



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

**9230**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 21 December 2022, 10.15 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mrs. Kamboj . . . . . (India)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. Costa Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Issahaku
Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Mythen
Kenya . . . . .	Ms. Mbabu
Mexico . . . . .	Mr. Ochoa Martínez
Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

### The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2022/933)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021), and 2642 (2022) (S/2022/956)

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22-76585 (E)



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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2022/933)**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021) and 2642 (2022) (S/2022/956)**

**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 this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/933, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic, and document S/2022/956, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020), 2585 (2021) and 2642 (2022).

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Two weeks ago, I visited Damascus to continue my discussion with the Syrian Government on advancing the political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015). As I did so, conditions on the ground were pointing in worrisome directions. Syrians are facing an ever-deepening humanitarian and economic crisis, inside and outside the country and

in both Government-controlled areas and areas outside Government control, where the situation remains most dire, especially in camps for the displaced.

We are dealing with a situation that is the result of more than a decade of war and conflict, corruption and mismanagement, the Lebanese financial crisis, the coronavirus disease, sanctions and the fallout from the war in Ukraine. United Nations assessments tell us that parents are skipping meals so their children can eat. Electricity and fuel, including heating oil, are scarcer than ever. Many are increasingly unable to access clean water and health care, or even to communicate with loved ones or colleagues, because of connectivity outages and failing infrastructure. I heard directly from United Nations colleagues that the needs of Syrians are rising just as resources are falling. Even those who would not normally need assistance — those who receive regular salaries, for instance — are in need, given the depreciation of the lira. No doubt, the situation will only get even more severe as the winter progresses.

The Government has closed state agencies for several days as a result of energy shortages. Some civil servants are unable to travel to work because they lack fuel. In Damascus, there were tangible signs of a worsening crisis: dark streets, unlit houses and little traffic. Payments come in thick stacks of bills, as the Syrian pound depreciates to new record lows.

This bleak humanitarian and economic picture is bad enough; add to it the continued armed conflict and the dangers of military escalation, and the potential for catastrophic deterioration is all too real. We have thankfully not seen further large-scale military operations by any one player this month. But the situation cannot be said to have improved in any way.

The same dangerous dynamics exist, with impact on civilians. We have seen that the same dangerous dynamics exist with impacts on civilians. We have seen reports of sporadic pro-Government airstrikes in the north-west, Turkish airstrikes in the north, and strikes in Damascus and the south-west attributed to Israel; shelling, rocket fire and intermittent clashes on contact lines, involving the full spectrum of actors — the Government, the armed opposition, the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham; continuing attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) against all of those actors, in all quarters of Syria, with reports that ISIL's leader was killed in southern Syria in October; and reports of tensions, continued protests and the use of force in Al-Sweida.

We need to shift those worrisome dynamics. When I briefed the Council last month (see S/PV.9204), I flagged a number of priorities that we need to focus on. I have been working on all of those priorities in my diplomatic engagements with the Syrian parties and with international stakeholders.

The first priority is to step back from escalation and restore relative calm on the ground. Let me remind the Council that a patchwork of agreements and arrangements reached bilaterally between some key actors brought about a relative reduction in violence in recent years, notably between Russia and Türkiye for Idlib in 2020, and between Russia and Türkiye and Türkiye and the United States in 2019 for the north-east, as well as Russian-United States deconfliction. But those fragile agreements and arrangements do not amount to a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Violence continues, and the careful work to establish those agreements and arrangements could be undone in a moment, despite all players often acknowledging that there is no military solution and that the military phase of the conflict is over. Any escalation could reignite a conflict that in reality has not ended, endangering regional stability and creating conditions in which terrorism can thrive. Once again, it would be civilians who would pay the price.

We convened a ceasefire task force plenary meeting in Geneva last Friday to convey a common message to all key Member States with influence on the ground: to show restraint, to protect civilians, to restore calm, to work to consolidate that patchwork of agreements and arrangements into a nationwide ceasefire and to ensure a cooperative approach to countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups, in line with international law.

The second action needed is to renew the framework in the Council on the humanitarian front. Unfettered humanitarian access to all Syrians in need throughout the country, by all modalities, remains imperative. As the Secretary-General has stressed, and as Mr. Griffiths will surely do after me today, cross-border aid continues to be indispensable. I understand that important progress has been made on all of the priorities of resolution 2642 (2022), namely, cross-border and cross-line access as well as the implementation of early-recovery projects. We should protect and build on that progress through the extension of the resolution, for the benefit of all Syrians. This is a core message to the Council today:

please continue to support this framework; millions of Syrians depend on it. Please also be generous in responding to the United Nations humanitarian appeals.

The third point I have stressed is the need to resume and make more substantive the Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva. As I told the Council last month, the United Nations stands ready to resume Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva as soon as readiness to do so from others exists. On that there is nothing new to report, particularly on the Russian position regarding Geneva. Nevertheless, I continue my efforts in that regard, including reminding Government-nominated co-Chair Kuzbari in Damascus of the need to reply to my June letter on improving working methods, to which Syria Negotiations Committee-nominated co-Chair Al-Bahra has already responded.

The fourth point I am focusing on is prioritizing work on the detained, the disappeared and the missing. In Damascus, I underlined the importance of sharing information on detainees and releases. I also stressed the need to safeguard detainees' right to communication, as loved ones deserve to know if they are alive. I will continue my engagement with the Syrian Government and all other stakeholders to push for releases and information, commensurate with the scale of the issue, while maintaining my dialogue with family, victim and survivor associations. I also look towards 2023 with hope of seeing a missing persons' institution mandated by the General Assembly, as recommended by the Secretary-General. That would be a pathway to generate some tangible progress for the millions of Syrians affected by this file and provide adequate support to survivors and families.

The fifth point is to further the dialogue towards identifying and implementing initial step-for-step confidence-building measures. I am convinced that it is possible that the Syrian stakeholders and international players could find a way to make some precise, concrete, reciprocal steps that could move us some way along the path of resolution 2254 (2015). If that were done, I believe it could begin to have a meaningful impact on the lives of ordinary Syrians, shift some of the negative dynamics on the ground and build some trust and confidence between the parties and in the political process. I had a long exchange with Foreign Minister Mekdad in Damascus on that, and I appreciated his willingness to engage. The dialogue has certainly deepened, and I welcome the invitation to return to Damascus in the New Year for a new round of talks.

I also met in Geneva with Badr Jamous, President of the Syrian Negotiations Committee, and discussed a range of issues in resolution 2254 (2015), including steps that all parties could take to help build trust and confidence and bring an end to the suffering of all Syrians. And I look forward to further engagement with the Syrian Negotiations Committee in the New Year as well.

Let me stress a sixth and final point. I will continue to rely on the insights and advice of the Women's Advisory Board. I will continue to mainstream gender in all our work. And I will continue to engage with a broad range of Syrians through the Civil Society Support Room to strengthen dialogue on issues relevant to the political process and to ensure inclusive participation. This month Syrian women and men told us that social trust remains in short supply. The role for civil society to help rebuild Syria's social cohesion is more imperative today than it has ever been. Syrian women have been admirably resilient, enduring mounting hardships, particularly as heads of households. Their empowerment and inclusion is essential.

As 2022 draws to a close, we look back on a very difficult year. The needs of the Syrian people have reached the worst levels since the conflict began, against a backdrop of further economic collapse and ongoing violence. No tangible progress has been made in advancing the political process. And global geopolitics made a difficult situation even more complicated. This is a bleak picture.

But it is sometimes said that the hour is darkest before dawn. Syrians of all backgrounds tell me that the current situation is unacceptable and also unsustainable. And I sense a growing realization in all quarters that allowing the status quo to continue and the situation to deteriorate is simply not an option. That is why I appeal to all members to get behind the agenda I have laid out today. Syria needs sustained international attention, starting with unity in the Council behind the humanitarian framework, but also on all the other aspects I have highlighted.

I and my team will spare no effort to bring about some movement on this extremely difficult conflict in the year ahead. We must give Syrians hope for the future. Our goal remains a comprehensive political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians and restores Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. I am counting on members' creativity, engagement and support.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I am afraid the Security Council will hear from me in very similar terms and words to the ones that we just heard from Mr. Pedersen about the extraordinarily gloomy and dire situation facing the people of Syria. I am grateful to Mr. Pedersen for his exposition.

