



Security Council

Distr.: General
1 April 2021

Original: English

Letter dated 31 March 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund; and Dr. Amani Ballour, Founder, Al Amal Fund, as well as the statements delivered by Their Excellencies Mr. Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States of America; Ms. Eva-Maria Liimets, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia; Mr. Simon Coveney, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Ireland; Ms. Ine Eriksen Søreide, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway (on behalf of Ireland and Norway); Mr. Othman Jerandi, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad; Mr. Sergey Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, as well as by the representatives of China, France, India, Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on "The situation in the Middle East (Syria)" convened on Monday, 29 March 2021. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Linda **Thomas-Greenfield**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

I am pleased to brief the Security Council today alongside Henrietta Fore as well as Dr. Amani Ballour. I was privileged to meet Dr. Ballour when she visited New York in 2019, and we are lucky to hear from her today.

As Council members all know, the conflict in Syria is now 10 years old — a decade of death, destruction, displacement, disease, dread and despair. I have spoken to Syrians in many parts of the country in recent weeks. They see no respite, and they are right. Our latest humanitarian overview, which my Office released last week, shows that needs are higher than ever. We estimate that 13.4 million people across all parts of Syria require humanitarian aid, that is, 20 per cent more than last year.

The deep economic decay from a decade of war has deepened further over the past year, not least as a result of the pandemic. The Syrian pound fell to its lowest point ever against the dollar this month. Because food is imported, one consequence is that food prices are at unprecedented levels. A consequence of that is that more than 12 million people no longer have reliable access to food, and the consequence of that is growing hunger and malnutrition, especially among children. Ms. Fore will speak more about that.

Several doctors in different parts of Syria have told me that they are seeing many cases of malnutrition, even among breastfed children, and the situation is getting worse. A displaced father of 11 children told me the other day that they had all dropped out of school to look for work to help feed the family.

My update today covers three main three points: first, the protection of civilians; secondly, humanitarian access; and, thirdly, the assistance that humanitarian organizations are providing across Syria.

Just over a week ago, at least 30 communities in northern Syria were attacked by artillery shells and air strikes. Artillery shells hit Al-Atarib Surgical Hospital, forcing it to be evacuated and closed. Two boys, cousins, aged 10 and 12 years old, were among the patients killed. Five medical staff are among the injured. Two of them remain in critical condition.

Al-Atarib Surgical Hospital, like many others, was built underground to escape attacks like that. It seems grotesque that hospitals, which are protected under international humanitarian law, should have to operate underground but that is the reality in Syria. The location of the hospital was well known to the warring parties. The United Nations has supported it for several years. Its location was reported again to the parties on 1 March. It was obviously a deliberate attack, and Council members will all have seen the statement that the Secretary-General issued.

Moving on, I have expressed my concern to the Council before about the increasing insecurity at the Al-Hol camp. A Médecins sans Frontières staff member there was killed while off duty in their tent on 24 February. Insecurity at Al-Hol has now reached intolerable levels, threatening our ability to operate. Forty-one residents have been murdered since the beginning of the year.

The de facto authorities in the north-east are responsible for providing security in the camp. A major security operation, involving large numbers of military personnel, began in Al-Hol on Sunday, with the stated intention of restoring security in the camp. The exercise has forced the suspension of many humanitarian services. Residents, including children, are being screened and their tents searched.

Security must be provided in a manner that does not endanger residents or violate their rights and that does not restrict humanitarian access. There are almost 40,000 foreign and Syrian children at Al-Hol. More than 30,000 of them are younger than 12 years old. It is entirely unacceptable that they remain in that unsafe environment. Countries of origin should take their nationals home.

My next point is humanitarian access. On 21 March, the same day as the attack on the Al-Atarib hospital, multiple air-to-surface missiles hit the road leading to Bab Al-Hawa border crossing in northern Idlib. Around 1,000 trucks of United Nations assistance cross through Bab Al-Hawa each month, as authorized by the Security Council under resolution 2533 (2020).

One missile struck a lot where trucks used for transporting humanitarian supplies were parked. Twenty-four trucks were destroyed or damaged. The air strikes also started a fire in a nearby non-governmental organization (NGO) warehouse, which stored food and other humanitarian supplies. A quarter of the stocks, amounting to aid for more than 4,000 people, were destroyed.

To put the impact of an attack such as that into perspective, let me outline the extent to which people in north-western Syria depend on cross-border aid. There are apparently some misconceptions about the scale of the United Nations role. At a Security Council meeting earlier this year, it was suggested that the United Nations cross-border operation accounts for 10 per cent of the assistance. I was recently asked about that informally and said that I thought the number was in fact around 40 per cent. When I reported that conversation to my staff, they said that I had got the number wrong. “So it is not 40 per cent?” I said. “No”, they said. “Well what is it then?” I said. “We think it is nearer 50 per cent”, they said.

There are more than 4 million people in north-western Syria. We estimate that more than 75 per cent of them depend on aid to meet their basic needs. The cross-border operation reaches almost 85 per cent of those people every month.

The proportions vary depending on the type of assistance. For example, the United Nations provides the vast majority of emergency food assistance. Between 70 and 80 per cent of that is delivered by the World Food Programme. The United Nations also plays a major role in supporting others providing assistance. Many NGO operations rely on the United Nations for support in logistics, financing and procurement.

The United Nations cross-border operation is one of the most heavily scrutinized and monitored aid operations in the world. That is because the people paying for it — mostly Western and Gulf donors — have been clear that they will do so only if they are sure that the resources are not being diverted to terrorist groups. We know that aid gets to the people whom it is supposed to.

Some people have suggested that aid must be being diverted, because otherwise we would not see the kind of malnutrition that we now observe. That, too, is wrong. The reason that there is so much malnutrition is that the cross-border operation is too small to prevent it. More money and more border crossings would address that.

People in north-western Syria know that the Council will shortly be deciding the future of the cross-border programme. Last week, my Office received a letter from women’s groups in Idlib. It said:

“We are 130 Syrian women: teachers, engineers, doctors and housewives. We are all civilians who have lived a full decade in the war in all its details. As women, mothers and those responsible for our families, we stand against stopping a cross-border resolution. We do not want our children to starve.”

We have also continued to try to seek agreement, as we have for more than a year, on cross-line deliveries to the north-west. I again updated the Council on

that last month (see S/2021/206). The various parties have each recently described arrangements that they could accept but we have yet to find an approach on which everyone can agree. The discussions continue. While we deliver 1,000 trucks a month of aid into the north-west cross-border, we have yet to see even a single truck just once cross-line.

Let me now turn to the north-east. Cross-line humanitarian assistance to the north-east has scaled up, but needs still surpass our ability to address them. We estimate that 1.8 million people require assistance in areas of north-eastern Syria outside the control of the Government. More than 70 per cent of them are considered to be in extreme need — well above the national average.

Reputable aid organizations tell us that the availability and accessibility of health care in the north-east is insufficient. Few health issues are adequately addressed due to the limited functionality and capacity of health-care facilities, a lack of adequately trained medical staff and shortages of essential medicines.

NGOs operating in the north-east report imminent stock-outs of critical medicines, such as insulin and cardiovascular and antibacterial medicines, in multiple facilities. The United Nations was able to support the supply chain of medical supplies through Al-Yarubiyah until the Security Council authorization to do so expired. Reputable organizations operating in the north-east tell us that neither cross-line support to health facilities nor increased cross-border shipments by NGOs have since proved a sufficient replacement.

Recent assessments in Deir ez-Zor and Al-Hasakah show that only half of the pregnant women and new mothers in those camps are able to access obstetric or antenatal care.

Humanitarian organizations are making every effort to bridge gaps. However, the World Health Organization warns that funding is a key constraint, as available resources will only cover 40 per cent of estimated health supply needs for north-eastern Syria for 2021. At least nine NGO-supported health facilities will close in the coming months if additional funding is not secured.

Let me now say a few words about the assistance that we are delivering across Syria, notwithstanding the complexities and constraints that I have just described.

The humanitarian operation currently reaches around 7.7 million people across the country each month. Tomorrow the United Nations will co-host the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. Humanitarian organizations, coordinated by the United Nations, are seeking an estimated \$4.2 billion for the response inside Syria in order to reach 12.3 million people in need. Another \$5.8 billion is required for support to countries hosting Syrian refugees in the region.

Our ability to deliver aid and stave off an even worse situation for millions of civilians will depend on the political will and financial generosity of the international community, including the countries represented on the Council. Now is not the moment to reduce humanitarian aid to Syria. We need more money, not less, if we are to avoid a further deterioration, the consequences of which could be dramatic and widespread.

Annex II

Briefing by the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore

This year marks an anniversary that no one wanted to see: the tenth year of the Syria crisis, with homes, hospitals, schools and water systems destroyed, the worst economic crisis in Syria's history, plunging 90 per cent of the population into poverty, and humanitarian law flouted with impunity. There are millions of internally displaced or fleeing across Syria's borders and shocking violence, which has killed or injured a verified 12,000 children, and likely many more, since the fighting began.

Last week, a 10-year-old boy was killed in the Al-Atarib area in yet another attack on a hospital. There has been tragedy upon tragedy for a once beautiful country, rendered unrecognizable today, and for a generation of children growing up knowing nothing but war. Across Syria, nearly 90 per cent of children now require humanitarian assistance. There are 3.2 million inside Syria and neighbouring countries out of school. They are vulnerable to violence, exploitation, early marriage, child labour or being forced to join the fighting. The number of families reporting that their children were suffering from psychological distress has doubled in the past year.

Attacks are decimating vital support systems. In 2019 alone, 46 attacks were recorded on water facilities, disrupting water access for families in desperate need. The constant disruption of the Allouk water station in Al-Hasakah, which serves nearly half a million people, is forcing civilians to rely on unsafe water, exposing them to deadly waterborne diseases.

A deepening economic crisis is placing adequate nutrition out of reach for millions of families. Last year saw the highest number of food-insecure people in the country's history. In some areas of the north-west, acute malnutrition is approaching the emergency threshold of 15 per cent among displaced children and in hard-to-reach areas and camps. While the world watches, half a million stunted children across Syria are being robbed of their full potential from a very early age. They will never be able to grow healthy brains or strong bodies if they are stunted in their first three to five years of life. Children cannot wait.

In the north-east, more than 37,000 children are languishing in the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps. More than 800 children are in detention centres and prisons.

