



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8535th meeting
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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Djani	(Indonesia)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Fiallo Billini Portorreal
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Vershinin
	South Africa	Ms. Goolab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: All Security Council members know the statistics of this conflict. Members know that more than half of the Syrian population has either fled the country or faced repeated internal displacement. They know that hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been killed and millions injured. And members know that, currently, an estimated 3 million people in Idlib are caught up in the crossfire, with some living under trees or plastic sheeting on bare patches of land. There are no safe schools or clinics, no way to earn a living — eight years of air strikes and shelling, of deadly terrorist attacks and the constant fear of sending one's child to a school that may be bombed later that day.

Fighting in Idlib has continued over recent days, despite the announcement of a temporary ceasefire on 17 May. So far this month, heavy shelling and aerial bombardment have resulted in the confirmed deaths of more than 160 civilians and the displacement of approximately 270,000 people. As recently stated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),

“both pro-Government forces and non-State armed groups fighting in northern Syria appear to have failed to respect the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law”.

Since 28 April, in the past four weeks, a total of 25 attacks on health care have been reported by the

World Health Organization, including on 22 health facilities, with some having been hit more than once. All of those attacks occurred in north-western Syria. About 25 schools are reported to have also been impacted by the violence, as have markets and at least three sites for displaced people.

The humanitarian community is responding in accordance with its contingency and readiness plans. For example, so far in May, more than 170,000 ready-to-eat meals have been handed out to those who fled the latest round of violence. Shelter support has been provided to 25,000 newly displaced people, while an additional 60,000 civilians are to be assisted in the coming days and weeks. That is in addition to the 1.2 million people whom we already reach on a monthly basis.

However, despite our best efforts, the response is stretched. Further military operations will overwhelm all ability to respond. Many of our humanitarian partners are part of the affected population and have themselves been displaced. As a result, in many areas of active hostilities, humanitarian operations have been suspended. That includes the suspension of health, nutrition and protection services previously supporting some 600,000 people, including 21 immunization centres that have ceased operations, and at least 49 health facilities that have partially or totally suspended activities, out of fear of being attacked.

As all members know, this year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions as well as the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda. And yet, as stated by the Secretary-General last week during the Council's open debate on the protection of civilians (see S/PV.8534), respect for international humanitarian law today is, at best, questionable. In Syria, for example, the World Health Organization has confirmed 33 attacks on health care since the beginning of the year, and some health care facilities have been impacted repeatedly. As Member States, all Council members are aware that all parties to armed conflict are legally bound to comply with international humanitarian law. Sparing hospitals and schools is not optional; it is a fundamental legal obligation.

While the fighting in Idlib is perhaps the most distressing front in the conflict at present, it is not the only place where humanitarian needs continue to increase. We remain gravely concerned, for example, about reports of deteriorating conditions inside Rukban.

As members might know, over 13,100 people left Rukban during the past two months. Typically, those who leave Rukban spend around 24 hours at five shelters around Homs city, where children are vaccinated and families receive humanitarian and medical assistance, before most of them continue on to their areas of choice. The United Nations now has access to people who left Rukban, having visited the shelters on 22 April and 13 May, and humanitarian assistance is being provided to all of them. That is a welcome development.

Sustained assistance for the 29,000 people who remain in Rukban, however, is just as necessary. They are perhaps the most vulnerable of all. The food, basic medicines and other life-saving supplies delivered in February have run out inside the camp. Fuel is scarce, and prices are skyrocketing. People are exhausted. The deployment of a third humanitarian convoy to Rukban therefore remains critical in order to avoid further suffering. We strongly urge the Syrian authorities to reverse their refusal and facilitate access for a third humanitarian convoy, as first requested in March, and again on 9 May. Access at all stages — in the camp, as they pass through the shelters and in their areas of origin — is important to provide support to this vulnerable population.

We have frequently reported to the Council about the plight of some 74,000 civilians at the Al Hol camp — 92 per cent of whom are women and children. Most have been exposed to extreme violence and trauma under the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. They are now living in extremely difficult conditions, under which they face a range of protection challenges and an uncertain and disconcerting fate. Many of them are foreigners, and face the risk of being denied repatriation, rehabilitation, re-integration, a fair trial, or even of becoming stateless. They also face the risk of family separation and not knowing the whereabouts of family members, given the notable absence of adult males and adolescent boys over the age of 12 in the camp.

All children, including those suspected of being associated with armed groups and/or designated terrorist organizations, are entitled to special care and protection under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Those children must be treated, first and foremost, as victims. The focus must be on their prompt rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation, where applicable, while remaining

with their families, and, in the meantime, ensuring their access to specialised support, including protection services, translation where necessary, and mental health and education services. Solutions for foreign nationals need to be urgently found to avoid their protracted encampment. We call, yet again, on all Member States to take all the measures necessary to ensure that their nationals are repatriated for rehabilitation and reintegration, or prosecution, as appropriate, in line with international law and standards.

We understand that more people may yet arrive to Al Hol in the coming period. Conditions are already difficult with the current population. The summer months and the risk of new arrivals might complicate the situation even further. Solutions for residents of the camp, including voluntary returns to their areas of origin or choice and/or repatriation, as relevant, must be found urgently.

Our concerns extend to the situation in the south of the country, which has been under the control of the Government since the summer of 2018. As described by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, active hostilities have ceased yet the levels of violence continue to be unacceptably high. Moreover, OHCHR has received reports of at least 380 people having been arrested or detained in recent months, 230 of whom have been forcibly disappeared. At least two have died in detention. Many families continue to have limited or no information about their missing or detained relatives.

The Council has been briefed in great detail — month after month — on the scale of the suffering of the Syrian people. Sixty-one reports have been submitted by the Secretary-General. Hundreds of Council meetings have taken place. There is no question today about whether the members of the Council are aware of the tragic humanitarian situation in Syria; they clearly are. The question today is what they will do to protect civilians in Idlib — the latest example of an entirely known, predictable and preventable humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes. Can the Council take no concrete action when attacks on schools and hospitals have become a war tactic that no longer sparks outrage? Is there nothing to be said or done when barrel bombs are dropped indiscriminately in civilian areas, in clear breach of international humanitarian law and of resolution 2139 (2014)? Millions of battered and beleaguered children, women and men cannot wait for

another Geneva round to succeed. They need protection and Council action now.

The President: I think Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

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

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium): I deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders, Germany, Kuwait and Belgium. I would like first to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller for her valuable briefing. We would also like to thank the humanitarian workers in the field for their tireless efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, in particular in the currently very challenging environment around Idlib.

We, the penholders, have five asks today.

First, all parties should abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian objects.

Secondly, the parties should recommit fully to the ceasefire arrangements of the Russian-Turkish memorandum signed on 17 September 2018.

Thirdly, the United Nations and its partners should have safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to people in need, be it in Idlib, Al-Hol, Rukban or anywhere else, including through the use of the cross-border mechanism as mandated by resolution 2449 (2018).

Fourthly, any return of refugees must be safe, voluntary and dignified, and continued monitoring of returnees should take place to ensure their protection.

Fifthly, those who have committed violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be held accountable.

The humanitarian co-penholders have called for two meetings on Idlib in the past three weeks. Once again, we cannot but start this intervention by expressing our deep concern about the situation in north-western Syria, where a military campaign continues through indiscriminate and relentless aerial bombardment and shelling, including the use of barrel bombs. This has caused the deaths of innocent civilians, destruction through targeted attacks on numerous de-conflicted hospitals and schools, the displacement of 270,000 civilians, and despair. One million children live in this area. Many of those fleeing have been displaced several times before. These people are the most vulnerable to

any military action. This use of force is incredibly cruel and completely unacceptable.

As we mentioned last week, we acknowledge the considerable presence of members of United Nations-designated terrorist groups in Idlib and condemn their violent attacks. But the fight against terrorism cannot justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Counter-terrorism operations do not override the responsibility of parties to protect civilians or their obligations under international humanitarian law, as well as resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2427 (2018). We have also learned of reports of an attack on a press crew last week, and we wish to recall that resolution 2222 (2015) condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict, and calls upon all parties to armed conflict to bring an end to such practices.

We urge the parties to recommit fully to the ceasefire arrangements of the Russian-Turkish memorandum, signed on 17 September 2018, and urge the Astana guarantors to ensure that de-escalation takes place. We consider the Turkish-Russian working group to be a tool that can swiftly de-escalate the situation. Finally, we reiterate our call for a nation-wide cessation of hostilities, in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018).

Our concern also regards the situation in Al-Hol camp. While humanitarian partners have been able to scale up the camp's infrastructure, it remains overcrowded, with a population of more than 73,000 persons, of whom over 90 per cent are women and children who face particular protection challenges. The United Nations and its partners must be able to provide needs-based humanitarian assistance to all its inhabitants without delay.

