country, and its implementation is still under way.

Diplomatic missions abroad have opened their doors to receive applications and requests from Syrians who would like to benefit from the decree and receive support to regularize their status. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs receives many such requests daily and refers them to the competent authorities for their response as soon as possible.

Syrian State institutions are continuing their efforts to strengthen the legal and legislative architecture and to develop laws aligned with the relevant requirements. Over the past few months, a number of important decrees and laws have been enacted to regulate essential issues, including the possession of weapons and ammunition and preventing the illicit trafficking thereof; amending the penal code; abolishing sentences of life and temporary imprisonment with hard labour; and enforcing the criminalization of torture and imposing deterrent penalties against those responsible for it.

The fourth session of the International Conference on the Return of Syrian Refugees was held in Damascus, attesting unequivocally to the strong will of the Syrian Government to continue to remove all impediments to the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees to their homes and places of origin.

I would like to say before the Council that those States that are preventing Syrian refugees from returning to their homeland must stop those practices and refrain from creating any impediments that prevent them from returning freely and with dignity. That requires first and foremost the lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria, which are killing the Syrian people and are totally unjustifiable.

The eighteenth meeting on Syria in accordance with the Astana format was held in the city of Nur-Sultan. Its concluding statement stressed firmly the importance of maintaining the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and emphasized once again the continued actions to combat terrorism and confront Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front, along with their affiliated individuals and entities, including those that constitute a threat to civilians within and outside the de-escalation zone in Idlib.

The statement rejected all attempts to create a new reality on the ground, including the so-called autonomy initiatives and separatist agendas in north-eastern Syria. It also denounced the actions taken by certain States that support terrorist entities and separatist militias. The statement condemned as well the ongoing Israeli military acts of aggression against Syria, which jeopardize security and stability in the region, and called for the cessation thereof. It also declared its refusal of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people along with the illegal diversion of oil revenues that should go to Syria.

The statement also welcomed the mutual release of a number of abductees and detainees that took place on 13 June within the framework of the Working Group on the Release of Detainees/Abductees.

Syria reiterates its appreciation to the Russian and Iranian guarantors for their efforts in that regard and condemns the practices of the Turkish regime, which has reneged on its previous commitments and obligations under the Astana agreements and Sochi arrangements.

In that regard, Syria reiterates its rejection and condemnation of the Turkish regime's statements on the establishment of a so-called safe zone in northern Syria, its bellicose statements and its continued aggressive policies based on killing, forced displacement, demographic change and ethnic cleansing, under false pretexts that in fact serve its own domestic political motives in order to cover up its increasing crises and export them abroad, thereby posing a threat to the peace and security of the region.

My delegation listened to the briefing by Special Envoy Mr. Geir Pedersen. My country closely followed the proceedings of the eighth session of the Constitutional Committee, and we look forward to the convening of the ninth session after the Special Envoy has resolved the logistical problems raised by certain parties.

It is regrettable that a certain party that was nominated by Türkiye and that claims to represent Syrians continues to insist on hindering any progress in the work of the Committee. It promotes ideas that run counter to the will of the Syrian people and their aspirations and vision for a better future in which peace, stability and prosperity prevail. How is it possible for a Syrian to justify the continuation of the unilateral coercive measures that all Syrians suffer in their daily lives? That person also calls for implementing additional unilateral coercive measures. How is it possible for any Syrian to publicly call for foreign military interference in their country's internal affairs?

My country is committed to a political solution based on Syrian national dialogue and a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, without any external interference. In that regard, it stresses the importance of fully complying with the terms of reference and rules of procedure of the Constitutional Committee. At the same time, my country rejects all external interference in its work and the imposition of predetermined results and artificial timelines.

Syria regrets the Security Council's failure to condemn the Israeli aggression against Damascus International Airport and condemns the obstacles that certain States have placed in the way of the Security Council's condemnation of that aggression under pretexts that clearly reflect a blind bias in favour of Israel.

Syria stresses the importance of compelling Israel to cease its hysterical and recurrent breaches of Syrian territories, which are organically linked to the crimes committed by terrorist organizations, as well as the United States and Turkish illegal troops present on my country's soil, all of which aim to perpetuate chaos and terrorism in the region and block all prospects for a political solution decided by Syrians alone, without egregious interventions. The failure of the Security Council to discharge its responsibilities suggests to the States Members of the United Nations that they cannot depend on international legitimacy. Instead, they must rely on their own abilities to restore their rights.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the Syrian Arab Republic is a sovereign country that takes pride in its national and Arab identity and makes its own decisions based on its national interests, while fulfilling its constitutional duties and caring for all Syrians. My country spares no effort in establishing friendly relations and constructive cooperation with all countries, while



upholding the principles of sovereignty, independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of others. We condemn the use or threat of use of force, in accordance with the priorities of Syria's foreign policy, which aims to restore security and stability and achieve sustained prosperity and development for all Syrians without exception or exclusion.

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

**Mr. Takht Ravanchi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

As we have frequently stated, there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The resolution of the crisis must be peaceful and in accordance with the principles of international law. The end of the occupation and the restoration of Syria's full sovereignty are essential prerequisites for achieving that goal. The violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity continues to persist through the occupation of certain parts of the country, the Israeli aggression and terrorist attacks. We once again reject separatist activities or illegitimate self-rule initiatives in Syria and condemn any effort to support such illegal measures.