In the south-east, 11,000 people, half of them children, are living in the Rukban camp under worsening conditions, including a lack of food and medicine and growing concerns about the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Across Syria, nearly 48,000 COVID-19 cases have been reported. With only limited testing available, that number is likely much higher.

The war's ripple effect on Syria's neighbours, including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey, is affecting host and refugee communities alike, putting economies and services under pressure and straining emotions, patience and generosity. With the rest of the United Nations family and our partners, our teams are providing health care, such as 900,000 routine vaccinations for children last year, psychosocial support, education, water, cash assistance, information on how people can stay safe during COVID-19 and equitable access to the vaccines.

Tomorrow's donor conference in Brussels will be a chance to renew global support in key areas. That includes education, which I will highlight as a critical need, and an appeal for funding to urgently close the gap in support in north-west Syria, where the needs are the greatest.

But beyond funding, we need the Council's help in four areas. First, UNICEF and our partners need regular access to north-western Syria to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance. The 12-month renewal provided a necessary window to help people in desperate need. But the needs are multiplying. In the last year, we have seen a 20-per cent increase in the number of people needing humanitarian assistance in the north-west. Over 55,000 children are acutely malnourished and will face dire consequences without a continuation of access and humanitarian assistance.

We cannot turn our backs on the 3.4 million people living there, including 1.7 million children. They are living in crowded camps or informal settlements with limited or non-existent access to electricity, health care or water plants. This aid is the only lifeline they have.

We call on the Council to renew the resolution on cross-border assistance and to spare no effort to reach an agreement on accessing children through cross-line operations to reach Idlib governorate and other parts of the north-west.

Secondly, all parties should immediately stop attacks on children, hospitals, schools and other vital civilian infrastructure, such as water plants. These crucial services need protection.

Thirdly, support UNICEF's call for the safe, voluntary and dignified release, repatriation and reintegration of children in the north-east. A child is a child, no matter who or where they are or who their parents are. They have a right to return to their communities, be protected and receive the same services as any other child. Many have witnessed and experienced extreme violence, and require long-term support to recover and restart their lives.

Syrian children in Al-Hol and Al-Roj should be reintegrated into their local communities, while third-country national children should be repatriated safely back to their countries of origin.

And fourthly, support the United Nations call for peace. Syria is disintegrating before our eyes. After 10 years, it is time to put the guns down, come to the negotiating table, and reach a lasting peace agreement.

Until then, our teams are staying and delivering. We believe in a brighter future for the children of Syria. Their courage inspires us every day — like that of the children I met in Tal-Amara school in southern rural Idlib during my last visit, their faces smiling and bright as they proudly showed me their work; their eyes filled with hope for the future.

For millions of war-weary Syrian children, hope is all they have. We call on this Council not only to keep their hope alive, but to match it with the solutions and support they need — and the lasting peace they deserve.

Annex III

Briefing by the founder of the Al Amal Fund, Amani Ballour

I thank you for the opportunity to brief the Council today. I would especially like to thank Secretary Blinken for his invitation.

My name is Amani Ballour. I am a paediatrician from Damascus, Syria. I am here today to speak not only as a doctor, but as a Syrian who cares deeply about my country.

Syria is broken. After 10 years of conflict, it is a country in ruins — not only in physical ruins, but also in mind and heart.

I worked in an underground hospital in eastern Ghouta for nearly six years, the last two as the manager. The conditions in my hospital were beyond your worst imagination — a severe shortage of medical supplies and health-care workers, a brutal siege, which starved even the doctors and nurses, daily bombardments with illegal weapons, and even the use of chemical weapons. We were surrounded by suffering and death.

My worst experience occurred in 2013. In the middle of the night, I arrived at the hospital and was shocked to see a large number of patients, many of them children, who were suffocating and experiencing the symptoms of exposure to chemical agents. Scores of women and children died right in front of my eyes. Overall, more than 1,500 people were killed in this heinous attack. Independent investigations found that the agent used was military-grade sarin, possessed only by the Syrian military and intelligence services. And yet, even after this horrific crime, attacks on hospitals continued, siege continued, chemical weapons usage continued — all with no real accountability.

My first point focuses on paediatric health. During six years of siege, I treated thousands of children. I watched them starving from lack of food; I saw them screaming from the sounds of war planes and rockets. The lack of food led to malnutrition, which resulted in stunting, weak immune systems and, in some cases, death. The trauma of the conflict also caused many mental health issues. A large number of children were born in Ghouta during the siege; they grew up knowing only destruction, bloodshed and death. This led to depression, personality disorders, insomnia and paranoia.

One moment I remember is from 2013. We, the medical staff, heard that there was a meeting in the Security Council about Syria. We were all waiting with great hope because we believed that you would help us. That you would end the siege. That you would bring food and medicine for the children.

We told our children that “the Security Council is holding a meeting for you”. For a brief moment, they felt hopeful. We waited and waited, meeting after meeting, for six years. Millions inside Syria are still waiting. I am here today, a lucky survivor who fought and continues to fight for the basic needs and rights of the innocent women and children I treated in Ghouta. More importantly, I am here representing their suffering and the action that must be taken to give them the basic right to life.

My second point focuses on attacks on medical facilities. According to Physicians for Human Rights, there have been 598 attacks on 350 different medical facilities, resulting in the death of 930 medical personnel, with no accountability. Medical workers must be supported, not targeted.

My own hospital was targeted by an air strike in 2015, not long after Russia began to increase its support to the Syrian military. That attack killed three medical staff. They were my friends and colleagues. Yet the criminals have never been brought to justice.

Just last week, Al-Atarib Hospital in the countryside of Aleppo, which is operated by the Syrian American Medical Association and received support from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, was directly targeted by artillery strikes. Five medical staff were injured and seven civilians were killed, including two children. This hospital had even shared its coordinates with the United Nations. There must be an immediate investigation. Only through real accountability will these attacks finally come to an end.

My final point today focuses on humanitarian access. Cross-border assistance is a vital lifeline for the 4 million civilians in north-western Syria. The need to quickly distribute coronavirus disease vaccines to all parts of Syria further shows the importance of cross-border aid.

My own experience living with cross-line aid for six years is that it is a failed experiment. During my time in Ghouta, we lacked even basic medical supplies for our patients. I treated children starving to death, suffering from chronic illnesses, desperate for even basic humanitarian assistance. Yet it never came.

Approvals from the regime were rarely issued, and, even when they were, essential items, such as baby formula, were often removed. I repeat — soldiers would remove the baby formula from the trucks, and empty it on the ground. The World Health Organization publicly condemned this many times, yet the practice continued. Such cruelty is beyond comprehension.

The Council cannot allow this situation to return. Why should any of us believe that things will be different this time? Base your decision on facts, not on empty promises.

Renewing cross-border assistance through Bab Al-Hawa is simply the right thing to do, and you should also open additional crossings to meet the growing needs.

I would like to end my remarks by asking a series of questions. Are the lives of these women and children worth any less than yours? Is a Syrian child's life worth less than a Vietnamese child, or Chinese child, or Kenyan child? Why have they been abandoned for so long?

Do you find it acceptable for a hospital to be targeted not once, not twice, but nearly 600 times? If a hospital was targeted in Tunis, New Delhi or Moscow, would you not immediately demand an investigation and not rest until there was justice?

Do you find it acceptable, in the middle of a pandemic, with humanitarian needs growing each day, to further reduce humanitarian access? If your own countries faced rising rates of malnutrition and disease, would you not increase access to aid?

I urge Council members to set aside their differences and refocus their efforts on reaching a political solution that includes essential freedoms and human rights, to act with great urgency to address the worsening humanitarian crisis, and to hold accountable those who attack medical facilities and use chemical weapons.

I also urge Council members to move beyond words, to concrete actions. I challenge each member of the Council and each State Member of the United Nations to take immediate steps to support the Syrian people: donate urgently needed food and medical supplies; increase your financial contributions to the United Nations and its partners; agree to resettle more Syrian refugees, huge numbers of whom remain in refugee camps in the region, desperate to avoid becoming a lost generation; offer scholarships for university students so that Syrians can be educated and one day return and rebuild our country.

Only through solidarity and shared humanity can we alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and move towards justice, peace and reconciliation.

Annex IV

Statement by the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Antony J. Blinken

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Executive Director Fore for their thorough and candid briefings and for the vital work the United Nations is doing to deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Syria. I also thank Dr. Ballour, both for the life-saving service he performed for his fellow Syrians amidst the most harrowing circumstances and for his powerful, determined efforts to bring the experiences of the Syrian people to the world and to push for their rights to be respected.

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the Syrian uprising. After a decade of conflict in which the Syrian people have suffered immeasurably, the situation is as grave as ever. As we have heard, an estimated 13.4 million people — two in every three Syrians — are in need of humanitarian assistance. Sixty per cent of Syrians are at serious risk of going hungry.

Every month, the Security Council gathers to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria and these massive numbers are rattled off. In the process, it is all too easy to lose sight of the fact that contained in each one of these numbers are the lives of individual human beings.

Like the Syrian mother who recently told a reporter she was so desperate to feed her three children that she faced a choice: “I had to sell my hair or my body”. She sold her hair for \$55. For two days after, she wept with shame. But with that money, she bought heating oil and food and clothes for her three kids. That is one mother — for one Syrian family. Now remember that 12.4 million people in Syria are food insecure, and one begins to sense the magnitude of human suffering in this conflict.

We heard Dr. Ballour say that she is waiting on the Security Council with hope — waiting on the Security Council with hope. Look, we all sit in these chairs, we speak these words, we represent our countries, but how is it possible that we cannot find in our hearts the common humanity to actually take meaningful action to do something? How is that possible? I have two young children of my own. I suspect many members of the Council have young children or grandchildren. I think of my kids when I think of the Syrian children we have heard talked about today. I ask my fellow Council members to do the same thing — think of yours, look into your hearts and then talk to your colleagues. And despite our differences, we have to find a way to do something to take action to help people. That is our responsibility, and shame on us if we do not meet it.

Meanwhile, the brave people who put their lives on the line to try to help the Syrian people continue to be targeted. On 21 March, the Al-Assad regime shelled the Al-Atarib Surgical Hospital in western Aleppo, reportedly killing seven people, including, as we heard, two children — cousins aged 10 and 12 years old. The attack also wounded 15 people, including a doctor who had a piece of shrapnel embedded in his eye. He will never see again.

The hospital had been bombed by the regime before, in 2014, and, as we heard from Dr. Ballour, had to be rebuilt underground, in hopes that doing so would keep people safe if it were targeted again.

