



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8664th meeting

Thursday, 14 November 2019, 3.20 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Ms. Pierce	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Djani
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
	United States of America	Mrs. Craft

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

19-36729 (E)



Accessible document

Please recycle



The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the 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 Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and 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 Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: As the conflict in Syria evolves, one fact remains — it is the people of Syria who continue to bear the consequences of eight and a half years of war. Across the country, more than 11 million remain in need of humanitarian assistance. That is more than half the estimated population.

Today I want to, first, update the Council on the humanitarian response; secondly, cover the situation in the north-west; thirdly, flag some points on the north-east; fourthly, brief Council members on the findings of my recent visit on the cross-border operation; and fifthly, remind the Council of the wider regional situation.

First, with regard to the humanitarian response, the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations work through all possible avenues to reach as many of the people in need as possible every month. So far this year, we have reached an average of 5.6 million people a month in all parts of Syria. We try to prioritize the neediest. Over half of the response takes place in areas under Government control. It takes place with the Government's agreement and acceptance and in coordination with it. This year, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations are delivering assistance from within Syria to an average of 3 million people every month. Most of the beneficiaries are people in the most acute need and in communities with a high concentration of people in need. The assistance provided by the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations is

tailored to meet people's needs, based on independent assessments. Despite the administrative and security challenges we continue to face from within Syria, the United Nations conducted more than 5,500 missions between January and September to assess needs, deliver aid and monitor the impact of our work. In addition to the United Nations coordinated humanitarian response in Government-controlled areas, we are regularly made aware of bilateral humanitarian assistance from Member States, including the Russian Federation.

Secondly, I remain very concerned about the situation in the north-west. In recent weeks, there has been an increase in air strikes and ground-based strikes, mostly in parts of southern and western Idlib, which, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports, have caused a high number of civilian casualties. In the past two days, there have been reports of over 100 air strikes in Idlib and surrounding areas. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that four separate health facilities were damaged on 4 and 6 November, including the Kafr Nabl hospital. An increase in shelling out of the area has also been reported.

Not only do civilians in those areas have to endure the impact of hostilities, but continue to suffer under the presence of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, a United Nations-listed terrorist organization. We are following with concern the situation for civilians in Kafr Takharim, where civilians were besieged and shelled following protests against Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. Reports indicate that civilians have been killed. More broadly, we are seeing that civilian infrastructure is being dismantled and sold in areas under Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham control, including water and electrical infrastructure, as well as rail lines. Removing civilian infrastructure affects basic services now, but will also make any future recovery all the more difficult.

More than half of the people in Idlib have had to move from other parts of the country. Hundreds of thousands are living in camps and informal shelters close to the border with Turkey. There is little space left to absorb additional displacement. The onset of winter — with the rain, the cold and the mud it brings — compounds the dire humanitarian situation. In that context, the internal United Nations Headquarters board of inquiry established by the Secretary-General has begun its work to investigate a series of incidents that have occurred in north-west Syria since September 2018. I would remind the Council of the Secretary-General's request that all

relevant parties extend their support to the board in the conduct of its duties.

Thirdly, I continue to follow developments in north-east Syria very closely. Hostilities have decreased since the agreements were reached on 17 and 22 October, but clashes continue in border areas, particularly around the Ras Al-Ayn and Tel Abyad districts. OHCHR has verified reports that 49 civilians have been killed by a combination of air strikes, ground-based strikes, sniper fire and executions carried out by armed groups. OHCHR has also verified that 31 civilians have been killed by improvised explosive devices or explosive remnants of war since the beginning of October. About 200,000 people left the border areas between Turkey and Syria in the early phases of hostilities, mostly heading south. Most of them have now returned, but more than 70,000 remain displaced.

Civilian infrastructure has also been affected. The World Health Organization has reported that five medical facilities have been affected by fighting. The Allouk water station, which provides water services to 460,000 people in Al-Hasakah, has been repeatedly put out of service due to hostilities. The Government of Turkey has responded to requests to support humanitarian operations. A number of cross-line missions have been facilitated by Turkey, whereby technicians came from Al-Hasakah to Allouk to do repairs to the water station and the power supply. Turkey has also sent its own technicians. While the water has again been restored, it is important to have sustained access to ensure the ongoing operations of those critical facilities.