The situation of over 28,000 people in Rukban remains dramatic. While a lasting solution is needed, we continue to advocate for a much-needed third humanitarian convoy. Camp inhabitants should be able to make the choice whether or not to leave the camp in a voluntary, safe, dignified and well-informed manner. The United Nations should have regular and continued access to the internally displaced persons and returnees at every stage, including at their final destination.

No lasting peace in Syria will be possible without justice and accountability. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible

for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 has become a central repository of information and evidence of the crimes committed in Syria and therefore has a crucial role to play in achieving accountability and justice. Several countries have brought criminal cases to their national courts, making use of the proof gathered by the Mechanism.

Lastly, we support Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, in his efforts to reach a political solution in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Vershinin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am very pleased to be here in the Council today to participate in this regular but nonetheless very important discussion of the current situation in Syria, particularly on the humanitarian front. I think that today's exchange will help us to better understand all aspects of the situation and to consider it in the way it should be considered by the Security Council and the United Nations, objectively and impartially. I would like to thank Ms. Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her briefing on the situation in Syria.

First of all, I want to say that we share the concerns about the situation in and around Idlib. In November, the influence of the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militias had spread across 60 per cent of the Idlib de-escalation zone, and they now control 99 per cent. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham's aggressive actions and its shelling of towns and Syrian Government positions are a threat to the civilian population and have resulted in the deaths of civilians, including women and children. In April and May, Russia identified 398 violations of the ceasefire by the militias in the Idlib de-escalation zone. During that time, the terrorists' shelling killed 76 Syrian military personnel and wounded 194, while 19 civilians were killed and 42 injured. I am purposely citing these statistics, and I will cite more, to make it clear that we are not talking about statements but about real people who are dying at the hands of terrorists.

The attacks on Russian military facilities in Syria using of multiple rocket launch systems and combat drones continue, representing a direct threat to the security of Russian military personnel who are in Syria entirely legitimately. In the last month alone terrorists shelled the Khmeimim base seven times. On 19 May,

the anti-aircraft system at the base shot down six rockets and destroyed two combat drones. On 21 May, militias from illegal armed groups shelled Khmeimim four times with rocket-launchers, firing 17 rockets. The most recent attack was on 22 May, when four rockets were launched. Terrorists are continuing their aggressive activity from southern areas of the Idlib de-escalation zone, with three attacks taking place in April and another 18 already this month, in May. The Council can judge for itself.

The Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militias are terrorizing the local population and using civilian infrastructure for military purposes. They are also using civilians as human shields. They are not bothered about verifying their targets. On 12 May, as a result of a terrorist attack on a preschool education centre in Al-Suqaylabiyah, a Christian town in north-western Hama governorate, four children and one woman died, and around 10 children were injured. Yesterday, that same town and the village of Muhradah were attacked twice, injuring residents and doing significant damage to civilian infrastructure.

In response to this kind of aggressive action, the Russian Aerospace Forces are providing the necessary support to the Syrian Government forces to drive the terrorists out of the areas being used to shell Russian bases and Syrian armed forces' positions in order to crush the hotbeds of terrorist activity in the southern areas of the Idlib de-escalation zone. According to intelligence data, in all of the areas where there is fighting, the Syrian armed forces are clashing with illegal armed groups from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. As we know, that means terrorists. The strikes by the Syrian armed forces and the Russian Aerospace Forces are directed exclusively at terrorist targets that have been verified by intelligence. Russia is committed to the agreements on stabilizing Idlib and to our memorandum of understanding with Turkey of 17 September 2018. I want to remind the Council that it affirms the parties' determination to continue fighting the terrorists.

We are particularly concerned about the terrorist leadership's efforts to exacerbate the situation using fabricated evidence, including with regard to the alleged use of chemical weapons by Government forces. According to our information, a separate structure, known as the chemical branch, has been created within Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham for the purposes of staging chemical attacks. It is headed by Abu Basir Al-Britani of the Haras Al-Din group affiliated with Al-Qaida. The chemical branch's head office, which

plans and coordinates the staging for filming fake attacks, is in Idlib. The Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militias make fake announcements for mass information outlets that are then picked up by the Western media. Thus on 19 May announced that Damascus was alleged to have used chlorine near Kabani, in the hills in Latakia governorate. We want to once again draw the attention of the Secretariat, the specialized United Nations agencies and all of our colleagues to the importance of carefully checking any information received.

Against a backdrop of newly alarmist statements about Idlib the Security Council should be sure to keep the worrying situation on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, which is not under the control of the Syrian Government, on its agenda. We are seeing a rise in tensions there, and in our view the only way to avert a large-scale escalation and establish a reliable process of national reconciliation is by ending the illegal United States-led international occupation and establishing a dialogue between the local ethnic communities and the Syrian authorities.

We should pay very close attention to the situation in Raqqa, Hajin, Baghouz, and every town that is still in ruins and not in a fit state for civilians to live in. We must continue to focus our joint efforts on what is happening in the Al-Hol camp, where the situation is disastrous. As has been said today, more than 73,000 people are living there in terrible conditions, more than 47,000 of whom are children under the age of 18. There is a severe shortage of water, food, medical personnel, medicines and medical services in Al-Hol, and thanks to the impossibility of ensuring basic personal hygiene, infectious diseases are spreading in the camp. The standards for sheltering people have been significantly exceeded and more than 15,000 people have been obliged to live in dugouts.

We also think it is important to complete people's voluntary departure from Rukban camp as quickly as possible. Obstructing that process is simply immoral. States with an influence on the Maghawir Al-Thawra militias should put pressure on them to stop terrorizing the temporarily displaced and allow them to leave the camp. More than 13,000 people have left Rukban since the end of March. The majority have also left the temporary settlements in Homs and have returned to their homes in areas under Syrian Government control. Incidentally, the settlements were visited by representatives of United Nations specialized agencies, specifically the Office of the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees, at the beginning of May, when they were able to verify that the necessary conditions for receiving refugees were in place.

The international community should support the stabilization processes in Syria that will enable progress on a political settlement and the improvement of the humanitarian situation. Russia will do its part, and we have no intention of politicizing humanitarian issues. Since 18 July 2018 Russian assistance in Syria has helped to restore 856 education and 168 medical institutions, to repair of five road bridges and more than 1,000 kilometres of road, to lay more than 968 kilometres of power lines, and return to functioning 143 water supply plants, 196 bakeries, 645 electrical sub-stations and 14,305 industrial enterprises. We are also deploying humanitarian and demining efforts.

Listening to statistics is dull work, but I would like to hear similar dull statistics from our friends and partners too, because everything being done is in the interests of improving the humanitarian situation in Syria. We urge all interested parties to unite their efforts, because together we can eradicate terrorism, accelerate post-conflict reconstruction and assist in the voluntary return home of refugees and internally displaced persons.

I would like to thank the Council for its attention. I have listened very attentively to everything that has been said here. We take note of our partners' concerns. I want to say that what Assistant Secretary-General Mueller said is important to us. The simple questions that she asked at the end of her statement about what must be done to protect civilians clearly require our consideration and direct action. I too have some simple questions about that, such as what can and should the Security Council do to ensure that the millions of people in Idlib we are talking about today are no longer held hostage by terrorists? I do not think anyone here has any doubts that they are terrorists. I also listened carefully to the representative of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the humanitarian troika of Germany, Kuwait and Belgium, who expressed some interesting thoughts that we should unquestionably all consider together.

I have some questions, too. When people talk about how all the parties in Idlib should absolutely comply with and abide by international humanitarian law, needless to say I would like to know exactly what parties they are referring to. If they mean the Government and the opposition, I understand that. But are they also

talking about the 99 per cent of Idlib territory that, as I said, is currently controlled by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is on the Council's list of terrorist organizations? I have questions about that. Is it even possible for us to say that terrorists have an obligation to do something under international humanitarian law? Should they or can they have such obligations?

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her important briefing today.

The Al-Assad regime, with the help of its military allies in the air and on the ground, has carried out a punishing campaign against the Syrian people over the past eight years. The regime's assaults have led to one of the greatest humanitarian crises since the Second World War, sending millions of people fleeing chemical-weapon attacks, air strikes, heavy artillery shelling, arbitrary arrests and starvation. During some of the most deadly moments of the conflict, the Al-Assad regime gave the people of eastern Aleppo, eastern Ghouta, Madaya, Moadamiya and Homs a bleak choice — surrender to regime forces or starve. That siege tactic is an unmistakable part of the Al-Assad strategy to seek a military solution to the conflict rather than negotiate a political solution through the good offices of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, for millions of people inside Syria, Al-Assad's use of starvation as a tactic continues. There is no clearer example of the regime's starve-and-surrender strategy than in Rukban. Humanitarian conditions are deplorable as a result of the regime's refusal to allow the United Nations to deliver aid on a regular basis to the thousands of people living there. Many of those people went to Rukban to escape the regime's attacks on civilians in their home villages and towns. It has been 111 days since the last delivery of humanitarian assistance arrived in Rukban, in early February — 111 days. The last United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid delivery in February was meant to last 30 days. In addition to denying United Nations aid convoys access to Rukban, the Al-Assad regime, with military support from Russia, has imposed a blockade around the camp that is also preventing regular commercial deliveries of much-needed supplies.