Many records were broken in 2022, all of them overwhelmingly negative. The hostilities, for example, continued to take a substantial toll, especially along the front lines, despite a widespread acknowledgement that the military objectives are out of line, as Mr. Pedersen said. In north-west Syria alone, at least 138 civilians were killed and 249 injured. The number of people who need humanitarian aid climbed to 14.6 million, which is an increase of more than 1.2 million compared to 2021. That number will go up in 2023 once again to reach a new and awful record of 15.3 million. We have not seen those kinds of numbers, death rates, damage and need since the beginning of the crisis. More than 12 million people, which is more than half of the population of Syria, are struggling to put food on the table. Mr. Pedersen spoke movingly, I thought, of the economic situation facing them. Nearly 3 million additional people could slide into food insecurity.

Socioeconomic conditions continued to deteriorate. Spiralling domestic inflation, most evident in the continued devaluation of the local currency — and coupled with the rising global food and fuel prices that we know so well — is putting basic food items and other essentials out of reach for millions of families. Prices for essential food commodities, the core need and the basic food basket for a family in Syria, have surged by more than 90 per cent during this year. It is of course therefore no surprise that the vast majority of families in Syria are unable to meet their own basic needs. Families headed by women feel the impact of these alarming trends most acutely. This is the worse since the crisis began, and I do not believe that 2023 will bring the people of Syria much relief.

Despite funding challenges and a complex operational environment — perhaps the most complex in all the world's humanitarian response programmes today — our humanitarian partners have been delivering life-saving assistance to 7.8 million people every month this year, including 2.7 million reached through the cross-border operations that Mr. Pedersen

referred to. The year 2022 was also notable as the year of cholera, making a resurgence for the first time in Syria in 15 years, as indeed it is in many places around the world, profiting, as it does, from health systems under strain. Outbreaks of cholera usually occur in communities struggling to access safe water where the sanitation and public health infrastructure has been damaged owing to conflict or natural disasters, of which Syria has both. Some 62,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported as of 18 December, and sadly, 100 people have died. Humanitarian partners are scaling up surveillance and testing capacities, monitoring water quality, training health-care workers and promoting awareness. And we urgently need additional funding to continue responding to that particular outbreak.

As we speak and sit here, millions of people in Syria are spending their twelfth consecutive winter in displacement. For the 2 million living in tents, camps and makeshift shelters, winter is a cruel time indeed, with its sub-zero temperatures, strong winds, sudden squalls, snowstorms and flooding that destroy their shelter. Approximately 6 million people — an annual increase of a third — are in need of urgent assistance this winter. The winterization response, which agencies deliver to respond to special winter needs, led by our colleagues at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is 21 per cent funded. That means that more than two thirds of the people who need help to deal with the scourges I just mentioned will not receive it. Families will not have fuel, heaters, blankets, winter clothes and other items that they need merely to ward off the cold and protect their children from its terrible grip. Once again, it will of course be families headed by women that will be the most gravely affected.

The general funding outlook for Syria is fairly discouraging too. We are not far away from the end of 2022, and the 2022 humanitarian response plan for the country is 43 per cent funded. And I am sure that is where we will end the year — under half funded. The low level of funding this late in the year is in fact unprecedented. We know the many reasons that have contributed to that. But let us please try not to let this become another disappointing record next year.

Women and girls are bearing the brunt of the continuing crisis. Gender-based violence is rampant in Syria in the form of physical, sexual, psychological and indeed economic abuse. Approximately 7.3 million people, an overwhelming majority of whom are women and girls, need support to confront and overcome

gender-based violence. That is 7.3 million who are in need of such support — a third of the total population. We must ensure that they receive that support. We must give them our help and a steady shoulder.

In less than three weeks, resolution 2642 (2022), which enables us to deliver cross-border humanitarian assistance to north-west Syria, to which Mr. Pedersen also referred, is due to expire. Needless to say, I am asking for the Council's support to enable us to do our job, do what generous Member States require of us and deliver that assistance to all who need it, no matter where they are. I cannot stress enough the importance of maintaining that lifeline for the millions of people in the north-west in particular. This is not about excluding the north-east but about focusing on the north-west. Not renewing the resolution jeopardizes the delivery of aid when people need it most, amid a cholera outbreak and in the middle of winter.

I also want to give the Council some statistics on early recovery. Since January, at least 125 humanitarian agencies have been implementing 374 projects in every governorate in Syria in early recovery. As a piece of good news, those projects have received a record \$517 million; 274 of the 374 projects are funded and have received a little less than that amount. In this way early recovery, as the resolution requires, has been built up. But we also need the continued facilitation and support of all the parties in the region, and the Council, to improve our cross-line access. In the north-west, the ninth cross-line mission to Sarmada, in Idlib governorate, was completed at the beginning of this month. Therefore, our record this year is better. The inter-agency convoy delivered food, medicines, sanitation and hygiene items and reproductive health kits.

Of course we need to see more of those convoys. However — and I must repeat this, as I always do — they cannot compensate for the massive scale of the cross-border operation. For every month in 2022, on average, nearly 600 trucks have delivered food and other essential aid across the border to north-west Syria. Cross-line deliveries are therefore an essential complement, and it is essential to build them up. Early recovery is essential, simply for the self-respect and future prospects of the people of Syria. The cross-border mechanism cannot be substituted. I am sorry to be so gloomy. I join Mr. Pedersen in his priorities, his humanitarian framework and all other efforts that he and his Office need in order to try to bring an end to this tragedy for the people of Syria.

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

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

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Geir Pedersen and Martin Griffiths for the overview on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Russian Federation's unchanging position is that there is no alternative to a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process carried out under the United Nations mediation and based on full respect for the principles of the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, without any external interference. In that regard, we consistently support the efforts made by made by Mr. Pedersen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Syria, within the framework of his direct mandate, as stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015), the key element of which is Syria's Constitutional Committee. We take note of Mr. Pedersen's efforts to depoliticize the Geneva platform, as well as to ensure the resumption of the Committee's regular sessions, and his engagement with Syrians on that matter, including during his recent visit to Damascus, earlier in December. We believe that key decisions as to the modalities of subsequent rounds of inter-Syrian consultations need to be made by the Syrians themselves, without any external pressure.

The situation in Syria's north continues to raise concern. Military operations in the governorates of Aleppo, Raqqa and Al-Hasakah have already caused deaths, not only among the Syrian military, but also among civilians, including reporters, in addition to destroying civilian infrastructure. Against that backdrop, we condemn the continued illegal aerial attacks by the Israeli air force. In November, at least two such cases were reported — an aerial attack on the Al-Shayrat military airbase, located to the east of Homs, as well as strikes from the Mediterranean targeting Syria's central and coastal areas, which killed six Syrian military personnel and wounded four more. We are convinced that achieving long-term stability and security in Syria can only be possible by fully restoring the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as ending the illegal foreign presence and the practice of turning Syria into an arena for settling geopolitical scores.

We are painfully aware of the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Syria. The cost of the basic food basket,

which far exceeds the monthly income of most Syrians, combined with the high inflation rate and the devaluation of the Syrian pound, means that, according to United Nations estimates, the number of people in need of assistance in 2023 will reach yet another record high, amounting to 15 million people. Amid the fuel shortages, there have been catastrophic power outages. In a number of governorates, electricity is available only for 20 minutes once every five hours, including in critical infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and municipal facilities.

The chronic water crisis and deterioration of key communications triggered an outbreak of cholera in September in Aleppo governorate, which then spread not only throughout the rest of Syria, but also to neighbouring Lebanon. We are of course reassured to know that half of the world's supply of the cholera vaccine has been sent to Syrians. However, the special World Health Organization epidemic response plan is only one-third funded.

Of the few positive changes, we note the fact that the 2022 humanitarian response plan is 43 per cent funded — which, as Mr. Griffiths just said today, is not enough. We also note the dispatch of the ninth convoy from Aleppo to Sarmada and the plans to dispatch a tenth, as well as the establishment of access to Tel Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn. However, those are the very basic results, and it took the United Nations much too long to achieve them. And it is hard to fight the feeling that more efforts are being spent on trying to prove the indispensability of the cross-border mechanism than arranging cross-line deliveries.

Let me say frankly that the current humanitarian situation in Syria does not provide a favourable context for the discussion on renewing the cross-border mechanism. The point is not that we are against helping ordinary Syrians, as some delegations will try to portray today. The point is that the global community should sincerely try to help all Syrians, without discrimination and politicization. But unfortunately, there is still a long way to go before that can be achieved. We can say that in principle, in the past six months, our former Western partners have not changed their opportunistic approach to this matter. Like careless students on the eve of an exam, they remember the provisions of resolution 2585 (2021) and 2642 (2022) only when they are about to expire and try to present the situation as though they have been diligently implementing those resolutions over the past six months. We can clearly see that that is

not quite the case, to say the least. In particular, despite the three rounds of informal interactive dialogue, the overall picture of the cross-border mechanism has not become transparent. Representatives of United Nations agencies and Western donors only go around in circles and juggle numbers, including on early recovery, trying to prove how much they are doing while they carefully dodge questions.