More broadly, I remain concerned about the impact that changes in administrative control could have on humanitarian operations in the north-east. With 1.8 million people in need, it is critical that there be continuity of life-saving essential services and humanitarian aid deliveries, regardless of any changes in control. That has particular implications for displacement camps like Al-Hol, where needs for the 68,600 residents are high. The camp includes Syrians, Iraqis and third-country nationals. It is more important than ever that States Members of the United Nations, including members of the Council, repatriate their nationals for reintegration or for prosecution under national legislation, as appropriate.

Across northern Syria, 4 million people are supported by the United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism, including

2.7 million in the north-west who cannot be reached from within the country. That brings me to my fourth point. In October, I went to Turkey and visited our cross-border operations. I was able to see the delivery of assistance, assess the work of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism and talk to people we are helping inside Syria. Since 2014, the United Nations has sent nearly 30,000 truckloads of humanitarian assistance across the four border crossings named in resolution 2165 (2014). Civilians have been provided with food assistance, water, medical assistance, shelter and other help. More trucks are using the cross-border mechanism today than ever before, with more than 900 passing through in October. More people are being reached than ever before. In October alone, the United Nations provided 1.1 million people with food through cross-border deliveries, which is double the number in January. The operation from Turkey has grown by more than 40 per cent since this time in 2018, due to the increase in humanitarian needs. It is through those operations that we have been able to stave off an even worse humanitarian crisis in northern Syria.

I can confirm that the operation mandated by resolution 2165 (2014) is one of the most closely scrutinized aid delivery systems in the world today. The movement and delivery of humanitarian aid is monitored at four distinct levels: at the border, at the warehouses inside Syria, at distribution points and after distribution. The humanitarian nature of United Nations cross-border assistance is monitored and verified by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism. Monitors of 15 different nationalities verify the humanitarian nature of the cargo being shipped. The monitors, whom I met, climb into every truck. They open boxes, cut into bags of rice and inspect vehicles before clearing assistance to cross the border.

When aid arrives at warehouses inside Syria, it is examined by third-party monitors contracted by the United Nations. They check the items being offloaded against the waybill. Third-party monitors have conducted almost 2,000 assessments of aid so far this year. In addition to monitoring the arrival of aid at warehouses, they have observed the direct distribution to affected people and deliveries of aid to schools and hospitals. They have conducted post-distribution monitoring, using community feedback mechanisms and individual interviews with beneficiaries. Their monitoring has not identified any evidence of systemic aid diversion.

We are also using new technologies to monitor the delivery of aid. Through video and time-stamped geotagged photos, we can monitor the delivery process every step of the way. Commodity tracking systems using barcodes on each box of aid allow assistance to be followed from the border to the warehouse and on to the individual beneficiary. Those same boxes have phone numbers printed on them to allow beneficiaries to report back by phone or WhatsApp if everything they are expecting is not delivered or if there are other things they need. A call centre has been established, allowing anyone with questions about aid deliveries to get in touch.

Nothing in life is completely risk-free, but I can say with confidence that the United Nations knows what is going across the border under our programme and where it is going. We know that help is reaching the civilians who need it. Therefore, I can be clear that there is no alternative to the cross-border operation. A renewal of the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014) is critical. There is no plan B. Without the cross-border operation, we would see an immediate end of aid that is supporting millions of civilians; that would cause a rapid increase in hunger and disease. A lot more people would flood across the borders, making an existing crisis in the region even worse.

That brings me to my fifth and last point. With more than 5.6 million Syrians living in neighbouring countries as refugees, the crisis has had an enormous impact on the entire region. The responsibility that refugee-hosting countries bear is heavy. When I visited Turkey last month, I had the opportunity to express again my deep admiration and gratitude to Turkey's Government and people for their exceptional and prolonged hospitality to the refugees. The same gratitude is due to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and others. I urge the international community to be more generous in supporting them all in shouldering the burden they have taken on.

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

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

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium): I am delivering this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Kuwait, Germany and Belgium.