Well, the cave could not keep them safe. The hospital’s coordinates had been shared — again, as we heard — with the United Nations-led deconfliction mechanism, meaning the regime knew exactly where it was. Al-Atarib Hospital, which is now closed, had previously seen an average of 3,650 people every month. On the same day the Al-Assad regime struck the hospital, Russian air strikes struck near the only United Nations-authorized border crossing with Syria, killing a civilian, destroying

humanitarian supplies, putting the most effective way of getting aid to the Syrian people at risk.

While today's meeting is focused on the humanitarian crisis in Syria, it is important to note that the only long-term solution to this suffering is through a political settlement and permanent resolution to the conflict, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). Together with our allies and partners, the United States continues to support Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Pedersen's efforts towards this end.

But even as we work towards that solution, we cannot lose sight of the urgent needs of the Syrian people that we have heard described so eloquently today. It is clear that those needs, including having enough to eat and access to essential medicine, are not going to be met by the Al-Assad regime. So, again, the question before us is: What can the Security Council do to help the millions of Syrians whose lives hang in the balance?

In the short term, we know the answer and it is simple — we must ensure that Syrians get the humanitarian aid they need. At present, the most efficient and effective way to get the most aid to the most people in the north-west and north-east is through border crossings. Yet the Security Council has recently allowed the authorization for two border crossings to lapse: Bab Al-Salam, in the north-west, which used to deliver aid to approximately 4 million Syrians; and Al-Yarubiyah, in the north-east, which brought aid to another 1.3 million Syrians.

We have a responsibility to ensure Syrians have access to life-saving assistance, no matter where they live. Given that goal, there was no good reason at the time for the Council's failure to reauthorize these two humanitarian crossings.

There is no good reason for the crossings to remain closed today. The crossings provided a path for delivering aid that was more economical, safer and more efficient. In their absence, delivering aid is costlier, more perilous and less efficient. It also means that when the sole remaining crossing becomes inaccessible for any reason — as happened last week when it was bombed by Russian forces — aid may be halted altogether.

The reduction of border crossings also means that more United Nations aid convoys are forced to cross multiple lines of control, negotiating access with various armed opposition groups, travelling longer distances, all of which leaves more ways in which aid can be slowed or stopped before it gets to the Syrian people and more ways in which aid workers can themselves be targeted.

Now some may argue that reauthorizing humanitarian crossings and providing cross-border aid would in some way infringe on the sovereignty of the Syrian regime. But sovereignty was never intended to ensure the right of any Government to starve people, deprive them of lifesaving medicine, bomb hospitals or commit any other human rights abuses against citizens.

Others on the Council may argue, as they have in the past, that we should rely more on cross-line assistance to deliver aid to people in Syria — claiming it is more efficient. But as we have seen, relying more on cross-line assistance has resulted in less aid — not more — getting to the Syrian people.

The failure to authorize border crossings is clearly not in the interests of the Syrian people. It is not what is recommended by United Nations experts or humanitarian experts, and it has nothing to do with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. As Secretary-General Guterres has said, "Intensified cross-line and cross-border aid deliveries are essential" to reach all Syrians in need.

It is also not in the interests of the Syrian people to pressure Syrian refugees to return to Syria, including to regime-held areas, where many fear they will be

arbitrarily detained, tortured or even killed by Al-Assad's security forces in retaliation for fleeing. We agree with the United Nations that refugee returns must be voluntary and well informed and should ensure the safety and dignity of the people involved, or else they should not happen.

The current approach is unjustified, ineffective and indefensible. It is directly resulting in the increased suffering of the Syrian people.

Let me propose a different approach: let us reauthorize both border crossings that have been closed and reauthorize the one that remains open. Let us give ourselves more pathways, rather than fewer pathways, to deliver food and medicine to the Syrian people. Let us commit to using whatever pathway is the safest, quickest way to reach people who are going hungry and dying for need of medicine. And let us not pressure Syrian refugees to return until they feel that they can do so in safety and in dignity.

Let us ask a simple question that will guide our decision on reauthorizing cross-border crossings and on all questions of delivering aid to people in Syria: what will do the most to reduce the suffering of Syrian children, women and men?

If we ask that question, the work before the Council is simple: reauthorize the crossings, stop enabling the obstruction of aid and allow humanitarians and humanitarian aid unhindered access so that they can reach Syrians in need wherever they are, as quickly as possible.

Unhindered access to Syrians is more important than ever — not only because of the growing humanitarian crisis, but also because of the threat posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

All members of the Council has witnessed in their own country the devastating impact of the pandemic — the lives it takes and how it ravages livelihoods and economies. Syria today provides the ideal conditions for the virus to spread. Social distancing is impossible when one is jostling for a spot in a crowded bread line. Many Syrians do not even have a reliable supply of clean water and soap to wash their hands. There is approximately one Syrian doctor for every 10,000 civilians in Syria. The hospitals that remain are still being attacked by the regime and its backers, as we saw with the Al-Atarib hospital.

Already doctors, nurses and health workers in Syria are getting sick and dying at alarming rates due to COVID-19; that is only going to get worse. And perhaps none in Syria are more vulnerable than the thousands who are being unjustifiably detained in the regime's inhumane prisons — many for daring to speak out against its atrocities — and the 6.7 million Syrians who have been internally displaced by the ongoing conflict.

The Security Council takes up so many challenges that are complicated. This is not one of them. The lives of people in Syria depend on getting urgent help. We have to do everything in our power to create ways for that aid to get to them — to open pathways, not to close them.

The members of the Council have a job to do: reauthorize all three border crossings for humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people; stop taking part in, or making excuses for, attacks that close these pathways; and stop targeting humanitarian aid workers and the Syrian civilians they are trying to help. Stop making humanitarian assistance, on which millions of Syrians' lives depends, a political issue, waiting in hope for the Security Council, waiting in hope for the Security Council, waiting in hope for the Security Council.

Let us end the wait. Let us take action. Let us help people in Syria.

Annex V

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Eva-Maria Liimets

I would like to thank the briefers for their valuable insights. I wish also to extend my gratitude to the humanitarian workers on the front lines in Syria, who continue to provide aid to millions of people.

This month we mark the tenth anniversary of the tragedy of the Syrian people. Unfortunately, a decade after the start of peaceful protests, the war is far from over. Estonia calls for a full, nationwide ceasefire in Syria. We condemn last week's strikes by the Syrian regime and Russia in north-west Syria, especially the attack on a hospital near Aleppo; that is a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Despite our attempts to provide relief to all people in need, the delivery of humanitarian aid to northern Syria has been greatly disrupted. Last year's vetoes by Russia and China of the extension of cross-border aid resulted in a significant reduction thereof to many areas.

The Syrian regime has not managed to facilitate cross-line aid. There is no reliable agreement between humanitarian organizations and the authorities for bringing the much-needed help to northern Syria.

Estonia joins other Security Council members in calling for the renewal of cross-border aid this July. To achieve that, we extend our firm support to the penholders, Norway and Ireland. That vital assistance must continue, especially during the pandemic. Further limiting access would have catastrophic consequences for millions of people, including children, in Syria.

The European Union's restrictive measures do not in any way impede the provision of humanitarian aid in Syria, especially food and medical supplies. These sanctions target only those who have committed crimes against the Syrian people. Sanctions will remain in place until a genuine political transition is firmly under way in Syria, in line with Security Council resolutions.

The European Union, together with its member States, is the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syria and the region. Estonia has contributed financially to humanitarian relief since the start of the crisis. Tomorrow, at the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, I will pledge additional funding to alleviate the human suffering of the Syrian people.

Annex VI

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Simon Coveney, T.D.

I thank Secretary Blinken and thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to be with you this morning. Your presence today at the helm of our meeting — and the strength and clarity of your remarks — are welcome signs of the urgency that the United States attaches to alleviating the plight of Syria's long-suffering people.

Let me begin by aligning myself with the co-penholder statement delivered on behalf of Ireland and Norway by Minister Søreide (annex VII).^[P]_[SEP] Our joint role as humanitarian co-penholders reflects consistent support for the humanitarian response in Syria during what is now more than a decade of conflict. Ours is a shared commitment to ensuring that humanitarian assistance continues to reach all people in need.

I would like to make two brief points this morning in my national capacity.

The first is to focus our attention on the devastating scale of need in Syria.

I want like others to thank our briefers — Mark Lowcock, Henrietta Fore and in particular Dr. Amani Ballour — for their stark and unsparing accounts of the terrible realities of life in Syria today, a full decade after this conflict began.

We are confronted in Syria with a humanitarian crisis that continues to be truly staggering in scale and severity.

We know the cold, hard facts; we hear them every month. The situation is worsening. The Secretary-General tells us that humanitarian needs have increased by one fifth in the last year alone. History will judge the Council so harshly for failing, after a full decade, to protect the Syrian people from mindless war, violence and utter misery. Women, children, hospitals, schools — whole cities in rubble. And even now, we are unable to fully deliver basic humanitarian assistance to children in tents starving without support or even their basic needs being met.

We collectively around this table have a duty to act — even 10 years late. The Council must ensure that humanitarian actors can carry out their work safely.

My second point is to amplify what we have heard clearly from the Secretary-General — and from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, once again today — that in order to meet the significant humanitarian needs on the ground, intensified cross-line and cross-border deliveries are both essential. That includes the continued provision of United Nations support through the border crossing in the north-west.

I visited the Bab al-Hawa crossing a number of weeks ago and saw first-hand the United Nations operation, which provides a vital lifeline to more than 3 million people in north-west Syria. While there I met with Syrian and international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies working in north-west Syria. Their first-hand accounts brought home to me again the sheer human misery — and the waste of human potential — that results from this conflict.

I also met with the head of the United Nations monitoring mission and was very impressed by the thorough nature of the monitoring and oversight at the trans-shipment hub. The ability to confirm the humanitarian nature of consignments, which, of course, is important — and to provide thorough supervision and inspection — is an essential part of the overall United Nations operation there.

All of the evidence that we have before us tells us clearly that the Council needs to renew the mandate for this crossing before it expires in July. In truth,

we need more crossings, more than just one, but at an absolute minimum we must maintain what is currently there.

Ireland believes in the efforts of the United Nations to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria, and we will work to support that. Only a sustainable political solution can end the conflict and bring hope and stability to a country that has been torn apart.

But in the meantime, many millions of Syrians are desperately in need of humanitarian assistance, and they are relying on us to provide answers and support. Let us not make them wait any longer.