The people of Rukban have few options for survival. We know that from the messages that we hear from the residents themselves. They do not have enough food. Children are dying of malnutrition. Medicines, medical

facilities and health-care providers in the encampment are scarce. Since 22 April, the Al-Assad regime has denied requests from the United Nations for a third humanitarian-assistance convoy. The regime could easily approve the convoy tomorrow. The United States stands ready to facilitate any deliveries. We know that the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent can provide the necessary assistance, because they have done so twice before.

Today the United States renews its calls to the Al-Assad regime to approve a third convoy to Rukban immediately. We are deeply concerned about the fact that the regime's continued refusal to allow aid into Rukban has forced people to leave the camp under the threat of starvation. Creating humanitarian conditions so dire that families are forced to choose between remaining relatively safe inside the camp or feeding their starving children is not a humane choice to force on innocent civilians, nor an acceptable way to generate departures from the camp. I expect that those defending the regime will cite the fight against terrorists as a blanket justification for such severe measures. The Council is united on the need to fight terrorism, but that is not a licence to starve civilians or depopulate a civilian safe haven. Any return process should be carried out with full United Nations visibility and access in order to ensure that departures from the camp are safe, dignified, voluntary and informed. Coercing people to depart the area by not allowing food in cannot be described as anything other than starving people into submission in order to further a false narrative that the war is over, or that it is safe to return home. For many that could not be further from the truth.

The United Nations has reported to the Security Council that the recent military escalation in Idlib and northern Hama by the regime and Russian forces has resulted in additional displacements and reduced the ability of the United Nations and its partners to provide humanitarian aid. The United States wants to underscore once again that the full implementation of the September 2018 Sochi agreement is essential to protecting civilian lives and preventing further forced displacement. Russia and the regime must recommit to implementing the 2018 Sochi ceasefire and restoring a full de-escalation of the fighting in Idlib immediately. Moreover, the parties on the ground must ensure that the United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries authorized by resolution 2449 (2018) reach populations in Idlib, including in the demilitarized zone.

The United States remains alarmed by the continued air strikes against health-care facilities and health workers in north-western Syria. Attacks directed at protected medical facilities are prohibited by international law and are in defiance of many Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2165 (2014), 2268 (2016) and 2449 (2018). There must be accountability for the forces and leaders who planned and conducted any such strikes.

Finally, the United States remains gravely concerned about the impact that any further use of chemical weapons, including chlorine gas, would have on the humanitarian situation in north-west Syria, where conditions are increasingly dire. The United States and its allies are closely watching the situation in north-west Syria and will respond quickly and appropriately to any further use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime.

As the Security Council marks the twentieth anniversary of adding the protection of civilians in armed conflict to its agenda, the conflict in Syria is one of the starkest examples of a failure to protect civilians. We have to do more to ensure the full implementation of international humanitarian law that the Council has called for again and again. The people of Syria are depending on it.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller for her very useful briefing, which once again shows that the humanitarian situation in Syria is steadily deteriorating and that we are witnessing another humanitarian disaster in the north-west of the country. I would also like to welcome the presence of Mr. Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia.

We must focus our efforts on three priorities — the need to preserve the ceasefire in Idlib, respect for international humanitarian law, which is non-negotiable, and the need for a lasting political solution, which is the only possible solution to the Syrian crisis.

First, preserving the ceasefire in Idlib must be an absolute priority for us all. Today's top priority is to prevent Idlib from becoming a new Aleppo. The lives of more than 3 million civilians, including 1 million children, are at stake. A large-scale offensive would not only result in tragic humanitarian consequences but also represent a security threat and a migration risk for us all. We call on the signatories of the ceasefire agreement to honour their commitments to maintaining

it. I recall that those commitments were reiterated by the Astana guarantors on 26 April. Russia, in particular, must exert all pressure necessary on the regime. Iran must also contribute by translating into action in Syria the commitment it made to the Council in a recent letter concerning its assistance on the issue of regional stability.

Despite all the positive rhetoric, the offensive against Idlib is taking place right before our eyes. Behind the pretext of combating terrorism, the new offensive of the regime and its allies are part of a desire to forcibly reclaim areas that remain outside of their control, as was the case for Aleppo and Ghouta. The threat of terrorism could become even greater due to the spread of elements that the regime is claiming to fight. With more than 40 civilian infrastructure sites hit, the targets and objectives of the offensive leave no room for doubt that the fight against terrorism can never justify such actions. Furthermore, I repeat, France will be extremely firm if chemical weapons are used again and stands ready to act.

Secondly, respect for international humanitarian law is binding on all and non-negotiable. I am thinking here of two absolute priorities. The first is the need to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel. It is completely unacceptable for hospitals, including those that have been deconflicted, and schools to remain the target of attacks in the north-west of the country. The Council's silence on the issue, for reasons we all know, is as deafening as it is intolerable. I would like to firmly reiterate that attacks on hospitals and health workers constitute war crimes and perpetrators will be held accountable.

The second priority is to guarantee immediate, safe, comprehensive, sustainable and unhindered humanitarian access to all Syrian territory, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law. A new aid convoy must be urgently deployed to the Rukban camp. That is an immediate and vital priority. It is also essential that the United Nations have access to people who have left the camp. We call on those who have the means to exert the pressure necessary on the regime to ensure that it complies with its obligations under international humanitarian law by authorizing the deployment of the convoy and, more broadly, by guaranteeing unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas under its control, in particular in the territories it has recently reclaimed in the south-west and in eastern

Ghouta. Lastly, I am thinking of Al-Hol camp, where it is crucial that the United Nations have sustainable access, through the most direct and effective channels, to provide assistance to the more than 70,000 people in the camp.

Lastly, only a lasting political solution can end the Syrian tragedy. That is our third major priority and inextricably linked to the first two. Only a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522,annex) can end the suffering of Syrians and lead to the stabilization of Syria and the region in the long term. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen, has our full support in implementing all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy has made many efforts and it appears that a new agreement may now be within reach. It is the responsibility of the regime's sponsors to encourage it to engage in good faith in the process.

However, the political solution cannot be reduced to the constitutional committee alone. It must include three elements: a nationwide ceasefire, the implementation of confidence-building measures to create a secure and neutral environment and the organization of free and transparent elections in which all Syrians can participate. Only concrete progress in the areas I have just mentioned will enable refugees and displaced persons to consider returning home. At the moment, the political and security conditions are not in place to allow a voluntary return in safe and dignified conditions under the auspices of the United Nations. That is reflected in the voluntary return flows documented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which remain very low to date.

Lastly, it is unimaginable to consider financing the reconstruction of the country, normalizing relations with the Damascus regime or lifting sanctions until irreversible and credible progress towards a political solution has been made. It would be not only a grave error in judgment but also a serious political mistake to believe that the Syrian tragedy is behind us. Given the new tragedy looming in Idlib — according to a very familiar script — no one will be able to claim to have been surprised. We call on each member of the Security Council to assume its responsibilities in order to prevent such a tragedy and allow for the establishment of a credible political process, under the supervision of the United Nations, to enable the country to embark on the path to stabilization and peace.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome Mr. Sergey Vasilyevich Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, to New York and wish him a pleasant stay with us.

We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting and Ms. Ursula Mueller for her insightful briefing.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea remains extremely concerned about the escalation of tensions in north-western Syria, in particular in the provinces of Idlib and Hama. Although it is true that there has been some reduction in the level of violence, aerial bombardments and attacks on the ground continue in various parts of those two governorates. Despite the announcement on 18 May of another unilateral 72-hour ceasefire by the Government of Damascus in the demilitarized zone, various reports echo the imminent start of an operation by Government forces and their allies against Al-Nusra Front jihadists entrenched in Idlib and surrounding areas, who, since last week, have been attacking positions occupied by the Syrian forces and the civilian population with artillery fire and rockets. In addition, the situation remains volatile and the possibility of new hostilities is strong, which complicates the future for some 3 million civilians caught in the crossfire.