Nevertheless, even those decoy tactics cannot hide the obvious fact that there is still an inexplicable and unjustified geographical imbalance in the implementation of early-recovery projects in Syria. Half of the donor funds go to Idlib, 15 per cent go to the trans-Euphrates area, and only 35 per cent go to Damascus-controlled areas, where most of the population lives. Those figures clearly demonstrate how politicized the discussion on the Syrian file is and the extent to which Western donors disregard the resolutions of the Security Council. Added to that is the absolutely unacceptable desire of Western States to maintain the wrongful and illegitimate unilateral sanctions against Syria, which have a devastating effect on the lives of ordinary Syrians.

Contrary to obvious facts and the conclusions of authoritative experts, the West tends to explain all of Syria's problems on the allegedly incompetent acts of the authorities. And when we raise those issues, including within the framework of the interactive dialogues I just mentioned, Western delegations hypocritically try to prove that is an unrelated matter. How can they talk about helping Syria while at the same time trying to hold the country by the throat?

Another taboo topic is the issue of creating artificial impediments to the return of Syrian refugees from neighbouring countries. Both Damascus and the refugees themselves, as well as Syria's neighbours, have an interest in seeing the refugees return. However, that approach does not sit well with the United States and its allies, who believe that the Government of Syria may receive vast political dividends after a mass return of its citizens. Once again, as in the case of the sanctions, the West prioritizes its own political goals over the interests and even the lives of ordinary Syrians.

How does the Council think the Syrian side should perceive this whole situation? What reasons does Damascus have to believe the new hypocritical and opportunistic Western promises? Moreover, does it help Damascus to see how Western countries are acting like

a mother hen nurturing the international terrorism of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in Idlib — a group that continues to benefit from the deliveries via the cross-border mechanism owing to its lack of basic transparency? Does it help Damascus that the commitment to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as stipulated in the resolutions of the Council, is nothing but an empty phrase for the West? We will put all this on one side of the scales and try to imagine what should be on the other side to justify our authorization yet another six-month extension of the cross-border mechanism. Let us be clear: arguments about the lack of an alternative to the cross-border mechanism are unconvincing because the lack of an alternative is artificially supported by the mechanism's supporters' inaction. Perhaps new arguments in favour of the cross-border mechanism will appear in the course of today's meeting, but so far, to be perfectly candid, there have been very few.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the tireless and principled work of the current co-penholders, Ireland and Norway.

This is the ninth meeting of the Security Council since the adoption of resolution 2642 (2022) in July: six briefings and three informal interactive dialogues, where United Nations leaders and humanitarian officials have repeatedly described for the Security Council the scale, transparency and necessity of cross-border deliveries of humanitarian assistance. Before the authorization for cross-border deliveries ends on 10 January, the Council must confirm the extension of the authorization, as envisioned in resolution 2642 (2022).

This is not a complicated issue. The Council recognized in July the need for cross-border deliveries of humanitarian assistance to mitigate the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria, which continues to constitute a threat to peace and security in the region (see S/PV.9089). The Council recognized in July that the need for cross-border deliveries would extend beyond 10 January. The facts that led to that decision in July have not changed. Humanitarian conditions in Syria are worse than they have ever been since the start of the conflict, as Mr. Griffiths mentioned. Some 15.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2023.

Cross-border humanitarian assistance deliveries are the most cost-effective and scalable way to provide food, medical supplies and other essentials to 2.4 million

Syrians who are at risk of starvation, disease and exposure to brutal winter conditions in the north-west. The United Nations cross-border operation is among the most secure and transparent anywhere in the world. There is simply no substitute for cross-border assistance.

The United Nations has implemented every element outlined in resolution 2642 (2022), notably increasing cross-line assistance deliveries and continuing the nationwide implementation of early-recovery projects. The United Nations has dispatched four cross-line aid convoys in the five months since we renewed the mandate in July, almost doubling the total of cross-line missions since they began in August 2021. United Nations experts have provided the Council a clear and logical accounting of their planning and efforts, which have been carried out consistent with humanitarian principles. The United States has done its part, including funding early-recovery projects in all 14 governorates of Syria and encouraging the provision of cross-line aid as determined by humanitarian needs.

The continued presence of thousands of third-country nationals in displacement camps and detention centres in Syria further complicates the humanitarian situation in Syria and must be addressed. Violence is prevalent in the camps, and thousands of vulnerable children are growing up in them without access to education, protection, including proper documentation, medical care and other basic services. Moreover, these camps and detention facilities are targets for attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), underscoring the urgency to facilitate durable solutions through voluntary, safe and dignified returns and repatriations. We call on all States to repatriate their citizens from the camps and detention facilities.

We welcomed the adoption of resolution 2664 (2022) and greatly appreciate Ireland's close collaboration with us in facilitating discussions with the Security Council over the last few months. The resolution established a humanitarian carve-out to the asset-freeze measures across United Nations sanctions regimes. We note that the applicability of this carve-out to the Security Council's ISIL and Al-Qaida sanctions regime pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) will provide important assurances to humanitarian actors in Syria, including those delivering cross-border aid.

Just yesterday, the United States Department of Treasury released a new package of general licences to implement resolution 2664 (2022) across our

domestic sanctions programmes, including some of the programmes related to Syria where humanitarian authorizations did not otherwise already exist. These updates to United Nations and United States sanctions facilitate humanitarian aid while maintaining sanctions on bad actors. This is a significant step for United Nations sanctions related to Syria and builds on significant carve-outs already within United States sanctions for humanitarian aid for the Syrian people, including the delivery of food, medicine and other aid. As we better align these carve-outs across United Nations and United States sanctions, we are making clear that our sanctions should not impede humanitarian activity or the provision of assistance to all in need.

Turning to the political situation, we regret there has been no progress on the Constitutional Committee, as its work has been blocked by arbitrary demands from Russia on unrelated issues. We support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process, and we call on the Al-Assad regime to cooperate with Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to reconvene the Constitutional Committee, agree to and implement a comprehensive, nationwide ceasefire, and humanely release the more than 130,000 missing or arbitrarily detained persons.

We remain concerned about the continued violence and recent escalation in northern Syria, which is putting civilians at risk and threatens the progress made in defeating ISIL. We urge all parties to de-escalate immediately, protect civilians and civilian objects and uphold international humanitarian law. We welcome Special Envoy Pedersen's convening of the ceasefire task force in Geneva last Friday and hope the resumption of this format of meetings can help ensure stability on the ground.

The start of the new year presents an opportunity for the Al-Assad regime to begin the process of healing the country that it has so thoroughly shattered. We urge the regime to make clear its support for the provision of humanitarian assistance to all in Syria, including through cross-border deliveries, and to make clear its intention to constructively participate in Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva as soon as Special Envoy Pedersen can convene them.

**Mr. Mythen** (Ireland): I deliver this statement on behalf of Norway and Ireland, as co-penholders on the Syria humanitarian file. I thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings today. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Griffiths and his team for the two reports with which we have been supplied on the situation in Syria (S/2022/956 and S/2022/933).

That situation could not be clearer. Syrians continue to suffer. The humanitarian situation continues to worsen. And aid, through all modalities, continues to be indispensable for millions of people across the country. An estimated 15.3 million people will require humanitarian protection and assistance in 2023. That is yet another significant increase, up from 14.6 million in 2022, which was the highest number of people in need since the beginning of the conflict.

Syrians are having to work harder than ever before just to survive. Humanitarian suffering as a result of protracted conflict has been exacerbated by food insecurity, the coronavirus disease pandemic, a dire economic situation, a water crisis and cholera. Astoundingly, from the 1 January to 30 September of this year, 450 civilians, including 123 children, were killed as a result of hostilities and violence in Syria. Those 123 children should be safe and well, learning, growing and flourishing.

Civilians are not a target. We echo the Secretary-General's call upon all parties to take constant care throughout their military operations to spare civilians and civilian objects, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Food insecurity has reached record heights. Children in particular are suffering. Cases of severe acute malnutrition rates have doubled since last year. Many children are stunted and at risk of irreversible damage to their health. As the income gap soars, families are unable to afford food. Parents are going without as they try to keep their children from starving.

In this context, early-recovery assistance is vital. From the provision of seeds and installation of streetlights to the rehabilitation of bakeries, schools and irrigation networks for agriculture, early-recovery support is changing lives in every governorate of Syria. Between January and September, an estimated 10.8 million Syrians were reached directly or indirectly by projects aimed at increasing resilience. We welcome that progress, underpinned by resolution 2642 (2022). It must continue.