The Council must not fail — any more than it already has — in our collective responsibility to the Syrian people.

Annex VII

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Ine Eriksen Søreide, on behalf of Ireland and Norway

I make this statement on behalf of the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file, Ireland and Norway. We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock; Executive Director Henrietta Fore; and Dr. Amani Ballour. We thank Dr. Ballour for his courage over many challenging years, and we thank him for sharing his powerful story with us here today.

This month we mark 10 years of conflict in Syria, a decade of loss and suffering — it is hard to comprehend. The cost to the people of Syria has been staggering. This morning I spoke with International Committee of the Red Cross President Peter Maurer, who has just returned from that country. He conveyed some sense of the hopelessness of a country facing possibly its worst humanitarian situation yet. The Council and the international community have, sadly, failed to protect civilians from the nightmare of this terrible conflict. At the same time, we have witnessed one of the largest humanitarian responses that the world has ever seen.

Tomorrow the United Nations and the European Union will host the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region.

The conference will again reaffirm the international community's extraordinary support for and solidarity with the people of Syria. However, the reality is that despite all efforts, overall humanitarian needs continue to increase and are now greater than at any previous point during the conflict. Today, more than 13 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance. That includes 5 million children, who have never known anything but conflict.

Violence continues to claim civilian lives in Syria. Last week an artillery shell attack on a hospital in Al-Atarib, in Aleppo, killed at least six people, including a 10-year-old boy. More than a dozen civilians were injured, including five medical staff. On the same day, there were multiple air strikes near Bab al-Hawa on the Syria-Turkey border, where life-saving United Nations cross-border humanitarian deliveries take place. Indeed, 24 trucks used for the transport of humanitarian supplies were destroyed or damaged.

Furthermore, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), including vehicle-borne IEDs and explosive remnants of war, are still causing numerous civilian casualties. We support the Secretary-General's Independent Senior Advisory Panel on humanitarian deconfliction in the Syrian Arab Republic in its efforts to strengthen the deconfliction mechanism.

We would also like to echo the Secretary-General's statement that direct attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including medical units such as hospitals, are strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. The fragile ceasefire that has broadly held in parts of Syria over the past few years has not provided peace for those civilians or their loved ones. There is a need for a lasting, nationwide ceasefire.

The accelerating depreciation of the Syrian pound continues to spur concerns over additional food price increases and a subsequent further deterioration of the food security situation. Indicators across Syria show a sustained deterioration over the first two months of 2021. There is now a very real prospect of hunger in parts of Syria.

As the Secretary-General forcefully argued before the Council earlier this month (see S/2021/250), if you do not feed people, you feed conflict. International

humanitarian law, reinforced by unanimously adopted Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2417 (2018), prohibits parties to a conflict from depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival, including food, crops, livestock and water installations. Humanitarian access must be unimpeded, and the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited.

We, the international community, pledged to prevent a lost generation in Syria. Syrian children, however, have largely not been able to realize their right to an education and to a childhood. Two and a half million children are out of school; their future is uncertain. Too many schools have been damaged or destroyed, used as shelter for displaced families or used for military purposes. Many children have left school to help their families survive. This is the generation that will one day be tasked with rebuilding the country.

To address these needs, all the strategic objectives of the humanitarian response plan must be fulfilled. Life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian assistance is essential. Humanitarian resilience activities are needed, such as transport of water and protection of water sources, and these must be carried out in full accordance with humanitarian principles and based solely on need.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation continues to be unpredictable. The anticipated first delivery of vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility will be a step forward in our joint efforts to combat the pandemic. We reiterate the Council's repeated demands that all parties allow unimpeded humanitarian access and uphold ceasefires to enable medical humanitarian teams to safely roll-out COVID-19 vaccinations to those who need it the most.

We are very concerned by the Secretary-General's report that parties to the conflict continue to target humanitarian and health-care personnel and services. We therefore also call on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law. Health workers are not a target.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners need rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all of Syria. As the Secretary-General recently stated, and as we have heard Under-Secretary-General Lowcock reiterate today, greater access is needed. As long as the situation on the ground is as it is, intensified cross-line and cross-border deliveries are essential to reach everyone in need everywhere, including for the purpose of COVID-19 vaccination. Meeting the humanitarian needs of the 4 million civilians in north-western Syria requires the continued provision of United Nations support through the border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa. This cross-border access is essential to reduce hunger, ensure access to health care and implement efforts to contain COVID 19. Without this life-saving humanitarian assistance, lives will be lost.

We fully support the United Nations efforts to put in place a cross-line support mission to north-western Syria, and we call on all parties to facilitate this without further delay. Cross-line operations providing aid across the front line in Idlib can be a supplement to cross-border operations. However, in the light of the overwhelming humanitarian needs, such cross-line missions cannot be expected to supplant the cross-border operation at Bab Al-Hawa. There is currently no viable way to replace the 4,369 trucks that crossed the border bringing life-saving support over the past eight months. We need all modalities for humanitarian assistance to reach those in need.

Before concluding, let me also add a brief note in my national capacity.

Tomorrow at the Brussels conference, Norway will pledge a further \$190 million in support to Syria and the region this year, reaffirming our position as one of the largest donors to the international response.

In conclusion, when speaking to partners on the ground they have one message to convey: the Syrian people need hope for a better future. For a decade, Syrian children, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters have borne the brunt of the failure to end the conflict. They continue to experience first-hand the suffering caused by years of protracted conflict and resulting humanitarian emergencies, compounded by impeded access for humanitarian aid.

We give our full support to the United Nations-led efforts to find a political solution. We know that progress on the political track is the key to improving the situation on the ground. The Council must exercise its responsibility to do its utmost to bring the suffering of the Syrian people to an end.

Annex VIII**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Tunisians Abroad of Tunisia, Othman Jerandi**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I should like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Antony Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States of America, on the successful steering by the United States of the meetings of the Security Council during its Council presidency this month. I also wish to express our appreciation for his Government's initiative to convene this high-level meeting, in view of the importance of the humanitarian dimension and its centrality to addressing various crises.

I would also like to thank Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for their valuable briefings on the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria. I also thank the representative of the Al Amal Fund for her briefing, and I welcome the convening of the donor conference for Syria, which began today in Brussels.

The information we heard in today's briefing confirms that the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate and underscores the magnitude of the tragedy that the Syrian people are enduring, especially vulnerable groups, namely, women, children, older persons and persons with special needs.

The decade-long crisis has depleted the Syrian people of its capabilities. Millions of Syrians are at risk of food insecurity and famine, in the face of the collapse of the economy, the depreciation of Syrian currency and the resulting unprecedented price hikes, all of which have diminished purchasing power to procure even the most basic items.

Millions of displaced persons have fled the machinery of violence only to find themselves vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation, trafficking and violations, and 90 per cent of Syrian children are now in dire need of supervision and immediate humanitarian assistance.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis has exacerbated the Syrian people's suffering, especially in the light of the deterioration of health services and the record-breaking rise in the price of medications — if they are available to begin with — thereby doubling the number of Syrians who need emergency assistance just to survive.

While it appreciates the tremendous efforts of all humanitarian organizations and specialized agencies to alleviate the Syrian people's suffering, as well as the efforts of neighbouring host countries, Tunisia urges the international community to redouble relief efforts in order to meet the Syrian people's urgent and growing needs, including by mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Against that backdrop, there is a need to work towards the adoption of an action plan that is based on the following priorities.

First, a comprehensive ceasefire and cessation of hostilities in all areas of Syria must be observed in response to the call by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy and in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2532 (2020). In that regard, I am deeply concerned at the military escalation, the recent resumption of violence in north-west Syria and the resulting loss of life and extensive damage to civilian facilities. The persistence of hostilities will not help to reach a political solution, and neither will it alleviate the

humanitarian crisis or contain the repercussions of COVID-19. All it will accomplish will be to enable terrorist groups to return and regroup, thereby undermining efforts to fight them.

Secondly, it is important to establish an integrated, cross-border, cross-line multimodal system in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance is granted access and is delivered to those in need in an impartial and continuous manner, in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. We therefore call on all parties to facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas of Syria and to ensure the safety of humanitarian relief and medical workers. We note with satisfaction the Syrian Government's constructive cooperation with United Nations humanitarian missions working in that vital area.

In conclusion, Tunisia reiterates that the only way to end the Syrian people's suffering, address various factors and areas of vulnerability and isolate terrorist groups is to reach a comprehensive political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the aspirations of Syrians. Such a solution would bolster their resilience and help them to rebuild and move towards a future that is unifying and inclusive of all Syrians, thereby bringing greater stability to the entire region.

Annex IX**Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Vershinin**

[Original: Russian]

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for their reports.

On the whole, we share the alarming estimates of the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Syria as expressed by representatives of the United Nations and other international organizations. Today the overwhelming majority of Syrians — over 90 percent — are living below the poverty line; 60 percent of them do not get enough food and 2 million children have no access to education. Paradoxically, the living standards in Syria have substantially deteriorated over the last year while violence was decreased considerably. Indicatively, the worst situation is taking shape in the regions in the north-west, north and north-east, which Damascus does not control. Let me remind you that responsibility for these regions rests with the de facto occupying countries and local authorities there.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams and Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams terrorists who control Idlib and have increased their activities in the trans-Euphrates region remain a serious challenge for Syria. According to resolutions from the international community, the irreconcilable struggle against them must continue. I would like to emphasise again at this point that the actions by Syrian Government forces, with support from the Russian military, are well-balanced and they consider the need to ensure the safety of local civilians. In the meantime, attempts by the pseudo humanitarians from the White Helmets to exonerate militant groups and present them as armed opposition are unacceptable and merit condemnation.

The alarming deterioration of the situation in Syria compels the leaders of the relevant international organizations on the ground to demand not only urgent humanitarian aid that covers only the basic needs of the Syrian people but also to implement projects for the early recovery and support of the population. In response, the most responsible members of the international community, primarily the United States and Europe, are saying that the Syrians will not receive anything for recovery without political changes in the country. Washington and Brussels have reacted to the appeal from the Secretary-General to reduce and lift the unilateral sanctions during the coronavirus pandemic with unprecedented increases in the unlawful restrictions adopted in circumvention of the Security Council, including the enforcement of the notorious Caesar Act in June 2020.