I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his valuable and timely briefing. Mr. Lowcock has reminded us once again that millions of Syrians continue to need humanitarian assistance and protection. We heard the numbers. Eleven million Syrians, including some 5 million children, need humanitarian assistance. These are essential and critical needs. We are talking about food, water, shelter, medical assistance, preventive medical care and education for Syrian children. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners should be allowed to continue to deliver humanitarian assistance in a timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded manner by using all means — including cross-border, cross-line and regular programming — to reach Syrians in need throughout the country. As of last month, 4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance depended on cross-border operations. In other words, almost 40 per cent of the entire humanitarian assistance is covered through that mechanism.

Since the United Nations began cross-border operations in July 2014, pursuant to resolution 2165 (2014), the mechanism has offered a true lifeline to the people in areas not under the control of the authorities. To this date, the mechanism continues to allow the United Nations and its partners to ensure that life-saving assistance reaches millions of people. In fact, this year has been extremely busy. Never have there been as many humanitarian cross-border convoys as during the month of October, owing to the situation in the north of the country. Moreover, as Mr. Lowcock explained in detail, the Monitoring Mechanism linked to cross-border operations is robust and reliable. It is known to be among the most effective and detail-oriented systems of all humanitarian operations run by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs across the world.

The current mandate of cross-border operations ends by the beginning of next year. The renewal of the mandate is of prime importance. As the Secretary-General notes in his report,

“Without this operation, we would see increased numbers of civilian deaths, greater prevalence of disease and even greater suffering being inflicted on a population who cannot be reached at this scale, in such a timely and direct manner, through any other means.” (*S/2019/820, para. 44*)

We share that assessment, which is why the co-penholders will work closely with all members of the Council and the countries concerned or involved in order to renew the resolution on cross-border operations — a purely humanitarian resolution — before the end of the year. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that resolution 2165 (2014) is renewed so that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners can continue to alleviate the humanitarian needs of all people in Syria.

In north-eastern Syria, clashes continue to be reported, adding further risk to the already dire humanitarian situation. They have led to civilian casualties and, although the number has dropped, many people remain displaced. It is of prime importance that humanitarian access not be impeded. At this stage, we are paying particular attention to the Allouk water station and call on all parties to ensure the continued full functioning of the station, which provides water to almost half a million people in Al-Hasakah. Some 68,000 residents, 94 per cent of whom are women and children, remain in Al-Hol camp. We call for continued and full humanitarian access to the camp and for its specific protection needs to be addressed.

In the north-west, despite a reduction in hostilities since the end of August, a recent upsurge in violence has been reported, leading to civilian casualties, especially in southern and western Idlib, and further impacting civilians and civilian infrastructure. Once again, we are deeply concerned about recent reports of attacks on medical facilities.

We have also condemned the attacks perpetrated by Security Council-designated terrorist groups, while reiterating that counter-terrorism efforts can never absolve the obligations of all parties under international humanitarian law, including that of adherence to the principles of distinction and proportionality. More than half of the current population in Idlib is made up of internally displaced persons, many of whom remain displaced close to the Turkish border, facing dire humanitarian circumstances in overcrowded camps as the winter sets in.

We remain equally concerned about the situation in the south-west, including around Damascus, where a total of 2.8 million people remain in severe humanitarian need of essential protection, water, sanitation, health care, food, education and other relief. The security situation, which remains volatile in this region, adds to the challenge. The situation in Rukban

also remains dire. We continue to call for a durable and lasting solution for the remaining inhabitants and underline, in this context, the importance of providing United Nations access to the camp.

Finally, I will make four more points.

No lasting peace in Syria will be possible without justice and accountability. We reiterate our support for 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. We also welcome the board of inquiry that was recently established by the Secretary-General and which is now operational.

With regard to the return of refugees our position remains unchanged. All returns must be safe, voluntary, dignified and well-informed.

We reiterate our call for a nation-wide cessation of hostilities in accordance with Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2401 (2018). There is no military solution to the conflict in Syria.

Finally, we welcome the convening of the Constitutional Committee as a first step in the political process and we reiterate our support for Special Envoy Pedersen in his efforts to reach a political solution in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing.

The Council has gathered scores of times to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Syria. After so many meetings, one might begin to believe that this crisis has always been with us and that it always will be — like a problem we that can analyse but cannot address. But we cannot be content with merely observing this problem. In fact, the Council has an obligation to the Syrian people — an obligation to respond to the deliberate choices of the Al-Assad regime, which have left a million Syrians dead and another 12 million displaced. That is an obligation that the United States is prepared to meet.