At the political level, we underline the Constitutional Committee's crucial contribution to the political process of the Syrian crisis and commend the Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate the convening of its eighth session. Our delegation was present in Geneva, actively interacting with all sides in order to help the process move forward. We welcome the announcement of the ninth session of the Constitutional Committee, to be held from 25 to 29 July.

We reiterate our steadfast position that the Committee must operate in strict conformity with its terms of reference and rules of procedure, free from outside intervention, pressure, artificial deadlines or any other circumstances of a similar nature. The participation of the United Nations must also be limited to facilitating the process. Ultimately, it must be a truly Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process.

In their joint statement earlier this month, the Astana format guarantors reiterated their commitment to advancing a workable and long-lasting political process that is led and owned by the Syrian people in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Iran will continue its serious contribution to the efforts related to the release of detainees, and in that regard calls on all parties to cooperate in realizing that noble humanitarian

endeavour. The recent declaration of the general amnesty issued by the Syrian President is a valuable contribution to the achievement of peace in Syria.

In the light of the dire situation in Syria, the provision of humanitarian aid is essential, and political circumstances should not prevent humanitarian aid from reaching the people in need. That must, however, be done with full respect for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. We support the Syrian Government's full cooperation with the United Nations and the numerous humanitarian organizations involved in cross-line aid delivery in Syria.

We also support cross-border aid delivery in Syria, provided that it be renewed in a balanced manner and addresses the Syrian Government's legitimate concerns. In that context, the implementation of early-recovery projects is of a high priority, bearing in mind the importance of providing essential services to the people in need. Furthermore, illegal unilateral sanctions should have no bearing on the implementation of early-recovery projects.

We strongly condemn Israel's repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including recent terrorist attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, particularly the attacks against Damascus International Airport on 10 June, which resulted in the cancellation of all flights, including humanitarian flights. The Security Council must unequivocally condemn the Israeli aggression and terrorist attacks against Syria. We recognize Syria's legitimate right to self-defence under international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

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

**Mr. Sinirlioğlu** (Türkiye): After 12 long and painful years, the war in Syria continues to pose a major threat to regional and international peace and security. The need to address the tragic situation in Syria in all its dimensions remains as urgent and critical as ever. Finding a sustainable political solution should remain our overarching goal. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Pedersen has our full support in his efforts towards that objective.

The political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Astana process are central in our efforts for achieving lasting stability and peace in Syria. Regrettably, the eighth session of the Constitutional Committee, which was held earlier this month,



once again failed to yield concrete progress. We call on the regime to stop its delaying tactics and start demonstrating serious and sincere engagement at the next session to be held in July.

From the very beginning, Türkiye has been encouraging the legitimate Syrian opposition to actively contribute to the success of that process. We applaud the opposition's continued constructive attitude despite all kinds of obstacles and provocation. In order for the efforts exerted as part of the political process to yield results, it is also essential that the ceasefire and the calm on the ground be preserved, including in Idlib, where the regime's ceasefire violations targeting civilians continue unabated.

Since the beginning of 2020, the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) has carried out at least 1,750 terrorist attacks against Syrian civilians. Those attacks have been taking place in a context where that terrorist organization is also illegally preparing so-called elections and social contracts on the ground. Those initiatives, led by a self-proclaimed illegitimate autonomous structure, once again confirm the separatist character of that organization. It truly defies logic that some Member States still insist on portraying the PKK/YPG as a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism. The real fight against Da'esh can be carried out only with legitimate actors.

As we have consistently expressed for years now, Türkiye is committed to combating all terrorist organizations that threaten its security, in line with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We will not hesitate to continue to take all the necessary measures to deal with all threats against our vital security interests. Nobody should expect us to remain indifferent to a growing terrorism threat emanating from Syria. We will not stand by and watch the PKK/YPG terrorist organization's attacks targeting not only Syrian civilians, but also Turkish security forces and

civilians inside our borders. Türkiye's determination in that regard is also an assurance for Syria's territorial integrity.

Facilitating the return of refugees should be an integral part of the overall efforts in the political process. While addressing their needs, we should also aim to create conditions conducive to the return of refugees in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner. Türkiye has facilitated the voluntary and safe return of more than 500,000 Syrians to the stabilized areas. Efforts are under way to increase cooperation with other neighbouring countries and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Türkiye has been providing assistance to millions of Syrians within and across our borders. Our humanitarian efforts for the wellbeing of the brave and resilient Syrian people have been recognized by the entire international community. Türkiye is also proud to support the United Nations and the international humanitarian community in delivering life-saving cross-border humanitarian aid to 4.1 million people in need in north-west Syria. In that context, I reiterate our strong call for the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism. As Secretary-General Guterres underlined, the continuation of that most scrutinized and transparent cross-border aid operation is a moral and humanitarian imperative.

Let me conclude by reiterating our strong determination to address the plight of the Syrian people and actively contribute to a political settlement that will meet their legitimate aspirations.

As to the previous speaker, I will not honour him with a reply. As I have said many times, I do not consider him as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I will now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion on the subject in closed consultations.

*The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.*