The declared “humanitarian withdrawals” now that Syria is suffering from a total shortage of bread, fuel, spare parts, medications and medical equipment are not applied either. This affects not only ordinary Syrians but also specialized United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. In the meantime, it is reported that United States convoys take oil and grain from Syria to Iraq every day. According to information available on 23 March, 300 petrol trucks and over 200 grain trucks crossed the border from Syria to Iraq since the beginning of the month. So it appears that, as the Syrians suffer from an acute shortage of basic products, including bread and petrol, Syria’s natural resources are being smuggled in a big way from the United States-controlled trans-Euphrates area. At the same time, the country is being stifled economically by unilateral sanctions that are nothing more than a form of collective punishment.

That said, now that a little less than three and half months remain before the expiration of resolution 2533 (2020), on cross-border humanitarian aid, debates have

begun to the effect that this approach has no alternative. Indicatively, this issue is not raised in the Security Council even while this unlawful cross-border traffic continues, while at the same time a special resolution is required for the delivery of humanitarian aid. It is also noteworthy that the Security Council is paying much less attention to serious humanitarian problems in other countries — Yemen, Libya and Venezuela.

Under resolution 2355 (2020), Bab Al-Hawa is the only border crossing that is indicated in the cross-border mechanism for the Idlib de-escalation zone. Since July 2020, when this resolution was adopted, the crossing capacity there was increased significantly. According to our United Nations colleagues, up to 1,000 vehicles pass through it every month. But despite this, the humanitarian situation in the north-west of Syria is going from bad to worse.

At the same time, a joint United Nations/International Committee of the Red Cross/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy has yet to cross the contact line, even though this was agreed upon with Damascus in April 2020. From one briefing to another, we are hearing explanations on the need to receive consent from certain parties in Idlib on the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid. Apparently, these are the same parties that allow similar convoys to cross as part of transborder commodity shipments. If we recall that the Idlib de-escalation zone is controlled by Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams and Hurras Al-Din, which are listed as terrorist groups by the United Nations, it is clearer what parties are being referred to. In addition, the same militants are preventing the free exit of civilians from Idlib through the special humanitarian corridors that were opened for this purpose with the assistance of the Russian military — in the villages of Abou Azzeidin, Miznaz and Al-Tarnaba.

I will give one example. On March 11, when humanitarian aid was sent to the village of Al-Rami, the militants deprived civilians of food products, which led to an armed clash with about 10 victims. This is further evidence that this aid is not reaching its intended recipients but rather is taken by the terrorists who demand payment for humanitarian deliveries and who cruelly harass civilians. In fact, the militants are using Syrian civilians as hostages to get humanitarian aid through a non-transparent mechanism. The United Nations is unable to establish proper control over this for lack of access to north-west of Syria.

A similar situation has taken shape in the Rukban camp, in the United States-occupied 55 kilometre zone near Al-Tanf, in the south of Syria. By Washington's strange logic, its residents are supposed to receive aid from Damascus rather than across the border with Iraq on the most direct and fastest route that is used to send supplies to the American garrison.

The regular European Union conference in Brussels on humanitarian aid for Syria was mentioned here. As has become common, the organizers did not invite the Government of Syria, a United Nations Member, to attend. How can the future of the country be discussed without its lawful authorities that, according to United Nations representatives in Damascus, promptly provide all the necessary permits for requested international humanitarian aid?

This is the overt politicization of strictly humanitarian issues, specifically discrimination against the Damascus-controlled regions when distributing humanitarian aid; refusal to facilitate the country's recovery and the return of refugees; the toughening of sanctions during the coronavirus disease pandemic; and the desire to maintain a cross-border mechanism, which violates the standards of international humanitarian law and General Assembly resolution 46/182. All this is being done to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria for political reasons due to displeasure with the country's leadership. In this context, the continuing violation by some Western countries of the spirit and letter of resolution

2254 (2015) is regrettable and must be denounced. This must be done on the basis of the resolution's second preambular paragraph, whereby United Nations members reaffirm their

“strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations”.

Statement by the First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy

[Original: Russian]

I cannot fail to react to the words of my British colleague regarding the “White Helmets”.

We believe that our Western and British partners continue to justify the pseudo-humanitarians from the “White Helmets” with a persistence that deserves a better cause. This practice continues despite the increasing evidence of the “White Helmets” merging with terrorists. Also, there is growing evidence that the videos that they have produced and on which the majority of Western allegations against Damascus are based have been staged.

We have denounced those fakes, shared relevant materials and hosted press briefings more than once. However, you would rather ignore all this, because the truth is too inconvenient and bitter. What kind of characters are the people who pretend to be humanitarian workers from the “White Helmets”? We can take the following fact for an answer — many of them, having fled abroad once the major part of the Syrian territory was liberated, were not adopted by their Western sponsors, despite all their pleas, because their connection to terrorists was far too obvious.

We understand your urge to justify yourselves to the British taxpayers for the squandering of funds allocated to support the alleged Syrian opposition. I am very sorry for you. This is a very uneasy business, especially in light of the increasing number of questions that have surfaced regarding the sponsor of the “White Helmets”, Mr. Le Mesurier of the British secret service, and his mysterious death. But all these domestic public tasks should not be resolved at the expense of a Security Council meeting. Such tricks do no credit to British diplomacy.

Annex X**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

[Original: English Chinese]

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Executive Director Fore for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the statement of the representative of civil society.

The decade-long conflict in Syria has brought untold suffering to the country and its people. Many issues arising from the current situation in Syria warrant deep reflection. Facts have proved time and again that respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity is an international norm that must be upheld. A political solution is the only viable way to address hotspot issues. Supporting the path of development that is chosen by a people and that suits their national conditions is the fundamental way. Regime change is not an option and will not work. Unilateral sanctions can only aggravate the situation. External military intervention can only cause greater disaster and have serious consequences.

In the current circumstances, the international community should adopt a comprehensive approach, integrating the political, security, economic and humanitarian aspects, so as to jointly promote the early achievement of peace, security and development. Here, I wish to touch on the following points.

First, we must stay committed to the right direction of a political settlement and support the Syrian people in independently deciding the future of the country. China calls on all parties in Syria to cooperate with United Nations mediation in jointly promoting progress in the work of the Constitutional Committee. The Syrian political process should adhere to the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned principle. The international community should firmly support the Syrian people in exploring the path of development. The Constitutional Committee should remain independent and free from external interference. The Astana process and related regional countries can play a coordinating and facilitating role. We welcome the fact that relevant Arab States are positively considering Syria's return to the League of Arab States. This is conducive to advancing the political process in Syria, which should be encouraged and supported by the international community.

Secondly, we must fully leverage the leading role of the Syrian Government so as to fundamentally improve the humanitarian situation on the ground. Given the acute pandemic and food security issue in Syria, targeted relief assistance should be provided with a focus on the humanitarian needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Recently, through the bilateral channel, China provided Syria with 150,000 doses of vaccines and 750 tons of rice as a first instalment, and we will continue to contribute to alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Syria. China welcomes the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access plan to provide vaccines to the Syrian people. The Syrian Government is cooperating with the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other partners in advancing the humanitarian operations and shipping a large amount of medical supplies to the north-east through cross-line delivery. China expresses its appreciation. The international community should support the United Nations in opening the humanitarian delivery route from Damascus to the north-west as soon as possible, which will gradually reduce Syria's reliance on the cross-border mechanism.

Thirdly, the unilateral sanctions and economic blockade should be lifted immediately to help Syria restore normal order. With the economy in distress, the prices of oil and other commodities in the country have doubled and the Syrian

pound has depreciated by 99 per cent compared with the pre-war period. Relying on aid alone cannot solve the problems faced by Syria. Achieving lasting peace and economic and social recovery and development is the long-term solution. China appreciates the action taken by the Syrian Government to assume its responsibility to advance agricultural reforms and promote trade cooperation.

At the same time, it must be noted that unilateral coercive measures and the lack of reconstruction assistance have become the main obstacles to Syria's economic recovery. The lifting of unilateral coercive measures is a call for justice, and denying the serious harm caused by such measures is nothing but self-deception. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should heed the appeals of several Security Council members and the wider membership and the call of the Secretary-General, comprehensively assess the humanitarian impact of unilateral coercive measures and submit a report to the Council. China calls on the international community to extend a helping hand to Syria to rebuild infrastructure and safeguard people's livelihood. Relevant assistance should follow the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and cannot be linked to the political process.

Fourthly, foreign occupation must be stopped and terrorism inside Syria must be eradicated. China supports the efforts of the Syrian Government to safeguard its national sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. We oppose intentions and actions that endanger Syria's national security and divide Syria's territory. The Charter of the United Nations contains clear provisions concerning the exercise of the right to self-defence, which cannot be misinterpreted, abused or used as an excuse for excessive force entrenched in Syria. Terrorist groups in Syria listed by the Council can stir up chaos at any moment, threatening the security and stability of the country and even the entire region. The international community must remain vigilant, strengthen cooperation and resolutely combat terrorism in accordance with international law and Council resolutions. Countless facts have proven that, on the question of counter-terrorism, politicization and double standards benefit no one and can cause endless harm.

An early solution to the Syrian issue is the ardent hope of the Syrians and in the interest of regional countries and the international community at large. China wholeheartedly hopes that Syria can emerge from the gloom of war and restore peace and tranquillity as soon as possible. We will continue to play a constructive role in this respect.

Annex XI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Riviere**

[Original: French]

It is an honour to see you presiding over this Council, Sir, and I would like to thank the United States presidency of the Security Council for the month of March.

I also thank Mr. Lowcock, Ms. Fore and Dr. Ballour for their briefings.

The Syrian people continue to pay the price for this conflict every day. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives, more than 13 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid, 90 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, half are displaced or refugees, and most Syrian children have known nothing but war.

Ten years after the start of this tragedy, the conflict is far from over. There is an urgent need to put in place an immediate cessation of hostilities under United Nations supervision, as well as a humanitarian pause, in accordance with resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2254 (2015).

The strikes near the Bab Al-Hawa crossing-point are of great concern. France has strongly condemned the attack on Al-Atarib hospital, in the north-west. We cannot accept these intimidating messages. Even wars have rules. Attacking a hospital is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime. The coordinates of that hospital had been communicated to all parties as part of the deconfliction mechanism. We call for all light to be shed on this heinous act. France will continue to give its full support to the mechanisms to combat impunity.