When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across Syria, all channels of access should be consistently available. Cross-line convoys of aid to north-western Syria continue to increase in frequency and size, and we encourage continued efforts in that regard.

Despite notable progress on cross-line deliveries, they remain at this time unable to substitute the size or scope of the massive United Nations cross-border operation. The highly monitored cross-border mechanism continues to be an indispensable lifeline — as Special Envoy Pedersen said — providing food, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene, protection, vaccines and critical medical services to millions of Syrians in need.

The impact of years of conflict, instability, recurring displacements, poor living conditions and ongoing economic struggles is clear. The rise in suicidal ideation and suicides is grim evidence of an encroaching mental-health crisis. Conflict, hunger and cold are stealing the lives of civilians. But so too is hopelessness caused by the burden of the ongoing conflict and the resulting extreme hardship. It is within our power, in this Chamber, to address at least some of that lack of hope by ensuring that aid continues to reach those most in need.

I repeat that 15.3 million people in 2023 will require humanitarian assistance in Syria. I know we often hear staggering numbers in the Chamber, but we must remember that they are much more than numbers. These are vulnerable people, including elderly persons and children, who need food, water and warmth. They need safe, dignified shelter; they need help; they need the Council to act. We must continue to use all modalities to deliver humanitarian aid to those in need.

To echo the Secretary-General, the continuation of the cross-border mechanism, which remains a lifeline for millions of people, by the Security Council is critical. It is a moral and humanitarian imperative. We cannot abandon these people at a time of such acute need.

I will now address the political situation on behalf of Ireland. My country is seriously concerned about the continuing hostilities on the ground in Syria, particularly given the worrisome escalation in the north in recent weeks. Information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that some of those attacks do not appear to be aimed at specific military targets, while hitting residential areas and densely populated internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, is deeply concerning.

Indiscriminate attacks are unacceptable and prohibited under international humanitarian law. All parties to the conflict are obliged to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Those who violate international

humanitarian law must be held accountable. We call on parties to exercise maximum restraint and reiterate the need for a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The Secretary-General's report (S/2022/956) highlighted the dire security situation for those living in the Al-Hol camp. In 2022, 42 people were reportedly murdered at the camp, including 22 women and 4 children. Impunity for killings, rapes and other acts of violence remains rampant, while people are living in overcrowded and miserable conditions. Ireland echoes the call of the Secretary-General for local authorities in control of those camps to abide by their obligations under international law. We urge the international community to take action in order to ease the suffering of those in Al-Hol and other IDP camps. We are concerned about reports that internally displaced women and adolescent girls lack access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services.

Ireland remains very concerned about the plight of those detained and missing in Syria, with tens of thousands of families left without any knowledge of their loved ones. Ireland calls on the Syrian Government and non-State groups to account for the fate and whereabouts of those detained and to allow human rights agencies access to places of detention.

I would like to conclude my statement by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen for his tireless efforts to advance the Syrian political process throughout Ireland's term on the Council. We reiterate our support for Mr. Pedersen's important work on step-for-step building measures and efforts to reconvene the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. Any new constitution and related political process must include the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. After years of conflict, the Syrian people deserve progress towards stability and security. That can be achieved only through dialogue and agreement on a lasting political solution.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

For some time now, the security situation in Syria has been turbulent. Türkiye has repeatedly pounded northern Syria with air strikes and artillery shelling and continues to threaten to launch ground actions. Israel has frequently attacked targets within Syrian territory. Syria is a sovereign State. Any military operations on its soil without the consent of the

Syrian Government, whatever the pretext, constitute a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call on Türkiye and Israel to immediately cease cross-border attacks and find solutions through dialogue and consultation. The illegal presence of foreign troops on Syrian territory must also end.

At the end of the day, a proper settlement of the Syrian issue can be achieved only through political means. The sooner a political solution materializes, the earlier the people's suffering will be alleviated. Resolution 2254 (2015) represents the international consensus on the Syrian political process and must be fully implemented. We welcome Special Envoy Pedersen and his team engaging extensively with all parties on implementing the resolution. We hope that the Constitutional Committee will reconvene as soon as possible on the basis of the Syrian-led and -owned principle. We support the Special Envoy's step-for-step approach and encourage him to continue to enhance communication with all parties on confidence-building measures towards an early agreement.

Resolution 2642 (2022) will expire in January. It has played its part in easing Syria's humanitarian situation. Relevant United Nations agencies have also contributed to its implementation. However, its comprehensive and effective implementation is still some way off. Cross-border aid was an interim arrangement in response to special circumstances. Eventually, it has to transition to cross-line aid in a gradual and orderly way. The international community must advance cross-line aid with the same vigour afforded to cross-border aid. Priority must be given to the assurances of supplies and funding for cross-line aid, in close coordination with all parties, especially the party in de facto control of north-western Syria so that it can become the primary channel of humanitarian relief for Syria.

Early-recovery projects can help cultivate endogenous drivers for Syria's development. In the past five months, funding for such projects has improved, but is still far behind in meeting the needs of the Syrian people. China urges all donors to put the well-being of the entire Syrian population first, provide sufficient financial support with no strings attached to early-recovery projects and ensure their even-handed delivery across Syria. Given that explosive remnants of war have taken a heavy toll on the normal life and work of the Syrian people, we hope that the relevant operations will be incorporated into the early-recovery programme without delay.

Unilateral sanctions and their excessive enforcement run counter to the efforts of the Council and the international community to improve humanitarian access and increase humanitarian resources in Syria. The Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights stated explicitly in her report (A/HRC/51/33) that such measures have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The Secretary-General also stated in his report (S/2022/933) that unilateral sanctions have impeded humanitarian work with regard to procurement and payments. Once again, China calls on the countries concerned to lift their unilateral coercive measures against Syria without delay.

**Mr. Costa Filho** (Brazil): I would first like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings.

Unfortunately, after 11 years of conflict, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to take an appalling toll on human life. Its scale and severity are affecting the Syrian population in areas both within and outside Government control, particularly in the north-west. The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and full compliance with international humanitarian law must remain priorities. Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons have an essential role to play in building a peaceful and prosperous future for Syria. Their fundamental rights must be fully respected, including their right to a safe and voluntary return.

Brazil believes that we should refrain from politicizing the humanitarian response in Syria. The delivery of aid must be impartial and non-discriminatory and reach all in need, regardless of their political affiliation. For the time being, the cross-border mechanism, which is set to expire in less than a month, remains a vital component of the humanitarian response in the country. We recognize the persistence of obstacles that prevent the scaling up of cross-line deliveries, particularly into the north-west, both at the speed and to the level required to meet humanitarian needs.

The Council's organization over the past six months of three informal interactive dialogues on Syria provided useful opportunities to consider the many challenges holding back progress in cross-line deliveries to all parts of Syria. In particular, we note the difficulties of coordinating the organization of humanitarian convoys with multiple parties and authorities. Brazil welcomes

the progress, even if limited, made in deliveries through the cross-line modality since the adoption of resolution 2642 (2022) in July. While maintaining respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, we should redouble our efforts to address the reasons for the delays to a more significant increase in humanitarian aid. The need to ensure transparency and accountability is valid for both modalities of humanitarian assistance. Brazil also encourages further progress in the development of early-recovery projects, without geographic discrimination. In addition to addressing immediate needs, such projects can lay a foundation for alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Syria in a more sustainable manner.

We welcomed the adoption earlier this month of a standing humanitarian carve-out, applicable across all United Nations sanctions regimes, under resolution 2664 (2022). With regard to Syria, we understand that the resolution could enhance the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver aid in areas outside Government control, including in sites where Al-Qaida or Da'esh affiliates are actively present. It is therefore important to strengthen oversight in order to prevent the diversion of aid.

Brazil reaffirms its commitment to playing a constructive role in the Syrian file. The Council should redouble its efforts to end the current political stalemate, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), with a view to achieving a solution to the conflict in Syria. A true Syrian-led and -owned political process, without foreign interference, is essential to promoting sustainable peace while preserving Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Ghana, Kenya and my own country, Gabon (A3).

We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen, and Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths for their briefings on the most recent political and humanitarian developments in Syria. We also welcome the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Republic of Türkiye to today's meeting.