As Mr. Mark Lowcock said at the most recent briefing (see S/PV.8527) to illustrate the gravity of the humanitarian situation, since the recent military escalation began in late April at least 160 civilians have been killed and nearly 200,000 people have fled the country's hostilities in southern Idlib and northern Hama. In addition, attacks on camps for internally displaced persons have resulted in a number of civilian deaths and injuries, while health centres and schools have been damaged or destroyed, leaving 400,000 students out of school. In that regard, we express our concern about the fate of people who remain in Al-Hol camp, in the north-east of the country, which hosts more than 70,000 people living in extreme conditions.

Against that backdrop, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that the parties or at least one of them is using chemical substances as a weapon of war, as is being reported, or that an attack with chemical weapons may be staged to justify further offensives.

In such a context, Equatorial Guinea can only call for restraint and for the parties to ensure full respect

for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We reiterate the need for Russian-Turkish cooperation to make it possible for ways to be found to reduce tensions in the de-escalation zone within the framework of the Sochi agreement.

I do not know if some members of the Council saw the well-known series *Game of Thrones*, produced by the Home Box Office television network. That medieval drama and fantasy series describes some aristocratic families who are fighting for power to conquer the Iron Throne and rule over the seven kingdoms that make up a vast territory called Westeros. In the last episode of the television drama, we saw how the mother of dragons uses the burning fire of her dragon to conquer the capital of the seven kingdoms — the King's Landing — by burning to ashes with horrifying violence thousands of innocent people and all the existing social and economic structures. In Syria, there is no need for dragons to destroy a city.

In *Game of Thrones*, death and destruction are only fiction but in many Syrian cities, air and ground strikes have caused very real damage, wiping out thousands of innocent families, their cultural identities and the social and economic structures. That metaphor should give food for thought to the parties and countries that can exert influence in order to prevent more victims being added to the nearly 400,000 people who have lost their lives since the beginning of the conflict.

I conclude my statement by reiterating the call on the parties to renounce violence and armed provocation and to decisively commit to the peaceful resolution of the crisis in the context of resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her briefing. I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, to New York and his presence here among us at this meeting.

We are paying close attention to the humanitarian situation in Syria and support the tireless efforts of the United Nations and the parties concerned to improve it. The problem in Idlib is due to terrorist forces that still have a grip on the region. We should therefore use common criteria in our fight against all terrorist organizations listed by the Council. The local terrorist groups not only violate the rights of civilians and humanitarian workers but also launch frequent attacks on Russian military bases and areas controlled by

the Syrian Government, threatening the security and stability of Syria and the region. It will not be possible for the Syrian people to enjoy peace or to fully resolve the humanitarian problems faced by those in Idlib until the threat of terrorist organizations is eliminated.

China supports the continued efforts of Russia and Turkey to implement the memorandum of understanding and to seek a comprehensive long-term solution through dialogue and consultations. China also supports the United Nations and other relevant actors in their humanitarian relief operations for displaced civilians and their efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in the north-western part of the country. Since the beginning of the year, there has been a massive influx to the Al-Hol camp of civilians fleeing conflict in north-eastern Syria. The population of the camp has rapidly increased and the situation is very complex. The humanitarian response should be strengthened in the light of the camp's demographics and proper arrangements should be made for the resettlement of those in the camp.

With regard to the Rukban camp the international community has proposed various solutions. Dialogue and consultations should be enhanced in order to reach an agreed solution as soon as possible. China supports the Syrian Government in actively taking steps to ensure the proper living conditions for those who leave the camps and to end displacement.

In areas where the security situation is relatively stable, the international community should support the Syrian Government in demining, rebuilding infrastructure, restoring health care, education and other social services, launching industrial projects, promoting development and improving people's livelihoods so that an increasing number of people will step out of the shadow of war and gradually live a stable and ordered life.

To fundamentally alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria, we must persist in advancing a political settlement. The international community should stand resolutely behind the United Nations as it plays its role as mediator and pushes the Syrian parties to seek a solution that addresses the concerns of all parties, while respecting the principle of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned process and adhering to resolution 2254 (2015). The Syrian parties should put the future of the country and the well-being of their people first and continue to overcome their differences through

dialogue and consultations towards a political solution. China supports the constructive role played by Special Envoy Pedersen in seeking a political settlement of the Syrian issue.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, China has provided many batches of emergency food aid and donated medical equipment. Through the International Committee of the Red Cross, we have provided water, food, temporary shelter and medical services to displaced persons and returnees. China will continue to contribute to alleviating the humanitarian situation in Syria to the best of its ability. The international community must continue to increase its humanitarian relief to Syria and to fulfil its assistance commitments.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief

Coordinator, for her briefing on the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Since the end of April the north-western part of Syria, in particular Idlib, has been the site of a new military escalation, which, in addition to causing many casualties and thousands of wounded, has led to the displacement of 239,000 people, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Regrettably, that new outbreak of violence, like previous ones, did not spare hospitals or schools, as Ms. Mueller informed us. The displaced persons camps were also not spared. Unfortunately, each incidence of violence further aggravates an already worrying humanitarian crisis, as evidenced by the situation in the Al-Hol camp. Initially planned to accommodate 10,000 people, according to the Human Rights Council, the camp now hosts 73,000 displaced persons, including about 6,500 foreign children, 240 of whom died from malnutrition or poorly treated or untreated injuries.

In addition to the humanitarian consequences, such armed confrontation undermines the efforts of the international community to achieve a lasting peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.

The determination of the international community to achieve the immediate cessation of hostilities throughout Syrian territory must be as firm as its call on all parties to promote dialogue in order to give the protracted peace process a chance to succeed. To

that end, Côte d'Ivoire calls for compliance with the Russian-Turkish agreement on the demilitarized zone, reached in September. The agreement should allow for the separation of insurgent territories from Government zones and ensure a cessation of hostilities in that region.

My country also calls on the parties to the Syrian crisis to respect the obligations to protect civilians under international law and international humanitarian law. They must therefore remove all obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced persons, including women and children, and to refrain from taking hostile action against humanitarian personnel, which is an obligation under international humanitarian law and a moral imperative that the belligerent parties cannot ignore.

I would like to affirm my country's conviction that peace in Syria is still possible, but only if the parties to the conflict want it and give themselves the means, in good faith, to achieve it. The prospect of peace indeed depends on constant internal efforts and the strong support of the Security Council, which, as we have underscored, must once again find its unified voice in order to contribute to the peaceful coexistence and long-term stability of Syria.

Finally, Côte d'Ivoire will continue to support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in all of his initiatives aimed at a peaceful resolution to the crisis, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): First, let me thank Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for another very useful and comprehensive briefing. The picture painted by Ms. Mueller is bleak. It is very regrettable that we are meeting again to discuss the worsening humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea referred to the Westeros world of *A Game Of Thrones*. I must say that there is one huge difference between the world of Westeros and our real world. In the world of *A Game of Thrones*, there are no rules for the conduct of war, whereas in our world there are such rules. I am referring to international humanitarian law and human rights law. This year we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions and the twentieth anniversary of the placement of the protection of civilians on the agenda of the Security Council. Additionally, the Council has adopted a number of resolutions on the protection of civilians, which constitute a part of international law. That means

that all actors, State and non-State actors alike, are obliged to follow those rules, including in Syria.

We meet again to discuss an extremely worrying humanitarian situation in Syria, especially in the north-west part of the country. The military escalation continues as we speak and hundreds of civilians are being killed and injured. Military operations, which have already brought enormous suffering to the civilian population of Syria, have again started to advance.

Attacks on densely populated areas, homes, medical facilities and settlements for internally displaced persons are unacceptable and must stop. All parties must, as a matter of the highest priority, protect civilians. Any military operation should be fully in line with the international humanitarian and human rights law to prevent harm to thousands of civilians trapped in the middle of fighting. The protection of civilians and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance are not a choice, as highlighted by Assistant Secretary-General Mueller, but a legal obligation of all sides to the conflict — State and non-State actors alike. Those who do not comply should be held accountable.

In that context, let me echo the Ambassador of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the humanitarian troika, that the fight against terrorism cannot justify indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the fight against terrorists cannot justify violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In addition, I want to stress our concern about the dramatic state of health facilities in Syria, as raised earlier by the United States delegation. Most of them are not functional and those still operating are too poorly equipped to provide care to patients with injuries and further support to persons with disabilities. That limited access to medical care turns many injuries into life-long impairments that otherwise could have been prevented with proper and timely care. We are also deeply concerned about reported attacks and shelling in north-west Syria, damaging 23 health facilities that serve almost 240,000 people.

In our opinion, the international community, and especially the Security Council, should vigorously advocate for the health and protection of civilians, especially the most vulnerable — women, children and persons with disabilities. The situation is extremely worrying in north-eastern and north-western Syria, just to mention the Al-Hol and Rukban camps. In that context, Poland calls on all sides to the conflict

to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law. Appropriate mechanisms must be in place to ensure that perpetrators are held to account, including those accused of serious violations and abuses against children. That is essential, especially in the Al-Hol area, where children constitute a majority of the population. Schools, hospitals and other vital civilian infrastructure must be protected from attacks. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of explosive weapons, and warring parties should make a special effort to protect them.