International humanitarian law must be strictly observed by all — not only the protection of civilians but also full humanitarian access. The needs continue to grow in a context marked by food insecurity and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The systematic blocking of aid by the regime shows that there is no alternative to the cross-border mechanism. Let us be clear — Damascus is not providing sufficient and timely permits to meet the needs of the population in areas under its control, let alone in those beyond its control. This blackmail is unacceptable. The announced opening of crossings inside the country is far from sufficient. Cross-line aid delivery remains marginal and can in no way serve as a pretext for calling into question the cross-border aid mechanism.

France is resolved to see this mechanism renewed wherever it saves lives, in accordance with the Secretary-General's appeal. This is also essential to allow equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

The current donors' conference is a key milestone. France and the European Union are there. Since 2011, more than €24 billion have been mobilized by the European Union and its member States in response to this crisis.

Without a comprehensive political solution, the position of France and the European Union on normalization, reconstruction and sanctions will remain unchanged. A political solution also requires justice, access to aid and the restoration of rights.

Finally, the instrumentalization of the question of sanctions in the context of the pandemic in order to obfuscate the responsibility of the regime is not fooling anyone. European sanctions are targeted; they target individuals and entities that participate in repression and benefit from the fallout from the conflict. They provide solid arrangements to preserve the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid.

Annex XII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T.S. Tirumurti**

Let me begin by thanking the Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. Antony Blinken, for convening this timely meeting on Syria today. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. I also thank UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and Dr. Amani Ballour, Founder of the Al Amal Fund, for their respective briefings.

Today's meeting is yet another reminder to the Council of the grim humanitarian situation in Syria. The decade-long conflict has had a devastating effect on the people of Syria. We are deeply concerned by the alarming statistics. An estimated half-million people have died, millions have been displaced, both internally and externally, the health infrastructure has collapsed, and children have been deprived of basic education. Women, children and youth especially have been deeply impacted. The coronavirus disease pandemic has further aggravated the humanitarian situation.

Syria's economy has suffered multiple shocks over the past decade. The substantial depreciation of the Syrian pound, which has lost more than three-quarters of its value over the past year alone, has led to spiralling inflation and dwindling purchasing power for the average Syrian household.

The last decade has largely been lost for the Syrians, particularly for the children and youth, who have not seen anything but violence and conflict since 2011. This suffering should certainly move Council members. The Council needs to introspect about the cost of its actions and inaction. There is an urgent need to build consensus on the humanitarian situation and to collectively work to ameliorate the suffering of the people in Syria. We cannot afford to be unmoved.

Keeping in mind the scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs, those who advocate linking humanitarian assistance to the political track should revisit the matter immediately. The politicization of the humanitarian track does not help anyone, least of all the millions of suffering Syrians. What we need immediately is an engagement that is both consistent with Syrian independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty and that addresses the urgency of the humanitarian issues to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

At the same time, concrete steps need to be taken to address hurdles that are obstructing the functioning of both cross-border and cross-line operations, in particular delays in granting requisite approvals to humanitarian aid convoys.

The recent flare-up of hostilities in north-western Syria on 21 March reminds us again of the serious impediments to our efforts. India strongly condemns the attack on the surgical hospital in Al-Atarib that resulted in the killing of innocent civilians. India has consistently underlined the need to protect health and humanitarian workers. We have equally underlined that we cannot allow terrorists to take any further advantage of the situation and that the Council should speak in one voice on terrorism. Let us not lose sight of the need to resolutely combat terrorists and terrorist groups.

We welcome the hosting of the fifth Brussels Donors Conference today and tomorrow, 29 and 30 March, and remain convinced that efforts towards improving the humanitarian situation in Syria will positively impact the political track as well. We need to engage on Syrian reconstruction as well.

For our part, as we mentioned earlier, India has already extended immediate medical assistance and food assistance to Syria recently, in addition to its development

cooperation projects, including \$265 million in soft loans and substantial human resources development initiatives under our technical cooperation programme. Our fitment camp for the artificial limb well known as the Jaipur Foot — manufactured by the Jaipur-based Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti organization in India — which was conducted in Damascus, benefited over 500 Syrians affected by the conflict. We undertook the Jaipur Foot initiative under the rubric of “India For Humanity”. We certainly need humanity now more than ever in the humanitarian crisis facing Syria.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani**

Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on a successful stewardship of the Security Council this month.

I thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Ms. Henrietta Fore and Dr. Amani Ballour for their briefings.

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the grim and protracted conflict in Syria, which has resulted in a colossal refugee and internal displacement dilemma and a humanitarian crisis of unimaginable proportions.

Syria, a country that once knew peace and prosperity, is facing the biggest economic crisis with the depreciation of the value of the Syrian pound by 99 per cent, as we have heard today. As we speak, about 60 per cent of the population is food insecure. There has been an increase of over 200 per cent in the cost of an average food basket in the past year that has made food unaffordable for the average family.

In addition, a generation of children in Syria have been robbed of their childhoods, as all they have ever known is conflict and violence. Many children have to support their families by looking for food instead of going to school and dreaming of a bright and hopeful future.

The drawn-out man-made humanitarian crisis in Syria, 10 years on, is simply not acceptable to Kenya and should not be to this Council. The Council has a moral obligation to engage on and act decisively to alleviate the protracted suffering. To this end, I wish to underscore four points.

First, it is fundamental that the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance be unimpeded and unhindered in order to reach the most people in critical need. Cross-border and cross-line assistance must be streamlined, strengthened and operationalized in line with applicable commitments and international humanitarian law.

Secondly, civilians and humanitarian workers must be protected. Humanitarian workers are targeted regularly by terrorists and armed groups, including in the camps that host the most vulnerable, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and children. Stemming attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including by terrorist groups, should be prioritized to make the delivery of humanitarian aid possible.

Thirdly, it is important to begin placing emphasis on a resilience-based development response to the crisis in Syria that includes the reconstruction of critical infrastructure such as schools and hospitals and building social cohesion measures. The exceptional resilience of the Syrian people has been overstretched, as they have had to cope with conflict for far too long. We therefore see merit in the rebuilding of this resilience through a gradual transition towards recovery and transformation.

Fourthly, the international community should redouble its efforts in the provision of the much-needed humanitarian support. Kenya appreciates the countries and institutions that have stood with the Syrian people by offering generous support.

We commend the European Union for convening its fifth international donor conference for Syria in Brussels, which starts today, and hope for its success. We also commend the ministers who have today made commitments to increasing their aid to the Syrian people.

We all know that the only sustainable solution to the humanitarian crisis is a political solution to the conflict in Syria. Regrettably, this conflict has drawn huge external interest.

Divergent foreign interests must not be allowed to paralyse the hopes of the Syrian people for a bright conflict-free future. We urge foreign Powers, including members of the Council, that have an interest in Syria to set aside their differences and work together to facilitate the long-desired consensus towards a political solution in an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process.

We remain convinced that the multilateral system, and in particular the Security Council, must find ways to generate and facilitate consensus and collaborative approaches towards the peace, reconciliation and dignity that the people of Syria have for so long deserved and longed for. Now is the time to deliver. The people of Syria and the world expect the Council and multilateralism to offer real solutions. Kenya will continue to make this point at every turn.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, Executive Director Henrietta Fore and Dr. Ballour for their briefings, and you, Secretary Blinken, for convening us and for the successful presidency of the United States for the month of March. I also welcome the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran to this meeting.

As we have heard, this month marks a decade since the beginning of the conflict in Syria — 10 years in which the suffering of the civilian population has been a constant, starting with the large number of human lives lost, to the extent that international organizations have noted the impossibility of keeping a record with precise and exact figures. The duration of the conflict is reaching the sum of the two world wars and has already seriously called into question the United Nations ability to keep the peace.

We express our strong condemnation of the recent attacks in north-western Syria, which impacted the operations of the Baba Al-Hawa border crossing, and we also condemn the attack on the Al-Atarib hospital, in which seven civilians lost their lives and more than a dozen people, including medical personnel, were injured.

Essential infrastructure for the civilian population, such as medical units, must be protected at all times, and attacks on such facilities are strictly prohibited. In addition to being serious violations of international humanitarian law, such attacks constitute war crimes and cannot go unpunished. We join those who have said this, but it is not idle to repeat that the violence has to stop and we have to open more effective spaces for diplomacy.

The Council must comprehensively consider the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. An example of this is the need to raise awareness of the impact that the conflict has had on people's physical and mental health. The harsh reality is that human and material losses have also left deep, invisible traces on individuals. A recent survey among young Syrians prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provides alarming data: 73 per cent of the young people interviewed experience depression and 54 per cent suffer anxiety, as well as other types of mental health disorders. The young people surveyed indicate that access to psychological and social support is one of their main needs. If we do not take action now, we will lose an entire generation that will always be haunted by the ghosts of this war.

The physical and mental health of children, especially those who have been displaced by violence or who have greater difficulty accessing food or attending school, is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of conflict. The effects on children's mental health will become more obvious in the longer term, but mental-health and psychosocial-support services need to be incorporated into humanitarian responses now. Following his recent visit to the Al-Hol camp, the President of the ICRC estimated that this is possibly the worst child-protection crisis his organization has ever faced, considering it a scandal that the international community allows this situation to persist. We should prioritize Al-Hol as an emergency and seek solutions that put the interests of children above all political considerations.

The assistance and services required by the Syrian population depend on timely and unimpeded humanitarian access. To this end, the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing is vital to delivering necessary humanitarian assistance, including medical

supplies and medicines, to north-western Syria. Humanitarian operations at this border crossing cannot be replaced by roads across conflict lines. We therefore support the renewal of the authorization of this crossing at a minimum. Today's briefings by the representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF reaffirm this point. It is unacceptable that humanitarian assistance becomes a hostage to the conflict.

It is equally important to improve the flow of humanitarian assistance. Approval times must be reduced. In the current context of the pandemic and the imminent distribution of coronavirus-disease vaccines, both the cross-border and crossline mechanisms are essential.

We must act without further delay, so that the millions of Syrian children under the age of 10, who have known no other reality than war, have a chance to know what it means to live in peace. We are already 10 years in their debt. How much longer are we going to make them wait?

Annex XV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: French]

I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Antony Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States of America, for the excellent way in which his country, through its Permanent Representative, has conducted the business of the Security Council during this month of March.

On several occasions, the Council briefings on the humanitarian situation have shown us how worrying the situation is. Today, again, the briefings that Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ms. Henrietta Fore have made on the humanitarian situation in Syria should push us to be more committed to finding urgent solutions. Ms. Amani Ballour's poignant plea simply calls for action.