We stand firmly behind the call of the Under-Secretary-General for the continuation for an additional 12 months of the life-saving cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism established pursuant to resolution 2165 (2014). That is because the mechanism is working.

The United Nations has reached more people in 2019 through the cross-border mechanism than any time since the Council adopted resolution 2165 (2014). We also support the mechanism because it is transparent, reliable and, most importantly, indispensable to millions of Syrians. We call on all Council members to support a technical rollover of that resolution for another 12 months. The importance of the resolution's renewal cannot be overstated. It will ensure under its terms that vital supplies continue to flow through all four crossing points.

In the first instance, we are grateful to the United Nations and the humanitarian organizations that have provided basic necessities and life-saving medicines through the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing. That integral crossing point must remain open. In north-western Syria, brazen and heinous military operations conducted by the regime have made civilian communities in Idlib and northern Hama fully reliant on United Nations cross-border aid deliveries through the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam crossings. We strongly condemn the Al-Assad regime's escalation of these air strikes that have, with Russian support, killed and injured civilians and humanitarian workers. These repulsive attacks have deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure, including two medical facilities operated by the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations humanitarian coalition, in violation of resolution 2286 (2016). The United States seeks full accountability for those responsible for the attacks on hospitals, schools and civilian homes. We therefore fully support the work of the United Nations board of inquiry to investigate attacks on United Nations-supported medical facilities in north-western Syria. A public accounting of the board's findings will be essential to ensuring accountability and deterring future attacks.

We call for an immediate end to these attacks by Syrian and Russian forces in order to end the humanitarian crisis and move the United Nations-led political process forward, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). But it is not only these attacks that must end. The regime must also cease using humanitarian aid to punish its political rivals. Aid must go wherever it is needed — without exception. Yet as we speak, the regime is blocking United Nations humanitarian aid and access to eastern Ghouta, Rukban and southern Syria.

The fragility of the security situation, especially in southern Syria, even prevents the United Nations from

utilizing the Al-Ramtha crossing, the use of which has been authorized by the Council. We urge the United Nations to remain prepared to utilize the Al-Ramtha crossing as soon as the security conditions in southern Syria allow. When they do, it is our firm belief that purely humanitarian aid, including \$9 billion that the United States has provided since the conflict began, should go to all Syrians in need.

While the choices of the Syrian regime embody the very quality of dishonour, there are those whose choices merit this Council's praise. I therefore conclude today by saluting the humanitarian workers who risk their lives for the Syrian people every day. We remember with admiration and gratitude Mr. James Le Mesurier, founder and director of the Mayday Rescue group, and we offer our deepest condolences to his family and his loved ones. In his humanitarian efforts, James worked to save the lives of civilians threatened by Syrian and Russian air strikes. It was James's commitment to the Syrian people that led him to support the creation of the White Helmets, whose life-saving work we are so very proud to support.

The Syrian people have suffered at the hands of the Al-Assad regime since 2011, but we have the power to relieve that suffering. Indeed, we are obligated to relieve it. May we delay no further in doing so, and as Mr. Lowcock stated, there is no plan B.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his briefing and, in particular, for sharing with us his assessment of the functioning of the cross-border assistance mechanism.

The first point I would like to make is that we must take every possible action to ensure humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory. I will not repeat the figures cited by Mr. Lowcock because they speak for themselves. Cross-border humanitarian aid is essential and irreplaceable. That point is clearly demonstrated by the ever-growing number of recipients of cross-border aid, at a time when hostilities continue in north-eastern and north-western Syria. France calls on the members of the Council to show unity and responsibility in preserving this essential asset by adopting another technical rollover of resolution 2165 (2014). There is no alternative to helping the millions of people in need while the regime of Bashar Al-Assad continues to use humanitarian aid for political purposes.

The Syrian population is preparing to face the rigours of a new winter of war. As in previous years,

it is imperative to have access to the whole Syrian territory by the most direct roads and the fastest means. The survival of men, women and children depend upon it. It also means maintaining the whole-of-Syria aid architecture and maintaining the role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Amman, which is crucial. The development of a first instalment of the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund for north-east Syria should be encouraged in that regard and represents a major step in addressing the needs of more than 700,000 displaced people in the region. We call once again on actors with influence over Damascus to ensure safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory, including in areas where the regime has recently regained control and where access remains particularly inadequate, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law.