Let me turn to the issue of humanitarian access in Syria, especially in Rukban camp, where the situation is increasingly dire due to the limited movement of goods and practically no access. As recalled in Assistant Secretary-General Mueller's briefing, a second humanitarian convoy to Rukban delivered life-saving aid to 40,000 people living in the camp at the beginning of February. Nonetheless, it was only a temporary measure, sufficient for merely a month. As we approach the end of May, no progress has been reached on a third convoy. We were made hopeful by the positive steps taken by the Syrian authorities in February with regard to enabling the access of international humanitarian assistance. We urge them to swiftly authorize the next inter-agency convoy to Rukban, where approximately 24,000 people still need humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, let me also underline the significance of ensuring that the de-escalation zone in Idlib, as agreed in the autumn between Russia and Turkey, is again in place. All parties to the conflict should do their utmost to ensure the full implementation of that agreement on the ground.

Last but not least, let me also acknowledge the presence of the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Mr. Sergey Vershinin.

Ms. Goolab (South Africa): I would like to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller for her briefing to the Security Council this morning, and join others in welcoming Deputy Foreign Minister Vershinin of the Russian Federation to the Council Chamber.

South Africa remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria. We appeal to all parties to cease bombings of infrastructure in Idlib and elsewhere in the country and ensure that the civilians in those areas are not used by non-State actors as human shields.

As we have previously stated, South Africa is concerned that a number of aid agencies have suspended their operations in the north-west of the country owing to the increase in violence. The large numbers of people fleeing the area are adding to the already overburdened humanitarian response. In that regard, we call on all parties to cease hostilities. We hope that they are able to take the necessary actions to allow for agencies to resume their important work. Additionally, we urge all parties to fully engage in the political processes currently under way, as the situation in Syria cannot be solved through military means.

South Africa urges all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. It is also important that the signatories of the September 2018 ceasefire memorandum adhere to its provisions. Attacks on education and health facilities are particularly disturbing, as they significantly impact the lives of the most vulnerable sectors of society, namely, women and children.

While we acknowledge the threat and violence committed by terrorist organizations, it is also necessary to state that actions taken to counter terrorism activities cannot be undertaken at the expense of innocent civilian lives, and any such action should be taken only within the parameters of international law. The situation and conditions in Al-Hol camp, in north-east Syria, is particularly distressing. The camp has expanded from a population of 10,000 in December 2018 to over 73,000 currently, of whom approximately 50,000 are children. All possible efforts must be made to assist all those who wish to return home, be they Syrian, Iraqi or third-party nationals.

Turning to Rukban, South Africa welcomes the reports of increasing numbers of people leaving the camp, aided by the Syrian Government with the oversight of United Nations agencies and based on the principles of voluntary, safe, dignified and well-informed returns. However, my delegation also notes that so long as people remain in Rukban there is a need for humanitarian and medical assistance, which is quickly diminishing. We reiterate our call for the necessary approvals to allow additional and essential humanitarian assistance to be delivered to Rukban.

It is important to note that presence of any foreign military forces operating in the country without the

permission of the Government of Syria undermines and violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We urge all States Members of the United Nations to identify their nationals through relevant United Nations agencies and repatriate them to their countries of origins and utilize their domestic law to deal with such individuals.

In conclusion, South Africa is deeply concerned by the reports of the spread of Islamic State affiliates from Syria onto the African continent as the group seeks new areas of operation and recruitment following its territorial defeat in Syria. All possible action must be taken to ensure that those individuals are detained before they are able to incite further violence and terror.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for her briefing.

Like others, we continue to be extremely concerned by the Syrian offensive in north-west Syria. I want to put on record how much we welcome Turkey's ongoing efforts to reinstate the ceasefire, de-escalate the violence and set up a working group on Idlib. As the French representative said, 3 million lives are at risk, and we do not want to see another Aleppo.

One of the things that has worried us is that there was a declaration of a unilateral ceasefire by the pro-regime forces, but violence went on to increase the very next day — and has increased further in recent days. I therefore join others in calling for the ceasefire to be respected and calling on all parties to adhere to the Sochi ceasefire, respect international law and protect civilians and aid workers. The international community will not let up on the pressure until those stipulations are met.

There was a report in the press this morning that doctors at a maternity hospital in Al-Atarib, in the countryside around Aleppo, have reported multiple attacks in the area and have started to evacuate the hospital. I wonder if the representative of Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) could say whether she knows that this report is correct or not, and if the hospital's location has been included in the deconfliction mechanism. One of the things we discussed last time was that deconfliction mechanism (see S/PV.8527). It is inexcusable that hospitals, schools and other infrastructure have been attacked despite OCHA's deconfliction mechanism. I want to join other colleagues in calling on all parties to distinguish

between civilians and civilian infrastructure, on the one hand, and military targets, on the other.

In that context, I want to be clear that we condemn breaches of the ceasefire by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham terrorist group. All combatants in a conflict — be they non-State actors or State actors — are bound by international humanitarian law. There is therefore no excuse at all for attacks on hospitals and other civilian targets. It is very important that we stress that the fight against terrorists is not *carte blanche* for conducting any attacks indiscriminately and that the fight must take place in a civilian-free zone. I therefore join others in again calling for the principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity.

The other thing that has deeply concerned us is the reports of journalists in Idlib being targeted last week. The latest was a Sky news crew on 23 May. I recall that in February a United States district court found the Syrian authorities responsible for killing *The Sunday Times* journalist Marie Colvin in 2012. Journalists are another group of people who urgently requires the interest and protection of the Security Council.

I want to say a word about humanitarian access in Rukban and Al-Hol. We need to see United Nations access to Al-Hol. We are also very concerned that the situation in Rukban is deteriorating. The humanitarian conditions are dire and are a direct result of humanitarian access having been blocked. As the representative of the United States said, that means that residents are forced to leave or face continued peril inside the camp. A third aid convoy must be allowed to reach the camp via the United Nations in Damascus. This is now becoming a desperate situation.

Several colleagues and I asked some questions of the Syrian authorities at the previous meeting. We did not get any answers. I do not want to repeat those questions. I want to make it a bit easier. I would like to ask today for four commitments from the Syrian representative on behalf of his Government. First, I would like to receive a commitment not to target journalists. Secondly, I would like to see a commitment to abide by international humanitarian law. Thirdly, I would like to see a commitment to abide by Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians. Fourthly, I would like to receive a commitment to let the third United Nations convoy into the camp in Rukban, as called for by a number of us. Those commitments are not difficult to give. I think any Government that truly

had the safety and interests of its citizens at heart would be able to give them.

Finally, I would like to conclude by echoing what the French representative said about the peace process. It goes much further than just the constitutional committee — there cannot be any reconstruction assistance from our side until there is a sustainable and irreversible political process.

I would also like to end by repeating what the French and United States representatives said about chemical weapons. We are ready to respond robustly if needed. With regard to the issue as to whether there have been chemical attacks or not, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has fact-finding missions that can go and ascertain the answer to that important question.

Mr. Fiallo Billini Portorreal (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Dominican Republic is grateful for the convening of this meeting and thanks Ms. Muller for her valuable briefing. We welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

We are meeting once again to discuss the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. The challenges remain enormous: the situation in Al-Hol camp, where more than 73,000 people — the vast majority of whom are women and children — remains precarious; and the fact that tens of thousands of people are still in Rukban camp awaiting humanitarian assistance is worrisome, especially when we are informed that permission for the entry of a new convoy has been denied. The remaining needs in the south of the country and the considerable challenges facing the political process confirm that the Council has a responsibility now more than ever to make tangible progress if it really wants to bring an end to the crisis in Syria.

The Dominican Republic remains deeply concerned about the increasing military escalation in recent weeks in north-western Syria, and in particular the impact it has had on civilians. The details that Ms. Muller shared with us today confirm that there is every reason for us to be absolutely concerned and for us to collectively seek solutions to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians and access to assistance for people who are already facing extremely precarious conditions. According to reports, between February and May of this year, it is estimated

that 300,000 people have been internally displaced by this new wave of violence. Of those people, 239,000 have been displaced in the past three weeks alone, of whom an estimated 70,000 are children.

Many humanitarian responders make up part of that alarming number of internally displaced persons. The need to protect all of them is urgent and requires our utmost effort and determination. With such a massive influx of people, camps for displaced persons and refugees are already overcrowded, and many have no choice but to take shelter in open camps without any type of protection. We must ask ourselves: how much more are those people expected to endure? For many of them, this is not the first time they have had to flee violence, and once again, they find themselves in the same situation of uncertainty and desperation.