Nearly a decade of war has thrown Syrians into an ever-worsening spiral of despair and deprivation, and they are now facing unprecedented levels of hunger, leaving millions extremely vulnerable. This has led to food insecurity, rising prices for basic necessities and the deterioration of Syria's socioeconomic situation, which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

In this context of immense humanitarian need across Syria, my delegation once again calls for greater cooperation between the parties concerned for the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to all those in need in the country. In this regard, my delegation reiterates its strong support for the cross-border and crossline mechanisms, which remain an essential life-saving apparatus for millions of Syrians. It is therefore imperative that these mechanisms continue to meet the immense humanitarian needs, in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law.

My delegation remains concerned about the millions of Syrians residing in various camps and other informal settlements that do not have the means to implement the necessary protective measures against COVID-19, in addition to the other adversities that confront these people on a daily basis. This is no longer the time to dither or retreat into geostrategic positions, but to agree on the imperative need to save innocent human lives, including a whole generation of children that for a decade has known only deprivation, lack of access to education and the trauma of war. Through these children, it is the future of Syria that is being compromised if the actors in the conflict and their supporters are not able to come to an agreement on this crucial aspect of the crisis. We would also like to urge all parties to the conflict to find a lasting solution for the Allouk water station and to ensure access to clean water for hundreds of thousands of people, including displaced persons in the camps.

The Niger also remains concerned about the continuing hostilities in the northern parts of Syria. We urge all parties to adhere to the provisions of the ceasefire and previous agreements, including their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. For example, we condemn the recent spate of attacks in north-west Syria that have resulted in injuries and loss of life. Similarly, the continued presence of foreign forces — as well as external interference, especially in terms of support to these armed groups — contributes to the exacerbation of tensions and hostilities and must be stopped.

Furthermore, my delegation would like to reiterate that the call for a ceasefire and the need for a common and collective effort aimed at dealing with the COVID-19

pandemic must not distract us from the fight against terrorism, especially since the facts have shown that the terrorist groups that are ignoring the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire are trying to take advantage of the current situation to regenerate themselves and regain lost ground. As a Sahel country facing the same challenges in the fight against terrorism, the Niger deplures and condemns their attitude.

In conclusion, as the Syrian people continue to face this terrible humanitarian crisis, the ongoing conflict and the pandemic of COVID-19, we urge the international community to continue the outpouring of solidarity towards the Syrian people who have suffered so much. As Mark Lowcock said, aid to Syria must be stepped up now more than ever, and we echo the Secretary-General's call for the lifting or easing of sanctions at this difficult time for the Syrian people, who are ultimately the victims of these measures. The forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the issue under consideration should include an assessment of the impact of unilateral sanctions on the living conditions of the Syrian people. Suffering and frustration breed despair, which in turn fuels violence. Let us bring hope to Syria and help the Syrians rebuild a country of reconciliation, peace, justice and prosperity. This is indeed possible.

Annex XVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Inga Rhonda King**

I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, Ms. Henrietta Fore and Ms. Amani Ballour for their informative briefings.

For a decade, the Syrian people have endured the perils of war and the resulting effects of living through one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has ever witnessed. The country's dire situation is further exacerbated by an amalgamation of factors, including severe socioeconomic decline, which has precipitated commodity shortages and food insecurity, climate-related severe-weather events and the global pandemic. The provision of timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance, in coordination with the Syrian Government and in line with humanitarian principles therefore remains imperative for the sake of human dignity. The cross-border mechanism continues to perform a critical role in this regard and must be preserved and scaled up to adequately meet the steeply rising humanitarian needs across the country. Further, assistance and access through the crossline modality ought to be strengthened to complement the mechanism and fill the existing gaps.

Cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have continued to rise in Syria in recent weeks. Those who reside in densely populated and overcrowded areas such as internally displaced persons camps and other informal settlements, which lack the means to implement necessary protective measures, are especially susceptible to contracting the virus. Accordingly, the equitable and efficient distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is an important component of the overall humanitarian response. We recognize the vital role of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility in this regard by providing the first shipment of vaccines. It is our hope that the rollout will begin soon to mitigate the public-health and economic impact of the pandemic.

The protection of civilians and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population must remain a priority. Insecurity persists, despite the ceasefire in the north-west and the many appeals for an immediate nationwide cessation of hostilities. We continue to be alarmed by the indiscriminate attacks on both civilians and humanitarian actors. We firmly condemn these acts, which constitute serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and we reiterate that perpetrators must be held accountable to prevent impunity and bolster confidence in justice.

Ten years of war have decimated Syria's critical infrastructure, obstructing the provision of health care, depriving hundreds of thousands of children of their right to education and displacing millions — transforming them from ordinary citizens into refugees and internally displaced persons. We renew our appeal to the international community to contribute to the country's reconstruction efforts so as to support its long-term recovery for the benefit of the Syrian people.

We strongly urge all parties to prioritize and address the deteriorating security situation and urgent health needs in displacement camps. Further, we emphasize the importance of pursuing a sustainable solution to the frequent disruptions of the water supply in the north-east. Access to a safe and reliable supply of water and sanitation services is essential to preserving the health of the people, especially when we take into account the pandemic.

Syria's humanitarian situation will only continue to worsen, and stability will be hindered in the absence of a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The international community has

an obligation to help Syria and its people through positive and pragmatic action. The politicization of the grave humanitarian situation must come to an end. This requires the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures, which have deepened the socioeconomic crisis and are incompatible with international law. They also impede the movement of humanitarian aid despite the humanitarian exemptions. It further requires a targeted and collaborative approach to counter-terrorism and the removal of all unauthorized foreign forces present in Syria in violation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

I close by reiterating the commitment of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to supporting Syria and its people so that they may emerge from the untold despair and suffering created by this protracted conflict.

Annex XVII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

Let me begin by welcoming the participation of the ministerial-level representatives at today's meeting. I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, Ms. Henrietta Fore and Ms. Amani Ballour for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran.

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the conflict in Syria. Yet there appears to be no possible end to the untold sufferings and losses of the Syrian people. Our delegation notes with great concern the extremely desperate and worsening humanitarian situation in the country, which is aggravated by the impact of economic hardship and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It is distressing that each and every time the Council meets on this topic, we hear about the rising numbers, inter alia, of people in need of assistance, people suffering from food insecurity, and civilians and civilian objects being attacked.

Even though the past year has been the calmest period of the conflict, instability has continued to affect the protection and livelihoods of civilians all over the country. We take note of efforts by concerned parties to maintain the ceasefire in north-western Syria. However, we note with concern the recent flare-up, which reportedly has caused civilian casualties and destruction of civilian objects.

In every crisis, children, women and other vulnerable groups bear the brunt of hardships. Half of the children in Syria are growing up without knowing the meaning of peace. They are missing out on education and other basic services. They cannot be allowed to miss out on their future.

To cope with the current situation, it is important to maintain safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access. It is encouraging that assistance continues to reach people in need across all of the governorates. As the need remains paramount, we urge all parties and the United Nations to enhance their coordination to ensure timely delivery of humanitarian relief. Parties should facilitate the delivery of this relief by swiftly granting approvals, especially in the light of the medical-supply shortage in the north-east. We also call for early agreement and further cooperation with the United Nations in an effort to establish crossline access into the north-west.

With regard to the humanitarian response, Viet Nam pays tribute to the tremendous contributions of United Nations agencies, international partners and donors, as well as all humanitarian workers on the ground. We note the various efforts undertaken to improve the humanitarian response, including those within the framework of the Brussels conferences. At the same time, we would like to stress the importance of coordinated international efforts to achieve the desired result.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we reiterate the importance of assisting Syria in its preparedness and response capability. We are delighted to see the plan for vaccination through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility and look forward to its implementation. Our delegation also supports the appeal of the Secretary-General for the waiving of sanctions that hinder the humanitarian response to the pandemic.

It goes without saying that humanitarian assistance will never be enough. What we need is an "exit door" — a long-term and sustained solution to the protracted crisis; otherwise, we will have to return to this place over and over again to hear about the predicament of the Syrian people. The only way to find an exit is through a political solution, and the only way to achieve that long-awaited political solution is through the unity of the international community and respect for international law.

In this regard, the Security Council is expected to play a vital role in making the peace process viable by promoting trust and dialogue and by sidelining division and politicization. We will continue to work in this direction.

To conclude, my delegation would like to reiterate our strong advocacy of a comprehensive and inclusive political solution, led and owned by the Syrians, facilitated by the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and in full accordance with international law.

Annex XVIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

We have heard recently from the Secretary-General and other United Nations officials about the risk of hunger in Syria in 2021. This leaves no doubt about the necessity and urgency of mobilizing international assistance to address this critical challenge.

While providing food and other humanitarian assistance to the people in need is necessary and must be pursued as a high priority, in the long run it cannot by itself resolve the problem. However important, providing humanitarian assistance can in no way substitute for fundamental measures that need to be taken in order to ensure durable peace, security and stability in the country.

The first and foremost of such acts is ensuring Syria's full sovereignty and territorial integrity by uprooting all terrorists, withdrawing uninvited foreign forces, ending the occupation and securing its borders.

Furthermore, necessary measures must be taken for the reconstruction of the country's critical infrastructure and further improving the conditions conducive for the return of all refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as stimulating further progress in the political process.

We cannot overemphasize that there is no military solution to this conflict. It must be settled peacefully and in full conformity with international law. At the same time, a political solution can neither be achieved in isolation or overnight nor must progress in that domain be considered as a precondition for assisting in making progress in other areas.

Politicizing humanitarian assistance and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons or imposing unilateral sanctions are hurtful, as they only prolong both the crisis and grief of the Syrian people, who are already suffering seriously from other hardships, particularly the coronavirus disease pandemic.

While 10 years of conflict have negatively impacted Syria's economic condition, the destructive effects of unilateral sanctions in further worsening the economic situation of the country are self-explanatory. It has now become quite obvious that certain countries have intended to achieve, through imposing sanctions, the objectives that they have failed to gain by military means or political leverage. By imposing sanctions, these countries are punishing the entire Syrian nation, adding insult to the injury for the most vulnerable segments of the society.

No State shall use economic, political or any other type of measures, including unilateral sanctions, to coerce another State. Weaponizing food and medicine and endangering the food security of a nation are unjust and unacceptable, and the so-called humanitarian exemptions are not panaceas, as in practice they do not work within the vast and sophisticated sanctions web.