The escalation of hostilities in northern Syria, especially in Idlib, is particularly alarming. The use of force on demonstrators in the south continues, as well as air strikes, mutual bombing and clashes, with the

potential for escalation. Once again, it is civilians who are paying a heavy price for the conflict. Hostilities and military operations affecting civilians have intensified in various parts of the country. During the reporting period, civilians were killed or injured as a result of air strikes, ground strikes and attacks with various kinds of improvised explosive devices and gunfire. The hostilities have also had an impact on civilian objects, further eroding access to basic services and livelihoods. Based on incidents reported across the country, as documented by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, from 1 to 13 October this year a total of 42 civilians, including seven women and 13 children, were killed as a result of the hostilities, and at least 60 civilians, including 14 women and 13 children, were injured. The A3 strongly condemns such indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects in violation of international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Terrorist acts have also continued. Da'esh, which is listed as a terrorist group by the Security Council, continues its attacks, including on civilians, in Dara'a, Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah and eastern rural Homs and Hama. Any additions to the list of terrorist groups will only worsen the dire security situation and continue to endanger the lives of innocent civilians. We therefore call for concerted efforts to combat terrorist groups listed by the Council. We are very concerned about the squalid conditions for detainees in Syria, especially in the Al-Hol camp. The detainees' treatment and living conditions should be improved immediately. We reiterate our call to States to repatriate their citizens, especially women and children, in a safe and dignified manner in line with the applicable norms of international humanitarian law.

After a decade of conflict, Syria is now experiencing a considerable increase in humanitarian needs, and the number of people in need of international assistance to survive continues to rise every year. The ongoing violence, a protracted economic crisis, difficult weather conditions and a lack of access to basic services in the context of a cholera epidemic that is now affecting every governorate are all challenges for the Syrian people. Food insecurity is worsening and is especially affecting children at risk of malnutrition. In Al-Hol and other camps in north-eastern Syria, children are constantly exposed to violence and deprived of basic rights, including access to education and health services.

With regard to the plight of women in Syria, the A3 echoes the Secretary-General and urges the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to develop legislative and policy measures to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in every area of life and to achieve the goal of gender equality, including by using quotas and special measures. Cognizant of the absolute importance of saving lives and fully responding to the humanitarian needs of the ever-increasing number of Syrians in distress, the A3 supports the United Nations-supported cross-border operations, which continue to play a key role in reaching many people in need and for which there is no substitute in terms of scale. In that regard, the renewal of the cross-border mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian aid is not just necessary but appropriate and urgent. We therefore welcomed the passage of a total of 29 convoys, or 1,377 trucks, as part of the cross-border operations through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing.

On the political front, the A3 welcomes the ongoing efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen to advance his step-for-step confidence-building process in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and to convene a ninth session of the United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-led Constitutional Committee. We note in particular his bilateral engagement with the Syrian Government, the Syrian opposition and other key stakeholders. We hope that the ninth session of the Constitutional Committee will allow for the fundamental challenges facing the Committee to be addressed.

Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to achieve a nationally facilitated ceasefire in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Calm on the ground is essential to create an environment conducive to moving the political process forward. We therefore call on all parties to prioritize the needs of the Syrian people, to exercise restraint and to engage in meaningful negotiations.

The issue of the fate of detainees remains a major concern for the A3. We call for those responsible to be held to account for their actions.

We reiterate our commitment to respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Finally, the A3 reiterates its solidarity with the Syrian people in their quest for lasting peace and stability. The resolute commitment in good faith of Syria's neighbouring countries is fundamental in order to achieve that.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): As my Irish colleague presented our joint statement as co-penholders on the humanitarian situation, I will now make a statement on the political situation in Syria. I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

As this is Norway's last meeting on Syria during our current term on the Security Council, let me offer a few reflections.

It is heartbreaking to have seen a continuation of hostilities, civilian casualties and even escalations in Syria in the past two years. There truly are no military solutions to the conflict. A nationwide ceasefire must be prioritized. We have called and will continue to call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and abide by their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Norway would like to commend the vital work of Special Envoy Pedersen and his efforts to implement resolution 2254 (2015), including to bring the parties to the negotiation table. The Special Envoy's recent mission to Damascus to consult with the parties and other key actors is positive. We fully support his step-for-step approach to seek a new dynamic towards a solution in Syria, and we encourage a renewed sense of urgency for the Constitutional Committee. We continue to urge all parties to work in good faith with the Special Envoy.

Let me also stress our support for the Special Envoy's inclusive approach to the political process and underline the importance of his regular consultations with the Civil Society Support Room and the Syrian Women's Advisory Board. Women's participation is central to building lasting peace and stability. It is also crucial to draw on the broad diversity of Syrian civil society organizations and to truly engage them in efforts to move the political process forward.

It is regrettable that, in the past two years, we have not seen much progress on resolving the important issue of those missing and arbitrarily detained. Many Syrians and their families are affected — they do not know what happened to their loved ones.

While the announced general amnesty for non-lethal terrorist crimes was positive, it is important that the amnesty is implemented, both broadly and with priority, in order to build confidence and share information with the public.

In conclusion, let me once again thank the Special Envoy and underline that Norway will continue to stay engaged and support United Nations efforts to find a political solution, which the Syrian people desperately want and deserve. Progress towards a political solution will not only benefit the people of Syria, who have suffered for too long, but also strengthen neighbouring countries and the broader international community.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I want to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their comprehensive and sobering briefings today.

At the outset, on the humanitarian situation, the facts on the ground are clear. As Special Envoy Pedersen said, we have an ever-deepening humanitarian crisis. An estimated 15.3 million Syrians will be in dire need of humanitarian assistance by early 2023, with approximately 12 million facing acute food insecurity. The report of the Secretary-General published this month (S/2022/933) sets out the criticality of food, shelter and medical assistance, in particular in the response to cholera and the provision of immunization services.

The United Nations has also clearly explained that cross-line operations complement but cannot replace or compensate for the cross-border mechanism. Therefore, my first point is that, with millions of Syrians facing another harsh winter, the moral and humanitarian imperatives are clear: renewing the cross-border mandate in January and continuing cross-border assistance is essential to the United Nations humanitarian operation and provides a lifeline to those people in desperate need.

My second point is that a political solution, as others have said, is the only way to bring an end to the humanitarian crisis. That means implementing resolution 2254 (2015) through, namely, a nationwide ceasefire; the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees; free and fair elections in line with a new constitution; and the release of those arbitrarily detained. We know that thousands of Syrians are arbitrarily detained in regime detention centres, and information on their whereabouts is withheld from their families. Worse still, the Syrian Network for Human Rights reported yesterday that hundreds of detainee deaths, including many children, were never reported to their families.

I also want to thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for his work to address gender-based violence. Colleagues will recall that, three weeks ago, the United

Kingdom hosted a conference on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict in order to strengthen the global response to that problem.

We therefore call for the immediate reconvening of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva to focus on the substance of the political transition. The Syrian opposition remains ready to engage in good faith. We urge Russia and the regime to do the same.

My third point is that, as we have heard, continuing the status quo is not an option. Syria needs the Security Council to unite and to support the renewal of cross-border aid within a humanitarian framework and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), leading to a political solution.

**Ms. Dautllari** (Albania): Let me also begin by expressing our thanks to Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings today and for their tireless efforts to improve the lives of ordinary Syrians. The grim reality that they have described is another reminder of how challenging the situation in Syria is for the international community and how little has been achieved despite efforts. We welcome the recent engagement of Special Envoy Pedersen with the parties with regard to reconvening the Constitutional Committee and promoting his step-for-step initiative. We share the view of the Special Envoy that those are important steps that all parties could take to help build trust and confidence and end the suffering of all Syrians. There is no alternative to negotiations and the constitutional route to return Syria to normality.

The humanitarian catastrophe in Syria is human-made. It is a political choice. But there should be no doubt concerning the renewal of the humanitarian mandate — the lifeline for millions of Syrians. Both the 12 December special report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/933) on humanitarian needs in Syria and his regular 60-day report (S/2022/956) emphasize that cross-line operations, while important, cannot currently replace the cross-border operation in size or scope. We also want to stress the important role that carveout resolution 2664 (2022) can play in the case of Syria. The renewal is the bare minimum we can do to meet the basic needs of the people in Syria. The Council will lose its credibility in the eyes of Syrians and of the world if it fails to live up to meeting its minimal humanitarian obligations.

The Syrian regime has fed the Syrian people and the world with false hopes about the whereabouts of hundreds of thousands of missing persons and detainees. The Syrian regime must immediately release all detainees and provide complete information about all missing persons. We strongly support the Secretary-General's proposal for a new mechanism on missing persons to provide long-awaited closure for millions of Syrians. At the same time, Syria needs all the help it can get to move out of the hellish place it has been forced into. It needs to restore its basic infrastructure to make normal life possible, and the life of ordinary Syrians bearable. Concrete plans and projects within the framework of the step-for-step approach are needed. But we cannot pay for the restoration of normal life in Syria without fighting impunity and holding the perpetrators of all crimes accountable.