Some reports refer to over 20 attacks on health facilities, including hospitals and ambulances, claiming the lives of medical workers. The situation has forced the interruption of medical services to hundreds of thousands of people, mainly women and children. In the same area, an estimated 250,000 school-age children have been affected. If that is not a catastrophe, what is?

We reiterate once again that, if a large-scale confrontation were to occur, we would be faced with the most serious humanitarian crisis in the entire history of the conflict in Syria. Mr Lowcock said so just a few weeks ago (see S/PV.8527) when he forced us to put ourselves in the shoes of parents faced with the terrible decision of whether or not to take their children for medical care, because if they did, their children might lose their lives in an attack.

As long as the norms of international humanitarian law are not respected and attacks on civilian infrastructure, in particular health facilities, continue and humanitarian access is at risk, the fate of the 3 million people living in the affected areas is simply uncertain. It is therefore essential that the renewed ceasefire commitment reached between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation be maintained and tangible steps be taken to facilitate access to the most vulnerable. The protection of displaced people who still have not found refuge must be a priority, as well as that of the millions who decide to stay in the area, primarily because they do not have the means to move to safer places.

It would be very shameful if we were to return to the Council next month to deliver statements on the

importance of respecting international humanitarian law when statistics and reports continue to pile up on attacks on civilian areas and civilian infrastructure. We must uphold our urgent responsibility to protect the most vulnerable and avoid greater suffering for them at all costs.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and Ms. Ursula Mueller for her comprehensive briefing. We express gratitude for the important work done by her Office to alleviate human suffering in Syria. We also welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Peru is following with concern the humanitarian crisis that is still looming over large areas of the Syrian territory and that is setting the stage for extremism. In the current situation, we are alarmed by the persistent violence in north-western Syria and its impact on the people, which is exacerbated by ongoing extensive damage to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools.

We deplore the new reports of fatalities in the south of Idlib, including of women and children, and the fact that this is a breach of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as mandates specific to the Council on the Syrian conflict. That must cease, as it undermines the trust required to build sustainable peace in the country.

We also note with regret the consequences of this escalation in terms of thousands of new internally displaced persons, who require urgent assistance to survive. We commend the professionalism and sense of duty demonstrated by the United Nations personnel and other agencies deployed in Syria to meet their needs. We also underscore the moral and legal imperative of guaranteeing their safety and providing them with the facilities and access required for their work.

In that vein, we hope that the necessary permits will be granted to the United Nations for further provision of assistance to the inhabitants of Rukban camp as a palliative measure until the countries directly involved in this situation can reach a definitive solution that will enable those people to return to their homes safely and with dignity, especially given that 95 per cent of them have expressed their desire to leave the camp and return to their places of origin.

We also underscore the huge challenge of meeting the critical needs of over 73,000 people in Al-Hol camp, and the importance of continuing to mobilize the international community to support them. To that end, we deem it essential to continue to work on measures to provide a better climate of understanding, in particular with regard to the sensitive issues of identifying missing persons, the recovery of their remains, the release of detainees and the identification of missing persons. We hope that new and better developments in those crucial matters will help in the coming weeks and months to promote the required de-escalation to overcome the humanitarian disaster that continues to affect the country.

Given the intensification of violence in recent weeks and its devastating consequences on civilians, we must remember the urgency of moving towards a political solution on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In that sense, we hope that the constitutional committee can soon be established and that all Syrian parties, especially the Government, will constructively commit to its objectives.

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

First of all, I wish to welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Sergey Vershinin, to the Chamber. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for her briefing — indeed, another grim and worrying briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

With today's meeting, I would like to highlight the fact that the Council has held three meetings related to the humanitarian situation in Syria, of which two specifically discussed the humanitarian impact in the north-west. With tomorrow's briefing by Special Envoy Pedersen, we will have had five meetings on Syria this month. That is quite a large number. While Indonesia prefers to conduct all Council meetings appropriately and as necessary, my delegation wishes to highlight the fact that the most important approach for the Council is to be united in addressing humanitarian issues in Syria.

Indonesia is following very closely the situation in north-western Syria, where the ongoing violence and hostilities continue to take a heavy toll on civilians and key infrastructure. Hundreds of people have been killed and injured, while almost 240,000 have been displaced in north-western Syria. The increasing number is

alarming, and I think everybody in the Chamber is fully aware of that.

When we say that there are 3 million people in the de-escalation area of Idlib, including 1.3 million internally displaced, we are also talking about a majority of individuals who have already been displaced multiple times. How do we think those displaced individuals should cope with their situation while heavy fighting and violence are going on near them? The ceasefire is very important and needs to be addressed, along with the restrictions on freedom of movement due to safety and security concerns, and the absence of basic services in key infrastructure, such as hospitals that have been damaged or destroyed. As Assistant Secretary-General Mueller mentioned just now, more than 45 health facilities have ceased to operate, depriving civilians of immunization and health services. That is not only sad but in contravention of human rights.

While we have focused on the situation in north-western Syria in recent weeks, the Council also needs reminding of how things stand in the Rukban and Al-Hol camps. More than 13,000 people have left Rukban, but the situation in the camp, where there around 28,500 residents, remains dire. As for Al-Hol, 92 per cent of whose population is made up of women and children, some issues remain of concern and urgently need to be addressed. Many residents have limited access to basic services, such as health-care facilities. Food assistance, nutrition and education are also sources of concern. In the light of all of that, I would like to highlight three points.

First, the increase in humanitarian needs must be met with concrete actions. We urge all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including by providing unlimited access for humanitarian activities throughout areas where people need safety and protection. The humanitarian responses from the United Nations and its humanitarian partners must be supported in order to ensure the rapid and full implementation of humanitarian assistance to those who are really in need. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twentieth of the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We held an open debate on the issue just last week (see S/PV.8534). People will be asking us all about what comes next. We need to have an answer.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the need to ensure sustained humanitarian responses. Sadly, the humanitarian situation in Syria will not be resolved overnight. The international community must make every effort to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and prevent another humanitarian tragedy.

And this brings me to my third point, on the urgent need for a humanitarian preparedness plan, adjusted to current priorities, especially as many humanitarian partners have suspended their operations due to heavy fighting in the north-west. Earlier, I urged the upholding of the ceasefire. That would give the United Nations and humanitarian actors the ability to quickly respond and provide life-saving humanitarian responses to the affected population. In this regard, I want to request additional information from Assistant Secretary-General Mueller on the update of the 2019 humanitarian response plan and how it could assist meeting humanitarian needs on the ground. Are there any new ideas for alleviating the suffering of the people of Syria?

In conclusion, we once again urge all parties to fully cooperate in ensuring the protection of millions of people in Syria, with particular attention to the north-west and north-east of the country. Indonesia fully believes that the humanitarian situation in Syria can be resolved only if all the relevant parties come to the negotiating table and together advance the political process in Syria, based on respect for Syrian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, as well as resolution 2254 (2015). The people of Syria are exhausted, as Assistant Secretary-General Mueller mentioned. People are tired of hoping for peace. It is our solemn responsibility here in the Council to not only bring hope back to the people of Syria, but also the reality of peace on the ground.

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

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

Mr. Vershinin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have indeed asked to speak again and beg the Council's indulgence for just a few minutes more. First of all, I am very moved by the serious discussion today and with my welcome, which is truly very important to me. We are dealing seriously with every issue related to the evolution of the situation in Syria on the humanitarian, military and political settlement

fronts. I therefore want to say a few words, and partly to respond to what has been said.

Clearly I cannot continue analysing or comparing the situation in Syria to the *Game of Thrones* television series, which I have not seen, but needless to say what has been going on in Syria for a very long time is no game. The reality is that a sovereign country and its people are not playing at anything. They are trying to survive and build a future for themselves.

In my statement I said that according to our estimate, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, an organization that the Council has recognized as terrorist, now controls 99 per cent of the Idlib de-escalation zone. I was expecting someone to at least attempt to correct that number, but no one did. I therefore want to ask once again exactly what the sides in question here are. I was pleased to hear condemnations of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham's violations of the ceasefire. But what I want to say is that there have been no violations, because Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham is not a party that has any obligation under anything to do with the ceasefire. The ceasefire was established between the Government and the armed opposition, and the Astana format played a role in that. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, the Al-Nusra Front and Al-Qaida are all organizations that we have all designated as terrorist and that we must therefore repudiate. That is why I was surprised by the references to the Government's relaunching or renewal of the fight against the Al-Nusra Front. That is not some whim, it is the duty of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to us, the international community, to combat that terrorist group.