As a tool for collective punishment of entire nations, unilateral sanctions are flagrant violations of the purposes and principles of the United Nations and must therefore be removed immediately.

We once again call for the mobilization of international assistance to address the current humanitarian situation in Syria, while stressing that its long-term solution is to work towards ending the conflict, ensuring Syria's full sovereignty and territorial integrity, removing unilateral sanctions and avoiding the politicization of humanitarian issues such as reconstruction and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

In its turn, Iran is committed to a political resolution of this crisis and will continue supporting a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and United Nations-facilitated political process, as well as assisting the people and the Government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.

Annex XIX**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, Bassam Sabbagh**

[Original: English and Arabic]

Once again, some Member States are continuing to use the platform of the Security Council to politicize humanitarian work in the Syrian Arab Republic and relevant discussions and to promote a selective perspective of the humanitarian situation there. These countries' statements focused on what would serve their goals, including their feverish efforts to extend and strengthen the cross-border assistance mechanism. At the same time, they deliberately ignore the disastrous effects of the unilateral coercive measures imposed by them on the Syrian people. This makes clear that these countries do not aspire to genuine humanitarian work, but rather to achieving political goals through the misuse and exploitation of the humanitarian situation.

It would have been more useful for the delegations of those countries to seize this high-level meeting to denounce their failed policies over the past 10 years and to prioritize humanitarian considerations over their narrow interests. Would it not have been more productive for the United States to announce the termination of its occupation of Syrian territories, put an end to its support for separatist militias and stop the plunder of Syrian wealth? Would it not have been more productive to demand the Turkish regime to withdraw its military forces from Syrian territory and stop its support for terrorist organizations? Would it not have been more productive to speak with one voice against all those who deny Syrians access to their utmost needed economic resources?

The positions of some countries, the United States being in the forefront, to which we listened today do not in any way help to improve the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria. Enshrining dictations by these countries, imposing conditionality on reconstruction, ignoring all calls for the lifting of unilateral coercive measures and obstructing the return of the displaced are all factors that do not contribute to establishing an environment conducive to a political solution and restoring security and stability to Syria.

We were looking for Mr. Lowcock's briefing today to be more balanced and to indicate the significant efforts made by the Syrian Government to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. We were waiting for it to refer to the disastrous effects of the unlawful coercive measures on the Syrian people, and also to the targeting by terrorist organizations, supported by the Turkish occupation, of two neighbourhoods in the city of Aleppo with rocket-propelled grenades, which caused the death of two civilians and the wounding of several others, including children.

The Syrian Government reaffirms that the centre of humanitarian work in Syria is Damascus, the capital, and not any other city in neighbouring countries or beyond. This is the simplest embodiment of the principle of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, which is affirmed by all relevant United Nations resolutions. This also means there is a need to engage in constructive cooperation and effective coordination with the Syrian Government to enhance humanitarian work and support the joint efforts of the Syrian Government and its partners in providing humanitarian aid and delivering it to those who deserve it, in order to achieve tangible qualitative improvement.

As for the cross-border assistance mechanism, the Syrian Government has repeatedly expressed its serious concerns over it, especially with regard to its violation of the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and

the parameters for humanitarian work established by General Assembly resolution 46/182. The Syrian Government — and based on its concern for the needs of the Syrians on all its territories and the provision of aid to them — took the initiative of strengthening the cross-line assistance mechanism to improve the humanitarian situation, bearing in mind that the conditions that prevailed at the time of the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014), on 14 July 2014, no longer exist. In this regard, I would like to briefly point out a number of grave flaws that accompanied the implementation of the cross-border assistance mechanism.

The so-called monitoring mechanism has shown over the past years the inability of those in charge of it to guarantee verification and accuracy standards that ensure due credibility and professionalism. Unfortunately, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) office in the Turkish city of Gaziantep does not adhere to the work controls as mandated in the Charter of the United Nations, which leads to its exploitation as a tool to serve the agendas of some countries.

The distribution mechanism represents the most dangerous aspect of this process due to the lack of transparency and identification of the third parties or partners that OCHA refers to in its reports. Add to that the experience of past years, which has shown the terrorist organizations monopolizing the largest amount of humanitarian aid that the United Nations drops at the borders, and using it to finance their terrorist activities, gain loyalties and recruit new terrorists.

In addition to the above, this mechanism allowed the Turkish regime to freely sponsor terrorist organizations and to move forward with its policies aimed at changing the demographic character and imposing “Turkification” measures on various aspects of life in that region, including the imposition of Turkish curricula and the circulation of the Turkish currency.

Committed to delivering humanitarian aid to all Syrian regions, including cross-line, the Syrian Government stresses the importance of the humanitarian crossings that are opened in cooperation with Russian friends, including the one it recently opened in Saraqib. However, the Syrian Government condemns the terrorist groups preventing our people in Idlib from existing through these humanitarian crossings and holding them as hostages and human shields. The Syrian Government considers some countries’ intentional disregard of these practices, which represent a violation of international humanitarian law, as an act of support for terrorist organizations controlling Idlib.

It is reprehensible to hear the statements of some countries blaming the Syrian Government for everything related to the human tragedy that its people are undergoing. Today the world has come to realize that these statements are only part of the campaign to mislead public opinion and draw its sympathy in order to convince it that these countries have nothing to do with what befell Syria after 10 years of terrorist war against it. However, despite the extent of the disinformation contained in these statements, they cannot convince anyone that these countries are not responsible for bringing thousands of foreign terrorists to Syria.

What is worse is that these Governments now refuse to repatriate terrorists to their countries of origin in order to be prosecuted for their crimes and to rehabilitate and reintegrate their women and children. They want those who listen to their statements to believe that the illegitimate unilateral coercive measures imposed by these Governments against the Syrian people, the most recent of which is the so-called “Caesar Act”, do not represent economic terrorism and collective punishment and have nothing to do with the economic crisis that the Syrian people are experiencing.

They want us to believe that imposing conditionality on reconstruction does not impede the provision of an environment conducive to the voluntary and dignified

return of refugees and displaced persons to their areas, or that it may cause a new refugee crisis. They want us to believe that the Brussels conference held today is a forum for assisting Syrians, while it is just a useless parade due to the exclusion of the Syrian Government and a platform to target the Syrian Government and tarnish its image.

In conclusion, I stress that the discussions of the Security Council cannot achieve progress through provocative statements and the use of inappropriate and sometimes rude terms. Progress is possible only through open and constructive dialogue based on the mutual respect among Member States, taking into account the views of the countries concerned with the discussion.

Annex XX**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

I thank you, for convening this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and UNICEF Executive Director Fore for their insightful briefings. And I salute Dr. Amani Ballour, who bravely saved countless lives in an underground hospital in eastern Ghouta.

In March 2011, the Syrian regime detained and tortured demonstrators in Dar'a. These young people had wanted to express their desire to live in a democratic and free society. That was the beginning of Al-Assad's horrific war against its own people.

Ten years have passed. Since then we, the international community, have not been able to bring an end to the violence and human rights violations in Syria. The figures are appalling. More than 60 per cent of Syria's pre-war population were forced to flee their homes. More than a half million people died. Inside Syria, over 80 per cent of people are living in poverty. Eighty-six per cent of refugee children do not want to return to Syria; they feel unsafe to go back. At least two aid workers and eight medical personnel are killed every month. Fifty-six per cent of the Syrian people are afraid to live near health facilities, because these are regularly targeted by the Al-Assad regime and its supporters. These numbers only get worse. And the Security Council holds meetings, one after another, to no avail.

My country is faced with all the security implications and humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Syria. We have been hosting 4 million Syrians. We have ensured that United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance reaches millions of people in Syria. We set a red line in Idlib and protect 5 million vulnerable people from Al-Assad and his backers.

Turkey is the only NATO country that engaged in hand to hand combat in Syria with Da'esh. And we maintain our resolute fight against the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units and its separatist agenda, which aims to establish totalitarian rule in north-east Syria.

The perpetrators of mass atrocities in Syria continue to target civilians and civilian infrastructure. The barbaric attack on Atarib Hospital last week, a United Nations-deconflicted facility, is the latest example of the war crimes taking place in Syria. The perpetrators killed innocent civilians and destroyed 24 aid trucks and relief items for more than 20,000 people. We strongly condemn these violations of international humanitarian law. The perpetrators should be, and will be, exposed and held accountable.

Today the humanitarian situation in Syria is worse than it was nine months ago, when resolution 2533 (2020) was adopted. As it was stated before me, 13.4 million people are in humanitarian need. This is a 20 per cent increase from last year. As part of the United Nations cross-border assistance, over 12,000 aid trucks crossed into the north-west in 2020, including over 10,000 through Bab Al-Hawa. Millions of people need vaccines against the coronavirus disease.

This human-made situation can be compared only to the most terrible crimes of human history. We all remember the heartbreaking images of Syrians from six years ago. They were fleeing for their lives. We could face another mass exodus if the United Nations cross-border humanitarian operation is not renewed in July. We do not have time to waste with discussions about cross-line access, which can never meet the scale of cross-border operations. It is particularly futile to advocate cross-line aid subject to the regime's approval. Damascus itself tops the list in terms

of humanitarian needs, with an additional half a million of its residents becoming vulnerable compared to last year. Unilateral initiatives that do not have the consent of the local population can only serve attempts to legitimize Al-Assad's dictatorship.

As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock emphasized today, and as has been highlighted by the Secretary-General on different occasions, the most scrutinized system in the world has been put in place to monitor the United Nations operations from Bab Al-Hawa. The lies that we heard today about Bab Al-Hawa are yet another attempt to cover up the most unlawful and inhuman starvation campaigns that have been conducted against Syrian people.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2165 (2014), in 2014, was one of the most important signs of unity within the Security Council. It is time for all members of the Council to prove that they really care about the urgent needs of the innocent people of Syria and authorize the renewal of the United Nations cross-border mechanism.

The Syrian people have endured the darkest decade of our time. The current humanitarian situation is a consequence of the Al-Assad regime's fight against the legitimate demands of the Syrian people — and we all know it.

While we await the political process to deliver in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), we need to respond urgently to the deepening humanitarian situation. This is a fight between right and wrong. This is a matter of humanitarian principles, and millions of human lives are at stake. We need real action now.

As to the statement made by the Syrian regime's representative, I will repeat: I do not consider him as my legitimate counterpart. His presence here is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the regime, and therefore I will not honour his delusional remarks with a response.