The second point I would like to highlight, which we tirelessly repeat, is that respect for international humanitarian law by all is essential and not negotiable. The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority. We strongly condemn attacks, specifically by the regime, against civilians and civilian infrastructure, especially against humanitarian and medical infrastructure. We are very concerned about reports of new strikes on four medical facilities in Idlib last week. The intensification of fighting in the north-west in recent weeks is unacceptable. The board of inquiry set up by the Secretary-General on those attacks, to which we give our full support, should make it possible to shed light on those incidents. Everything must be done to restore the ceasefire in Idlib.

It is essential to make progress in three directions in the north-east — the continued fight against terrorism, the protection of the civilian population and the full implementation of the humanitarian response. The continuation of hostilities also serves to underline that conditions are not in place to allow the return of refugees in conditions that respect international law. The fight against terrorism is an indisputable crucial issue for all of us, but it cannot be used to justify the flagrant violations of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing. Those who commit such acts will have to be held accountable before the courts. We call for the cooperation of all parties with the board of inquiry and with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most

Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The third point I would like to reiterate is our support for the Syrian political process, which is the only way out of war. Outside of the humanitarian response, only an inclusive political solution can put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. Resolution 2254 (2015) remains our road map and must be implemented in all its components. The launch of the Constitutional Committee is a starting point, but progress must be made parallel to other aspects of the political process. That means creating a safe and neutral environment. It means that weapons must be silent throughout the entire territory. It also requires confidence-building measures, specifically the release of detained and abducted persons. In addition, there must be complete clarity on the fate of victims of forced disappearances. Such an environment is crucial for the holding of free and fair elections, under United Nations observation, in which all Syrians participate, including those who have fled the war.

All of those elements are fundamental to a credible political solution. Until such a solution is firmly in place, France, like its partners in the European Union, will not participate in financing reconstruction.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing and commends the efforts of the Secretariat and relevant agencies to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria.

At present, many Syrians are still in need of humanitarian assistance. Years of conflict have taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure and caused many hardships, including a shortage of food, health care and medicine. Military operations in north-eastern Syria have exacerbated the fragility of the humanitarian situation. The protracted conflict has also caused negative impacts on the humanitarian situation. As winter draws closer, the United Nations and all humanitarian agencies should prepare to make a real difference in the living conditions of the Syrian people. Moreover, Syria's humanitarian situation is closely related to political, security and counter-terrorism conditions. To resolve the humanitarian problem, we need a holistic and integrated approach.

First, it is essential to respect and safeguard Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and to resolve issues by political and diplomatic

means. A political settlement is the only realistic way out of the Syrian conflict and the fundamental means to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. The Syrian Constitutional Committee met for the first time in Geneva in late October, followed by the meeting of a core group of 45 members. The parties will start the second round of discussions on 25 November. China welcomes this development and supports the United Nations, especially Special Envoy Pedersen in continuing his good offices and efforts to respect the principle of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process, implementing resolution 2254 (2015) and reaching a political solution that can accommodate the concerns of all parties.

Secondly, it is necessary to intensify humanitarian relief efforts, lift economic sanctions on Syria, move ahead with the return of refugees and displaced persons and support the Syrian Government in its post-war reconstruction. The international community should provide the United Nations with adequate funding and resources to ensure the provision of humanitarian supplies to people in need throughout Syria. To fundamentally improve the living conditions of the Syrian people, efforts must be made to improve Syria's economic situation, assist with the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees, support the Syrian Government in repairing and rebuilding housing, people's livelihoods, medical and education facilities and clearing mines and other explosive remnants of the war. China has provided Syria with food, medicine, means of public transport, human resource training and other assistance. A handover ceremony was held at the port of Latakia in Syria on 24 October for the Chinese Government's assistance in Syria in the form of customs inspection equipment and emergency food aid.