The hope was expressed here several times that Idlib might not become a second Aleppo. I kept waiting for somebody to say that they hoped Idlib would not become a second Raqqa. I can assert that Idlib will not become a second Raqqa, that dead city that the United States-led international coalition bombed into the ground. The Idlib operation is not about the large-scale use of force. I want the Council to know that Russia is very committed to all of its obligations under the memorandum with Turkey, which has been frequently cited today. That is therefore not going to happen, but at the same time the fight against terrorism is necessary.

I have also wondered, in answer to questions that have been asked today, what sort of message we are sending, after today's discussion and those during previous meetings, to the 3 million civilians in Idlib who, as we have all acknowledged, are hostage to

organizations that we all call terrorist. As I understand it, the message that many are trying to send is that they will have to continue to put up with the situation for now. I think that is wrong and creates terrible disappointment among the civilians who are hearing that message from the international community.

With regard to the remarks by a number of representatives that, in the case of reports of the use of chlorine, they will respond quickly and appropriately, I would only urge that, rather than acting quickly, they act intelligently and based on verified data, which should unquestionably precede any action, especially if such action could have seriously destabilizing effects.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to welcome my dear friend the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and thank him for his presence at this meeting and for the valuable clarifications he just provided.

As the English saying goes,

(*spoke in English*)

“words may lie, but actions will always tell the truth”.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The truth known to everyone is that the suffering of the Syrian people is the result of the crimes of various terrorist groups, going by different names and having varying loyalties, and including foreign terrorist fighters among their ranks. Their suffering is also the result of the aggression and war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the United States-led coalition, its agents and its proxy militias, including its barbaric actions involving economic terrorism.

The truth everyone knows is that, from the beginning, the humanitarian issue has been exploited by Governments of certain members and non-members of the Security Council to target my country and ruin Syrian State institutions, while distorting their image and turning public opinion against them. How can anyone believe that the claims made by the Governments of those countries in their reprehensible statements are born of their concern for the safety of the Syrian people? How long will the Council be unable to uphold the principles of the Charter of the United

Nations and international law, or be unable to compel those aggressor States to end their aggressive practices against my country, as well as hold them responsible?

Some colleagues mentioned the situation in Idlib. In my statement before the Council on 17 May (see S/PV.8527) I clarified the reality on the ground given that the terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham — which, by the way, is the Al-Nusra Front, which itself is part of Al-Qaida in the Levant, which in turn is part of Al-Qaida in Iraq, which in turn is part of Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Therefore, we are all talking about Al-Qaida, regardless of its different names; all are designated by the Council as terrorist entities. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, along with its associates, control large parts of Idlib and also carry out terrorist attacks on neighbouring safe areas and on positions of Russian and Syrian forces, as detailed by my Russian colleague.

I continue to await a response to the questions I raised previously, including how members would react when facing similar circumstances whereby terrorist groups take control of one of their cities and use it to target other cities and undermine their safety and security.

The Ambassador of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the co-penholders, asked five questions; we have just one question, which I have just asked. When will it be recognized that the right we are exercising is the same right others have exercised in confronting terrorist attacks against the Bataclan theatre and the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, as well as terrorist acts in Nice, London, Boston and other cities? The terrorists that members have confronted in their own countries were not equipped with Turkish rocket launchers and tanks, or modern United States military supplies and communication technologies. They were not supported by media mercenaries such as the American Bilal Abdul Karim, who is the Al-Nusra Front terrorist group's correspondent working with British Sky News and the American CNN. They did not have Western experts on chemical weapons at their disposal, as is the case with the terrorists holding civilians hostage in Idlib.

The meeting held two days ago by the Turkish intelligence service with members of the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups — including Jaysh Al-Izza, Ahrar Al-Sham, Suqour Al-Sham and Jaysh Al-Ahrar — serves to refute everything put forward in previous years with regard to the so-called “moderate Syrian opposition”. It also proves undoubtedly that

Governments of States sponsoring terrorism are providing support to those armed terrorist groups. Allow me to show the Council photographic evidence. This is a photograph of the leaders of the terrorist groups that held a meeting in Idlib two days ago sponsored by Turkish intelligence and some members represented in the Security Council. Leading the meeting was the head of the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Julani the terrorist. What is important is that some people in the photograph sitting down with the Al-Nusra Front, which controls 99 per cent of Idlib, were part of the Astana process — meaning that they are obligated not to fight alongside these terrorist groups against the Syrian Government. They are bound to honour the agreements reached at Astana, including the establishment of the de-escalation zone. Therefore, this is a photograph of the “moderates” who were meeting in Idlib.

How long will the Council ignore the suffering of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians in areas where militias of illegitimate foreign forces are present? Ignoring the suffering of those civilians yet again proves the scale of the lies and hypocrisy of some in dealing with humanitarian issues. Allow me to highlight some aspects of that suffering.

First, the United States and its agent the terrorist group of Maghaweer Al-Thawra continue to detain thousands of civilians in Rukban camp, in the occupied Al-Tanf area. They are preventing civilians from leaving the camp and returning home. They refuse to dismantle the camp. We call on the Security Council to compel the United States to cease its obstruction of joint Russian and Syrian efforts to end the suffering of the residents of that camp. Those efforts resulted in making it possible for more than 12,000 people to leave the camp.

Allow me to express my reservations about remarks made by Ms. Mueller in her briefing. She urged the Syrian authorities to allow the entry of a third humanitarian convoy into Rukban camp, in Al-Tanf. She gave the impression that it is the Syrian Government that is obstructing the entry of the convoy into the area, and I would like to correct that. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ms. Mueller, the Secretary-General, the Security Council and, in fact, the entire world all know that the Syrian Government approved the first convoy. It was the occupying United States forces that refused the entry of the convoy for 40 days. Ms. Mueller, OCHA, the Council and the Secretary-General know

that the Syrian Government also approved the second convoy. The United States of America — the occupying Power — refused the entry of the convoy into Al-Tanf for four months. Ms. Mueller, OCHA, the Council and the Secretary-General know that, by virtue of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the occupying Power is responsible for the protection of civilians. The United States occupying forces in Al-Tanf are, by virtue of the Geneva Conventions, responsible for providing medical and food assistance to those under its occupation. Please correct me if I am mistaken. Why is the United States occupying such a wide expanse of my country? What is the position of OCHA and the Council? What is the United States doing in Syria?

Secondly, the situation in Al-Hol camp, in the north-east of the country, is just as desperate as the situation in Rukban camp. Al-Hol camp is under the control of United States proxy militias known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. They are militias that grew with the support of the United States-led coalition, supplemented by elements of the Da'esh terrorist group. They have perpetrated many massacres, carried out brutal practices and detained and tortured Syrians who have called for their rights and the return of Syrian State institutions so that they can carry out their role. I would recall that the United States and gangs of the Syrian Democratic Forces are plundering and smuggling oil, historical artefacts and Syrian national resources. They are undermining the Syrian economy and fabricating crises that impact the day-to-day lives of the Syrian people.

Thirdly, we must put an end to the suffering of our people in the areas under the illegal control of the invading forces of the Turkish regime. We call on the Security Council to take decisive and immediate action to put an end to the practices of the Turkish regime and its attempts to change the identity and demographic character of those Syrian areas, put an end to the Erdoğan regime's attempts to undermine the unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and end his delusions of bringing back the Ottoman Empire. Those days are gone for ever. I say that because I heard my colleague the Ambassador of Britain thanking the Turkish authorities for their humanitarian assistance in Idlib.

The Syrian Arab Republic would like to stress that the presence of any foreign military forces on its territories without its approval is an act of aggression and occupation and will be dealt with accordingly. Our

perspective is clear. We will spare no effort to rid our citizens in Idlib of the control of the terrorist groups that have taken them as human shields and to put an end to the repeated acts of aggression of those terrorist groups against innocent civilians in neighbouring towns and cities. We call on all countries concerned to withdraw their nationals who are foreign terrorist fighters, whose number is estimated in the tens of thousands. We call on them to withdraw those fighters from my country immediately, hold them accountable for their crimes, make sure that they do not commit future crimes and not recycle those terrorists, thereby allowing them to pursue their terrorism in countries in Africa and elsewhere.

I would like to ask the representatives of Western States in the Council: How can elements of terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters move to Libya, Afghanistan, Central Asia and the borders of the Niger with Algeria, and others, without the support and sponsorship of Governments with influence? We have warned against this time and again. We have said that those countries are investing in terrorism to undermine the security and stability of other countries and serve their own political agendas.

Our second question is the following: Why has the Secretariat, with the partnership of 38 international counter-terrorism institutions, been unable to identify the Governments of States sponsoring terrorism that has been targeting my country for the last eight years? It is not that complicated, really. It is not as if we are trying to identify the gender of angels.