In conclusion, Syria needs an inclusive and active political process, with the full and meaningful participation of women and civil society, to allow for a political transition to take place, and we encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to continue working with the Women's Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room in that regard. That is the only way to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people. Albania fully supports all efforts to that effect and the role played by the Special Envoy.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Geir Pedersen and Martin Griffiths for their briefings.

I would like to underscore the three following points.

First, I regret once again the absence of a political process. While the situation remains volatile, especially in the northern part of Syria, we reiterate our call for a nationwide ceasefire. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime refuses to engage in a political process as set forth in resolution 2254 (2015), which, I recall, was unanimously adopted by the Security Council. The Constitutional Committee is no longer meeting. The regime refuses to cooperate with the United Nations with regard to the fate of more than 100,000 missing persons — a historically unprecedented statistic. Finally, the regime does not want to engage in the Special Envoy's step-by-step approach, which we support.

The United Nations has broadly documented the atrocities committed by the regime over the past 12 years of war. The use of sexual violence is systematic, including against children, in the regime's detention

facilities. The Sednaya prison, located in an area under the regime's control, is known for the abuses committed within its walls. Based on United Nations reports and the testimonies of Syrians, the European Union has adopted targeted sanctions against the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria. They include many humanitarian exemptions so as not to hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid, which, I recall, has been largely financed by the European Union and its member States. In total, they have raised more than \$27.4 billion since 2011. That is why, in the absence of any progress on the political process in Syria, the French and European positions on the lifting of sanctions, normalization and reconstruction will remain unchanged.

Secondly, I would like to recall the responsibility of the regime for the humanitarian tragedy taking place in Syria. The brutality of the repression has caused the largest population displacement of the twenty-first century. Many major Syrian cities have been bombed or even completely destroyed by the regime and its allies. There are 12 million displaced persons and refugees who hope to return to Syria when the conditions are right. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, many refugees today do not want to return for fear of reprisals, forced conscription or because their property has been confiscated. I recall that the several hundred people who made the choice to return to Syria were unable to do so without first obtaining the regime's consent to cross the border. The security checks are coupled with administrative detention upon their arrival in places to which the United Nations most often has no access. Numerous cases of torture, forced disappearances and executions have been reported in the detention facilities. Faced with the scope of such persecution, many returning refugees are seeking to leave Syria once again.

That is a deliberate policy of demographic engineering, which is being pursued today and in which the international community cannot be complicit.

Lastly, only humanitarian assistance under the aegis of the United Nations, in accordance with the norms of international humanitarian law, can help the Syrian population. The latest special report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/933) leaves no doubt — as the briefings by Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths reminded us — that needs are ever-greater and the prospects for 2023 are

extremely worrisome. The report highlights the critical and vital role played by the cross-border mechanism, both in terms of the volume of aid delivered and the number of its recipients. Such aid is the only means of survival for more than 2 million Syrians every month.

Cross-line aid is complementary and important, but it cannot be a substitute for cross-border aid. As the Secretary-General has stressed, renewing the cross-border mechanism is a moral imperative. France fully supports that goal. The operation carried out under the aegis of the United Nations enables ensuring compliance with the relative Security Council resolutions, which, I recall, are binding on all parties.

**Mr. Ochoa Martínez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings.

During its two years as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Mexico has witnessed the unacceptable human cost of almost 12 years of conflict and the political stalemate to end it. The reports of the Secretary-General (S/2022/933 and S/2022/956) reflect the alarming data. Next year, almost 15.3 million people will require humanitarian assistance, the highest level of people in need since 2011. Inflation has led to a deterioration in purchasing power and the inability to purchase basic goods, in a country where cases of severe malnutrition among children are on the rise. The impact on mental health and the increase in deaths by suicide, especially among women and young people, are alarming.

Given a situation in which humanitarian needs are not subsiding but, on the contrary, are increasing, it is clear that all modalities of humanitarian access must be preserved. That is why we welcome the continued cross-line deliveries to the north-west. We urgently call for redoubling efforts to overcome the security and administrative challenges to continue and increase such deliveries. However, it is clear that there is no substitute for the voluminous aid entering through the Bab Al-Hawa humanitarian crossing.

Moreover, early-recovery projects are critical to the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure. We also recognize how demining efforts can help render agricultural land usable again.

My delegation notes with deep concern the resurgence in hostilities, particularly the military presence and movements in the north. We call for

exercising restraint and for a national ceasefire. We stress that there can be no military solution. The only path to sustainable peace in Syria is an inclusive political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2016). We commend the efforts of the Special Envoy, including his efforts to convene the ninth meeting of the small body of the Constitutional Committee, which we regret has so far not been able to take place. It is urgent that the international community encourage the parties to participate in those discussions in order to make progress towards national reconciliation and rebuild the social fabric. That is the only way to create the conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of millions of Syrian refugees. It is urgent to address the demands of the thousands of families that have been torn apart by the disappearances of their loved ones. We urge the authorities to release the detained, clarify the situation of the missing persons and grant humanitarian agencies access to the detention centres.

Accountability also continues to be a crucial element for advancing towards a resolution of the conflict. Unfortunately, the progress in that area still leaves much to be desired. Since it is not possible to refer the Syrian case to the International Criminal Court, my delegation urges for strengthened collaboration with 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 the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

The nearly 12 years of conflict have resulted in one of the greatest human crises in living memory — 12 years in which the international community and the Security Council have failed the Syrian people. Our debt to the Syrian people increases with each passing day. The least we can do to mitigate that is to renew the authorization of the Bab Al-Hawa cross-border mechanism. We trust that the Council will rise to that occasion.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank both Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Martin Griffiths for their briefings today. As we approach the end of several Member States' terms on the Security Council, I want to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to our colleagues from Norway and Ireland, the penholders for the Syrian humanitarian

resolution, for their professionalism, balanced approach and tireless efforts to facilitate the resolution on the cross-border mechanism in Syria over the most recent period. We hope that the incoming penholders will take the same approach.

As we near the expiration of the cross-border mechanism to Syria, I would like to focus today on the humanitarian situation in Syria. This year, the Syrian crisis has witnessed worsening humanitarian conditions and a deepening of divisions with regard to that dossier, both inside and outside the Council. We must ensure that a spirit of unity and collaboration prevails among the members of the Council in the coming year if we are to lessen the suffering of the Syrian people. We also stress the importance of not politicizing the Syrian humanitarian dossier or tying it to progress on the political track. We all have a moral and human responsibility to ensure the delivery of assistance to all in need in Syria, without any political considerations.

In July the Council adopted resolution 2642 (2022) during a period of conflicting positions and geopolitical complications. That resolution extended the cross-border mechanism to Syria and for the first time included a provision on the importance of ensuring electricity supplies for Syrians, given that it is a basic and essential humanitarian need. The resolution also allowed for the convening of informal interactive dialogues, which helped provide a clearer picture to the Member States about the difficulties surrounding its implementation. Given those important elements, which have strengthened the objectives of the resolution, the United Arab Emirates supports the extension of the cross-border mechanism to Syria for an additional six months. That is currently the best way to move forward.

The United Arab Emirates believes that the resolution on the cross-border mechanism to Syria should be treated as one that benefits all Syrians in all of Syria's governorates, not only those living in north-western Syria. It includes sustainable solutions such as early-recovery projects essential for addressing the humanitarian situation in the long term, as needs continue to rise to dangerous levels. According to the report of the Secretary-General (see S/2022/933), more than 15 million of Syria's population of 22 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance next year. We are talking about real people and families of women and children, not mere numbers. All the parties on the ground must therefore also enable the unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and commit

to non-interference in humanitarian operations in order to ensure that they reach all in need. We also stress the importance of restoring calm and ensuring de-escalation across all regions, especially in northern Syria.

The delivery of cross-line assistance requires security guarantees from all the parties on the ground and the removal of all obstacles that impede humanitarian operations in order to enable the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to increase cross-line humanitarian operations, in terms of both frequency and scale.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that the cross-border mechanism to Syria was established as an exceptional and temporary measure, which means that we should prioritize the political track, given its impact on the humanitarian track, including through our support to the Special Envoy's efforts. Without a political solution to the crisis, the humanitarian situation in Syria cannot be addressed.