Thirdly, to consolidate gains on the counter-terrorism front, efforts must continue to unify standards and combat all forms of terrorism, in accordance with Security Council resolutions and international law. Eliminating terrorist forces is a necessary security guarantee for the Syrian people to resume a peaceful and ordinary life. At present, terrorist forces still occupy a large part of Idlib. Terrorists threaten the safety of civilians, destroy infrastructure and worsen the humanitarian situation. The international community should be committed to finding a holistic solution to both counter-terrorism and humanitarian challenges. All parties should refrain from any actions that might erode counter-terrorism gains and work

together to address risks associated with relocating terrorists and prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The Secretariat should pay close attention to Syria's counter-terrorism situation and the movement of terrorists, look in earnest into the issue of bringing terrorists to justice and propose practical suggestions. When it comes to cross-border humanitarian operations in Syria, it is imperative to fully respect Syria's sovereignty, take on board the views of the Syrian Government, strictly follow the requirements of Council resolutions and prevent abuse of cross-border authorizations. Operations should be conducted in compliance with the United Nations guiding principles on humanitarian relief, the relevant provisions of international law and the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization. Cross-border humanitarian relief is a special relief method, under specific circumstances, and the Council should consider it as such in the light of the latest security situation. The operation should be subject to United Nations monitoring and could benefit from greater transparency. We should enhance coordination with the Syrian Government to ensure that only humanitarian supplies enter the country and effectively prevent aid supplies from falling into the hands of terrorist groups and illegal armed groups.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): We also would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive update. My delegation also believes that addressing the humanitarian challenges in Syria is a matter of urgency. The humanitarian situation in Syria requires our utmost attention and priority.

In the north-east and north-west Syria, we remain concerned about the clashes and displacement, which continue unabated. It is also extremely troubling to learn that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has confirmed 31 civilian casualties in the north-east due to hostilities since early October, as well as over 1,000 casualties in the north-west. Millions of people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock provided us with the numbers, which are quite staggering. They are not merely statistics to be put in regular reports — we are talking about people's lives, and it is important to ensure that those numbers do not increase. It is also important that we improve the situation through aid efforts to the greatest possible extent. Indonesia wishes to highlight three points in that regard.

First, Indonesia welcomes the decreased hostilities. However, various incidents continue to be reported. We therefore appeal to all those with guns to permanently cease hostilities and attacks affecting civilians. We need a sustainable solution to the fragile conditions on the ground. At this stage, we have to appreciate positive developments of any scale that aim to lessen the suffering of the Syrian people. It is our hope that the relevant agreements will be continuously maintained and implemented.

Secondly, my delegation commends the efforts made by the United Nations humanitarian team — despite the challenges they face — in continuing to deliver humanitarian assistance to people in need. With regard to the renewal of the cross-border humanitarian response, we noted in Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's statement that there can be no alternative to that if the United Nations is to reach the millions of people in need. Indonesia strongly believes that we should support the 4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance who are currently living in areas supported by cross-border operations. In addition, my delegation would like to emphasize the importance of effective and efficient cross-border assistance with a strong monitoring mechanism. We are ready to engage in the various activities of the Security Council, including during the discussions on the draft resolution on cross-border assistance.

That brings me to my third point, which is on the critical importance of a common Council response in addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria. We might hold positions that sometimes oppose and contradict one another, but that should not prevent us from saving people's lives. Dialogue and consensus in the Council are critical to ensure a well-targeted humanitarian operation in Syria and to further assist the Syrian people in rebuilding their lives.

The conflict in Syria will never come to an end if dialogue does not take the place of violence. We know that dialogue is indeed challenging without trust among all relevant parties. Indonesia therefore commends the hard work of Special Envoy Pedersen in facilitating dialogue and building trust and confidence among all parties, along with the valuable support of the international community. We are following very closely the progress being made regarding the intensive discussions in Geneva on the Constitutional Committee, and we are looking forward to the next round of discussions at the end of this month.

Mr. Van Shalkwyk (South Africa): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Mark Lowcock for his detailed briefing, as usual.

Syria and its people are at a unique juncture, at which the prospects for peace and stability are within their grasp. As South Africa has stated previously, the situation in Syria must be resolved through negotiations and dialogue, and we continue to call on all parties to exert every effort towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We see the recent launch and first meeting of the long-awaited Constitutional Committee in Geneva as an encouraging sign. However, we must also remain cognizant of the impact of recent developments along the Turkey-Syria border on the progress achieved, both on the political track and on the humanitarian situation.