We will liberate all of our national territory. We will rid it of any illegal presence of foreign troops. That is a sovereign right in accordance with the principles of international law, the provisions of the Charter, the Council's resolutions and the Astana agreements, which have reaffirmed the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We call on OCHA to shoulder its responsibilities and inform the United Nations about the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people as a result of the unilateral economic measures imposed by the United States, the European Union and other States against my country, Syria. Those measures have had a negative impact on the day-to-day lives of the Syrian people. The Ministry of Health in Syria cannot even access material and equipment used in surgeries. That is a form of economic terrorism that complements terrorism by terrorist groups and their supporters. This is unacceptable and should not go on. Again, we call

on OCHA to stop including in its reports claims that are baseless and fabricated by hostile parties in the United Nations Office in Gaziantep and in OCHA in order to implement the agendas of the United States and its allies.

In conclusion, some Council members — by which I mean the United States, Britain and France — continue to use deceit and misinformation to implement their hegemonic policies so that the world goes back to the era of colonialism, mandate and trusteeship. Those countries continue to use the Security Council to protect terrorists and undermine the advances of the Syrian army when confronting terrorist groups supported by those countries, including by instructing the White Helmets terrorist group, which is a branch of the Al-Nusra Front, to fabricate so-called use of toxic chemical materials and to accuse the Syrian Government of the act. It would not be the first time that two of those countries have fabricated the lie of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Similar to what happened when the Syrian army made advances in eastern Ghouta, Aleppo and other areas, we hear senior officials from those countries and their Ambassadors in the Security Council making threats in the event of the use of chemical materials. Those senior officials and Ambassadors tell armed terrorist groups in Idlib that they will be saved only if chemical weapons are used. They ask them to use toxic chemical weapons against civilians in Idlib, fabricate evidence, bring forward false witnesses, as usual, and manipulate the crime scene as they have done before, and then those countries are ready with their political and media capabilities to accuse the Syrian Government and to come to their aid. That has happened before, and we should prevent its recurrence.

The President: The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I am sorry for taking the floor again; I will be brief. I have been quite alarmed by what we have just heard in the last closing interventions. I would therefore like to be very clear about a number of things.

First, I would like the record to show that I did not get the commitments that I was seeking. I want to be very clear that the Sky News crew is not a legitimate target. The targeting of journalists is not permissible, and I again call on the Syrian representative to pass

that message on to his Government and give us a commitment that they will not be targeted, unlike the late Marie Colvin.

Secondly, I want to repudiate the slander against the White Helmets. I have said many times in this Chamber that it is a humanitarian organization doing good work to help the suffering civilians in Syria.

Thirdly, I want to say that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) does not do the bidding of the United Kingdom and the United States in the manner in which the Syrian representative implied. OCHA, like all the United Nations, is impartial. It does the best job that it can, in terrible circumstances, for the people of Syria, and it would be better if the Syrian authorities supported OCHA in that work, rather than attack it.

Lastly, there are more babies in Idlib than there are Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham fighters. Rather than talk about responding to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham provocations — no one is taking issue with the question of whether to respond to those provocations — the question is: How they are responded to? How do Russia and the Syrian regime respond to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham? They say that they want to protect the 3 million civilians in Idlib, but massive aerial bombardments of civilian areas and the bombing of hospitals, schools and civilian infrastructure are not necessary and are certainly not proportionate. That is the absolutely critical thing about international humanitarian law. There needs to be a distinction between civilian and military targets, and there needs to be proportionality. That is what we are not seeing, and that is why the Council is so worried about that.

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

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I am speaking on behalf of the penholders, including Belgium and Kuwait. My statement is warranted given the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia asked about what message should come out of our meeting. I would like to respond to that. I regret that he left the Chamber, but I understand that he left while the Syrian Ambassador was speaking. The point I wanted to make is the following.

I repeat what our British colleague just said, and the message that we expect to come out of our meeting is that everybody around the table supports and subscribes to respect for international humanitarian

law. While fighting terrorism, there is no excuse for violating international humanitarian law by using chemical weapons, barrel bombs or indiscriminately bombing populations, thereby wreaking havoc upon so many civilians, as we have unfortunately witnessed not only in Idlib but also during the fighting in Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to make a further statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor once again. I would like to respond to the comments made by my colleague the Ambassador of the United Kingdom.

Asking questions is not one sided. It is her right to do so, and I will answer them. But I asked many questions that went unanswered. Those were key questions, which could have reduced the length of this discussion and could have stopped at number 62, rather than getting up to 100 reports. That would have happened if I had received genuine responses to the many unanswered questions that I have raised on numerous occasions.

First, the Syrian authorities were asked to support the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), whose representative is present in the Chamber. OCHA is working in Syria pursuant to resolution 2139 (2014). After its adoption, we, as the Government of Syria, started to implement the humanitarian response agreement, together with OCHA. We renew that agreement every six months. Thus, OCHA, which talks about supplying aid to millions of Syrians, could have offered nothing if it were not for the support of the Syrian Government, which endorsed the humanitarian operation. OCHA, then, is not acting alone on Syrian territory, but rather with the agreement and assistance of the Syrian Government, which gratefully allowed it to provide assistance to millions of Syrians. That operation has been ongoing since 2014. It is nothing new.

Secondly, I would like to turn to the White Helmets. There are many Western media and political reports that elucidate the truth about the establishment of that organization, led by a British intelligence officer whose name we shared with the Council. If that organization were truly a humanitarian one, its workers would not have been smuggled through Israel into Canada, the United States and certain European countries. Why do those humanitarian White Helmet workers have to be smuggled through the Golan and then Israel? If they

were truly White Helmet humanitarian workers, why did they go to Israel and the Syrian occupied Golan? Four hundred terrorists have been smuggled through Israel to Western countries.

Thirdly, resolution 2133 (2014) prohibits the payment of ransoms to terrorists and rejects negotiations with them. Those who say today that the Syrian Government must implement a ceasefire with the terrorists in Idlib are speaking in contradiction to the provisions of that resolution, in which the Council decided not to negotiate with or pay ransoms to terrorists. However, the regime in Qatar has paid ransoms scores of times to the Al-Nusra Front in the Golan, Aleppo and Idlib. Those present know the old stories, but in the Golan, when the Al-Nusra Front took members of the Fijian and Philippine units hostage, Qatar openly paid them ransoms of €35 million with the knowledge of the Secretariat.

My colleague the Ambassador of Germany said that everybody here must uphold international humanitarian law. Yes, we too believe in upholding it. However, I call on the Ambassador of Germany and my other colleagues to first uphold international law and the provisions of the Charter before upholding international humanitarian law because the former prohibit interference in the domestic affairs of a State Member of the Organization. Respect for the law cannot be selective.

We respect international law, the provisions of the Charter, international humanitarian law and human rights law. We also respect the law on the protection of journalists so as not to annoy my British colleague. We respect a journalist who upholds his profession and its rules and who wishes to visit a country to cover events. Such a journalist must request a visa from the authorities of the country he or she wishes to visit. He or she must go to the country's Embassy and obtain a visa and authorization, rather than illegally entering the country through its borders with neighbouring countries to cover terrorist activities then getting killed by a terrorist missile. Everyone knows that. The French authorities are well aware of that.

The safety of our armed forces was compromised in order to recover the journalist's body that my British colleague spoke about and hand it over to the authorities of her country in Beirut. The French authorities know that. They know the identity of those who brought the journalist's body to them. The Syrian Government

again put its own security forces and army in jeopardy to protect United Nations personnel and accredited journalists in Syria. Those who wish to behave like Hollywood actors will pay the price.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller to respond to comments and questions.

Ms. Mueller: Let me first state the facts regarding the inter-agency convoys to Rukban. After the second convoy delivered assistance to the people in Rukban in February, we requested a third convoy because that assistance was supposed to last only 30 days. We requested a third convoy in March and again on 9 May. Those requests were not approved. Today, I have heard Council members calling for the approval of the request for a third convoy to Rukban to provide life-saving assistance to people while they are still there.

With regard to the question posed by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, attacks against medical care are verified by the World Health Organization by checking against multiple sources. We will review the press article mentioned by the Permanent Representative and inform the Council whether or not such attacks have been confirmed by the United Nations. As the Permanent Representative reiterated, medical facilities enjoy special protection under international humanitarian law, whether or not they are located in deconflicted zones. I again call for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, in particular medical facilities.

Concerning the question posed by yourself, Mr. President, in your capacity as the Permanent Representative of Indonesia, with respect to the humanitarian response plan, the *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview* was published on 1 March. The 2019 humanitarian response plan asks for \$3.3 billion to support 11.7 million people in need. The most recent update is that the plan has been financed approximately 16 per cent, which is \$544 million. I thank those Member States that have contributed to the plan. The plan itself is nearly finalized. A few details remain to be discussed and will be finalized and published soon. Overall, we believe that the plan is critical to our response. Support for it is necessary for the United Nations and its partners. The humanitarian community stands ready to respond based on the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and on needs.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.