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

I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary General Martin Griffiths for their briefings. We note with regret that there is still no end in sight for the conflict in Syria and that the political process has not yet taken off. We continue to urge for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), with a firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. A decisive forward movement on the political track in Syria remains urgent if the sufferings of its people are to be alleviated.

The revival of the Constitutional Committee process is crucial if we are to move forward on the political track. In that regard, we take note of the efforts of the Special Envoy, particularly his visit to Damascus earlier this month. The step-for-step approach that he advocates requires engagement and response from all sides and cannot be a one-sided process. The progressive normalization of Syria's relations with its neighbours can contribute positively in that regard, and we continue to support the Special Envoy's active engagement with the region.

In recent weeks, the security situation, particularly in north-east Syria, has worsened. Moreover, the activities of terrorist outfits are on the rise. We have also seen military operations inside Syria carried

out by a neighbour. We express concern over such unilateral actions, which violate Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We believe that withdrawal of all foreign forces is essential to achieving a nationwide ceasefire. We note the recent meeting of the ceasefire task force and hope that the parties will take steps towards a cessation of hostilities.

The humanitarian situation remains dire, as many have said. In his most recent report (S/2022/933), the Secretary-General has projected an increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian aid from 14.6 million in 2022 to 15.3 million in 2023. Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths has also reiterated the challenges faced by humanitarian agencies.

Women, children and the elderly continue to be severely affected, and impediments to humanitarian assistance persist, both in terms of delivery and augmentation of financial resources. The restrictions on financial services have also negatively affected the work of humanitarian agencies.

We have noted the progress in cross-line deliveries and early-recovery projects. Our consistent view in this regard has been that distribution of humanitarian assistance to Syrians, whether by cross-line or cross-border mechanisms, should be guided by a needs-based assessment, and not by political motivations. Humanitarian assistance cannot be a matter of political expediency.

The threat of terrorism to Syria and the region also cannot be ignored. The sanctioned terror outfits, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham remain active in Syria. We reiterate our call for the exercise of caution and due diligence when extending humanitarian assistance to entities and individuals proscribed under the United Nations sanctions regime. The global fight against terrorism cannot and should not be compromised for narrow political gains. It is urgent and imperative that the international community display zero tolerance towards terrorism without any double standards.

In conclusion, I will say that India and Syria share historic and friendly relations. Over the years, India has extended humanitarian, technical and development assistance to Syria through bilateral and multilateral channels. Consignments of food and medicines have been supplied to Syria from time to time, including during the pandemic. India has offered lines of credit worth \$280 million to Syria for building a power

plant and a steel plant. A next-generation centre for information technology was set up in Damascus in October 2021. Approximately, 1,500 scholarships have been provided to Syrian students to study in India in diverse streams, including 200 scholarships in the current academic year itself.

We stand ready to do more in the coming days and months to help our Syrian brothers and sisters in their hour of need. I assure the Security Council that India will continue to play a constructive and meaningful role in support of Syria and its people in their endeavour to attain lasting peace and stability.

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

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

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We asked for the floor yet again because we were surprised by the statement made by our American colleague when he said that Russia suspended the deliberations of the Constitutional Committee on the basis of arbitrary demands on unrelated issues. I want to underscore that we had serious reasons for suspending the meetings of the drafting commission of the Constitutional Committee, given that, at the time, no appropriate guarantees had been extended to the delegation of the host country.

Furthermore, the meaning of such a suspension in the deliberations of the Constitutional Committee should not be overstated. If our Western colleagues have this urge to move the negotiating process forward, they would do well to worry about the long-standing stagnation in the Israeli-Palestinian process, which has resulted from Washington's efforts to block the Middle East Quartet and other international platforms, including the Security Council, from introducing relevant initiatives.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for the support extended by India to Syria. I would also like to welcome Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths in today's meeting,

Our meeting today on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria is our last such meeting for this year. It is convened amid continued major threats and

challenges facing Syria over many years — foremost of which is terrorism, the illegal presence of the United States and Turkish troops on parts of Syrian territories, the escalation of recurrent Israeli acts of aggression on vital Syrian facilities, the expansion of the humanitarian crisis as a result of the failure of pledges to the humanitarian response plan being honoured, and the negative repercussions of the illegal, unilateral and coercive measures that are nothing but tools of collective punishment. The Security Council's discharge of its mandate in relation to Syria is not only a legal responsibility, but it is also a moral and humanitarian necessity that requires the Council to condemn all violations of Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and to unconditionally call for the immediate cessation of those violations.

The Syrian Government has made tireless efforts to counter terrorism and managed to liberate wide areas of Syrian territory from the hands of terrorist groups and restore control of those areas by the Syrian State. In parallel, the Syrian Government has made efforts to achieve local settlements and national reconciliation with a view to realizing normalization. Meanwhile, a number of presidential amnesty decrees have been issued, the most important of which is Decree No. 7 of 2022, which is comprehensive in scope and nature as it relates to addressing terrorist crimes, only excluding those that have led to human deaths. All of those measures have contributed to the return of many Syrians to their homes and to their normal lives. They have also bolstered Syrian national unity and social cohesion, along with sustainable stability.

At the same time, Syria has positively responded to the sincere efforts and initiatives that were made on the political track. It has supported the Astana meetings and continued to follow up on the work of the Constitutional Committee, established during the national dialogue in Sochi in 2018. We look forward to the ninth round of the Committee's meetings after the resolution of the logistical issues and aspects that some opposition parties claim to be impeding their work. Syria has also maintained its communication with Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy for Syria, who visited Damascus this month, where he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, who assured him of the need for Syrians alone to determine the fate and future of their country without any external interference, in addition to putting an end to all violations of Syrian sovereignty and immediately lifting the unilateral, inhumane and illegal coercive measures.

Since the adoption of resolution 2642 (2022), three informal interactive rounds of dialogue have been held by the Council, pursuant to the resolution. The interactive dialogue was supposed to be a platform for the assessment and implementation of its provisions. During those three rounds, my delegation demonstrated in detail the shortcomings in the implementation of the resolution, in particular that certain Council members are unwilling to implement the resolution's provisions aimed at alleviating and ending the human suffering of the Syrian people. In that regard, I would like to briefly reaffirm certain aspects.

First, cross-border humanitarian mechanism was a temporary measure taken under exceptional circumstances that no longer exist. The insistence on the continuation of that mechanism — with its many defects, irregularities and ambiguity — reflects flagrant selectivity and clear distinction among Syrians, who all deserve to have access to humanitarian aid.

Second, the relentless pursuit by the United States of America and European Union countries to extend that mechanism under the pretext of being humane regarding the Syrian people runs counter to their immoral, inhumane and unprecedented siege on the Syrian people. Their siege increases the number of Syrians who are dependent on humanitarian aid.

Third, some are adamant in preventing progress in the work of the cross-line humanitarian mechanism within the country, namely, across conflict lines, which is evident in their pursuit to prove that the mechanism is unable to replace the cross-border mechanism despite the former being fully consistent with the principles of humanitarian action and respect for Syrian sovereignty.

Fourth, the underfunding of the humanitarian response plan for Syria due to the failure of some Western donors to fulfil their pledges undermines the effectiveness of improving the livelihood of Syrians and impedes early-recover projects. That has a catastrophic impact on the daily lives of Syrians and denies them access to basic services. Electricity, as some noted in this meeting, is provided for only half an hour every day in certain areas in Syria.

Fifth, it is unacceptable to ignore the systematic pillaging of the national treasures of the Syrian people, such as oil, wheat and gas, at the hands of the United States occupying troops and affiliated armed groups. That practice deprives Syrians of their resources and exacerbates their human suffering in an unprecedented

manner. The latest statistics show that the total value of direct and indirect losses caused by the United States occupation troops and the so-called international coalition due to pillaging the oil sector in Syria have exceeded \$100 billion.

Sixth, some — including the Council — deliberately insist on concealing the adverse effects of the unilateral, coercive, immoral and inhumane measures imposed on the Syrian people by the United States and European Union countries. Any argument that those measures do not target all aspects of the lives of Syrians is refuted by the reality of the suffering of the Syrian people. Moreover, there are no exceptions for humanitarian purposes as some claim. That is simply an outright lie.

Seventh and lastly, the persistent water cut-off by the Turkish regime and its terrorist organizations under various pretexts and their weaponization of water against civilian Syrians should be denounced and condemned, as depriving citizens of water is a war crime under international humanitarian law. That practice suffocates the lives of more than 1 million Syrians living in Al-Hasakah governorate and its surroundings and hinders their access to clean water, a matter that eventually lead to the outbreak of diseases, including cholera, and impedes access to irrigation, thus creating a food security crisis for Syrians.