South Africa remains gravely concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Syria and the negative impact on the Syrian people of the recent hostilities. Although we have noted the various peace agreements and memorandums of understanding, and that the levels of violence have decreased, clashes between parties continue to further aggravate the dismal circumstances that many civilians are already facing. The continued threat of violence and destruction cannot be acceptable, particularly with regard to the most vulnerable members of society — women, children the elderly and those with disabilities. South Africa reiterates its call on all parties to comply with their obligations under international law, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The circumstances in which innocent civilians find themselves behave us, as Security Council members, to do more to ensure that their basic needs and requirements are met. We must also ensure that the recent developments in the north of Syria do not jeopardize the United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its partners for the vital work they do in challenging environments in order to ensure that those in need receive the necessary, and in many cases life-saving, assistance. The mandate for that cross-border assistance is due for renewal at the end of the year. South Africa will work with the co-penholders and all interested parties to find common ground and unity in that regard.

In conclusion, South Africa calls on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint to ensure a de-escalation of hostilities, as well as for respect for Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We also look forward to Special Envoy Pedersen's briefing on the progress made in the work of the Constitutional Committee and welcome the holding of the second round of talks at the end of November. Every small step towards peace and stability should be encouraged to the benefit of all Syrians.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Let me first thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his informative briefing.

Every day, the situation in Syria becomes more complex. But one thing remains constant—the enormous suffering of the civilian population in Syria on a scale that is unique in today's world. As we are painfully aware, civilians — including children — continue to pay the highest price as a result of the ongoing hostilities in the country. In recent times alone, dozens have been killed and injured during simultaneous ongoing hostilities in north-eastern and north-western Syria. We once again reiterate our call on all parties to the conflict to implement all ceasefire agreements and to ensure the unhindered and safe access of all humanitarian actors to the entire territory of Syria. Most important, access must be granted in priority areas, including cross-border deliveries of humanitarian assistance, in a manner that ensures the safety of humanitarian personnel.

While much of the international community's attention is now focused on north-eastern Syria, in the north-western part of the country, after a temporary break from hostilities in Idlib in October, there has unfortunately been a recent upsurge in air strikes and ground-based strikes, including yet more attacks affecting medical facilities. Faced once again with those unacceptable attacks, we would like to strongly emphasize the need for the full compliance of all parties with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In that context, let me express Poland's support for the work of the United Nations board of inquiry to investigate attacks on United Nations-supported medical facilities in north-western Syria. We also underline the obligation borne by all parties to the conflict for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. The protection of civilians should be at the centre of our debate. We remain deeply troubled by the severe situation of the most vulnerable victims of the Syrian conflict,

especially children and women, members of religious minorities and internally displaced persons. We must put in place practical measures to effectively prevent or minimize civilian casualties and incidental damage to civilian objects.

Let me reiterate our strong support for the cross-border assistance mechanism, which enables humanitarian supplies to cross into Syria, provide aid to those in urgent need and support basic service delivery. Without that, it would be extremely difficult or — let us be frank — impossible to ensure life-saving assistance for millions and to reach those in need. Examples of the usefulness of that mechanism could be multiplied, but let me just recall the words of doctors working in Idlib who told us that, without cross-border assistance, they are simply not able to work. As we heard from Mr. Lowcock, without the cross-border mechanism we would face catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Let me therefore join other Council members in calling for the timely extension of resolution 2165 (2014).

Let me conclude by underlining that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. A political agreement remains the only way towards peace. That requires a genuine political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this meeting on the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria and commends Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on his comprehensive briefing.

My delegation notes with concern the persistence of violence that has resulted in the loss of human lives in north-east and north-west Syria. Côte d'Ivoire strongly condemns those attacks on the population and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, which contribute to the deterioration of the situation and hamper efforts to provide vital humanitarian assistance to those in need.

It should be noted that the fighting thwarts ongoing mediation initiatives and efforts, including the agreement signed on 17 October between the United States of America and Turkey on the safe zone in north-eastern part of Syria and the memorandum of understanding signed by Russia and Turkey on 22 October on border control in Syria. Those agreements, the conclusion of which my delegation welcomed, made it possible to

stop the offensive against Kurdish forces in north-east Syria and to significantly reduce hostilities.