The Syrian Government continues to facilitate the work of the United Nations and international organizations in Syria in order to meet the needs of the Syrian people and to bolster their resilience. However, the Syrian Government stresses that the humanitarian crisis will not be resolved if the Security Council and the Secretariat remain silent regarding the politicization of the humanitarian aid dossier, the return of refugees, the extortion by certain donors, the systematic pillaging by United States occupation troops, the irresponsible practices of the Turkish regime or overlooking the adverse impacts of unilateral coercive measures.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria can be resolved only when the Council moves immediately to fight terrorism and to end the repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty, and when the Council calls for the unconditional and immediate lifting of illegal coercive measures and for donors to fulfil their pledges towards the humanitarian response plan. The Security Council should also urge an increase, in quantity and quality, of early-recovery projects. Moreover, the Council should guarantee the just distribution without discrimination

of relief, humanitarian aid and address the threat posed by mines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices, which constitute a real threat to the lives of the Syrian people.

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

**Mr. Jalil Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their updated briefings.

After more than a decade of conflict, there is only one way to end the crisis in Syria, and that is through a political process that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and facilitated by the United Nations. We commend Mr. Pedersen's ongoing efforts and contacts with the parties aimed at bringing the Constitutional Committee out of its current impasse. In the context, we welcome his recent visit to Damascus and close interaction with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. We stress that the Committee's work must be conducted in strict accordance with its terms of reference and rules of procedure, without interference from outside parties or outside pressure and without artificial deadlines. The role of the United Nations should be restricted to facilitation. It must be a wholly Syrian-led and Syrian-owned effort.

We continue to believe that an end to the occupation and a full restoration of respect for the Syrian Arab Republic's national sovereignty and territorial integrity are preconditions for any political settlement. Similarly, peace and security in Syria's north can be achieved only by upholding and fully respecting the country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any military action would only worsen the already severe humanitarian situation. Iran again condemns the looting of the Syrian people's natural resources, particularly oil products, in areas occupied by foreign forces. Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to Syria and the whole region. However, the war on terrorism must not be used to undermine Syria's national sovereignty or territorial integrity. In that regard, the illegal presence of foreign forces in certain parts of Syria, which has created ideal conditions for terrorist activities, should end immediately.

With regard to humanitarian issues, we commend the efforts of the United Nations and its agencies to provide humanitarian relief to those in need. Despite those efforts, Syria's humanitarian situation is challenging, and the country's continued economic difficulties have

had a widespread impact. We have taken note of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on Syria's humanitarian situation (S/2022/933), which emphasizes that the country is dealing with various challenges, including difficulties caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the spread of cholera throughout the country. According to the report, access to electricity is among the top three unmet needs. The report indicates that 15.3 million people will need early-recovery and livelihood support in 2023. It also highlights that the lack of electricity has made it more difficult for people to access essential basic services. We fully support the call for further expanding early-recovery projects, including those aimed at ensuring electricity supplies in Syria, as they are critical to restoring access to basic services and must not be hampered by unilateral sanctions. We also request a non-discriminatory and equal distribution of early-recovery projects, as well as their transparency and predictability.

The continuing unilateral and illegal coercive measures remain one of the key causes of the appalling conditions in Syria, where they have exacerbated the humanitarian situation. Their negative effects are also highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, which expresses serious concerns about the unintended consequences of sanctions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and access to essential services such as health, education, food security and electricity. Urgent efforts must therefore be made to remove such unlawful measures, which can only prolong the people's misery.

We underline the significance of the cross-border mechanism. However, we believe that it must be a temporary arrangement and that the Syrian Arab Republic's legitimate concerns, including ensuring its national sovereignty and territorial integrity, must be fully respected. In addition, the absence of significant progress in cross-line deliveries, as well as their inequitable and discriminatory distribution, is a challenge that must be handled in an appropriate and timely manner.

Despite Syria's repeated appeals, the Security Council has maintained a deafening silence regarding the Israeli regime's continued aggression and terrorist attacks on Syria, refusing to condemn those egregious crimes. As a result, the Israeli regime has been emboldened to continue its violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its systematic and intentional targeting of civilians and

civilian infrastructure, which are flagrant violations of international law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations. Under the Charter and international law, the Syrian Arab Republic has an inherent right to take all necessary actions to protect its national interests and security.

We support initiatives such as local and national reconciliation, which are vital to facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced people, and we are ready to help them succeed. We continue to believe that a secure, stable and prosperous Syria benefits the Syrian people and is in the interests of the region and the international community. To that end, we support Syria's standing in the region and are more determined than ever to strengthen our relations with it.

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

**Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Türkiye):** Let me thank Under-Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for their briefings.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/933), prepared in line with resolution 2642 (2022), clearly illustrates the grave humanitarian situation in Syria. As the report highlights, the humanitarian crisis has been prolonged, with the people's needs constantly growing over the years. There has been yet another projected increase in the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance, now estimated at 15.3 million, the highest since the conflict began in 2011. The harsh winter months are especially concerning, especially for the most vulnerable, including internally displaced persons, women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. In view of that grim outlook, the continued provision of life-saving humanitarian aid is as critical as ever. The cross-border operation has proved to be a reliable lifeline for humanitarian assistance for millions living in north-western Syria. Through that closely monitored operation, the United Nations reaches 2.7 million people each month and does so in an accountable and transparent manner. The assistance goes beyond physical aid and includes critical support in education, protection and health services.

There is no match or substitute for the scale, scope and efficiency of the cross-border operation. Since the adoption of resolution 2585 (2021), United Nations agencies have successfully completed nine cross-line missions to north-western Syria as a complement to the massive cross-border operation. The most recent cross-

line mission, which took place on 30 November, was the fourth of the monthly convoys that have been conducted in August, September, October and November since the adoption of resolution 2642 (2022). The Secretary-General's report on humanitarian needs in Syria also provides detailed information on the progress made in relation to early recovery. We continue to emphasize that all regions should benefit fairly from those projects, on the basis of United Nations needs assessments.

We are now exactly three weeks away from the expiration date of the Security Council's authorization of the United Nations cross-border mechanism. It is clear what must be done. It is clear what the Syrian people, the United Nations and the humanitarian community need. As we have said before in this Chamber, there is no hidden agenda at issue here. The aim is nothing more than to save the lives of those who depend on that assistance.

The relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council since 2014 have affirmed the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political unity of Syria. They have established control, oversight, transparency and accountability over United Nations aid and have allowed the Security Council to monitor that process. A halt in the delivery of United Nations food assistance, critical medical supplies and other life-saving aid would threaten the lives of millions who rely on us to keep them alive. We renew our call on all members to be guided solely by humanitarian considerations. We cannot afford to politicize the issue. We urge the Council to continue to do what is right and to support the indispensable United Nations cross-border mechanism beyond January 2023.

According to the *Global Humanitarian Overview 2023* of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Syria ranks second on the list of countries requiring the most resources for humanitarian assistance activities. The ability of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to respond to the large-scale needs in Syria depends on access to adequate financing as much as on access to the people in need. The persistent low financing rates of the Syrian humanitarian response plans over the years is a source of concern. That negative trend continued this year, with the plan receiving only 43 per cent of what was needed for 2022. We echo the calls for adequate funding to be allocated to the United Nations humanitarian response in Syria.

The crimes committed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) terrorist organizations are cause for great concern. In the past two years, more than 500 Syrians have been killed as a result of PKK/YPG attacks in northern Syria. The PKK/YPG/SDF oppresses the people in the north-east and pursues a separatist agenda. Supporting those terrorist and separatist organizations under the pretext of fighting Da'esh runs counter, first and foremost, to the relevant United Nations resolutions, which reaffirm a strong commitment to the territorial integrity of Syria.

The PKK/YPG also poses a vital threat to my country's national security. The attacks last month in Taksim, in Istanbul, and Karkamış, in Gaziantep, once again displayed the real face of PKK/YPG/SDF terrorism being harboured in northern Syria. No country is entitled to give us lessons about our fight against terrorism. We reject the entitled statements that we heard today on what we should and should not do while defending our borders and protecting our people.

Our determination is unwavering. We will continue to take all necessary steps to protect our people and ensure our border security.

A sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict can be achieved only through political means in line with resolution 2254 (2015). It is crucial that the political process not be stalled. The Constitutional Committee sessions should continue under the auspices of the United Nations. We expect the ninth session of the Constitutional Committee to be held as soon as possible. All relevant parties should be encouraged towards that end. The success of the political process must be a priority for all.

As for the hallucinatory statement by the representative of the Syrian regime, I will not honour him or his delusional statement with a response.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

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

*The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.*