My country urges all parties to put an end to violence against populations and to respect their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. We also call on all other actors in the Syrian crisis to proceed with the dialogue, with a view to achieving de-escalation and a definitive ceasefire, a necessary precondition for addressing the humanitarian challenges in the region. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes efforts to ensure the continuation of cross-border humanitarian deliveries to the thousands of people affected by the conflict. My delegation therefore supports the renewal of the mandate of the cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the international community once again to maintain its humanitarian assistance efforts in Syria and reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's Special Envoy in his tireless efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis. We hope that the Geneva talks launched on 30 October among the Syrian parties will provide the political space necessary to achieve that objective, in order to enable the whole region to return to peace, stability and development.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his valuable briefing.

Peru notes with regret the serious situation of vulnerability that the civilian population is experiencing in various areas throughout Syrian territory. That is occurring despite the professionalism and sense of duty of personnel from the United Nations and humanitarian agencies, such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, among others deployed in Syria. We are especially alarmed by the increasing number of internally displaced persons — 200,000 since 9 October — and the precarious conditions that they have been facing, which have been exacerbated by the harsh winter.

It is precisely the risks and suffering that Syrian citizens face on a daily basis that make immediate and unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance imperative, through the efficient use of all available modalities, including cross-border assistance. In that regard, Peru highlights the sophistication and security offered by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic at designated border crossings, in terms of strictly controlling and verifying

humanitarian deliveries. Those guarantees, together with the lack of real alternative means of accessing the more than 4 million people served under that modality, lead us to support the extension of the provisions outlined in resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions.

We hope that this crucial issue will be addressed in the coming weeks from the perspective of alleviating human suffering. To that end, we believe that the Council must remain attentive to developments on the ground with a view to maintaining an effective ceasefire in the north-west of the country, while promoting its extension throughout the Syrian territory. We also believe that it is crucial to continue prioritizing the sustained meeting of the basic needs of the civilians who remain in Al-Hol and Rukban, as well as promoting comprehensive solutions to ensure their voluntary, dignified and safe return.

Accountability is essential to preserving international legality, just as it is essential to the prospects for sustainable peace in Syria. We therefore welcome the start of the work of the board of inquiry established by the Secretary-General, which we hope will help to clarify the facts and responsibilities in the attacks perpetrated on facilities covered by the system to prevent attacks on humanitarian targets.

I conclude by reaffirming that only the achievement of a political solution, on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), will make it possible to overcome the humanitarian disaster that continues to affect Syria, with full respect for its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing. We particularly appreciate the valuable impressions that he shared with us following his recent field visit. We listened very carefully to his remarks on the cross-border humanitarian operation, which provides assistance to approximately 4 million people in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In that regard, we express our strong commitment to the renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) for another year, which has saved the lives of millions of affected people through the cross-border mechanism since 2014. We believe that this has been a fundamental instrument used by the Security Council to illustrate that, when efforts and willingness are united towards a single goal, it is possible to make decisions that impact the

lives and health of real people who would otherwise not be able to survive.

We know that with each military escalation the humanitarian needs of the population deepen and increase. We therefore view with much regret a new surge in hostilities in Idlib, where we are already seeing camps for displaced persons reach maximum capacity and where the imminent arrival of winter presents the moral obligation to urgently satisfy those necessities. With another winter, what will happen to the thousands of people who, after the wave of hostilities that began in April, are still without shelter? I wonder what would happen if from January onwards it were not possible to facilitate humanitarian access in order to provide them with the provisions they need to shield themselves from the cold.

Asking such questions would not be necessary if the parties to the conflict fulfilled their responsibility under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population and make their livelihoods viable. The obstruction of and attacks on civilian health, water and electricity infrastructure are a flagrant violation of those principles and have an immediate negative impact on people's lives and dignity.

I take this opportunity to express our support for the recently established board of inquiry into the incidents in north-west Syria, and we hope that at least part of its conclusions and recommendations will be made public.

The situation in the north-east of Syria has become a matter of deep concern for the Dominican Republic, in particular because of the consequences of insecurity and uncertainty among the population, as well as the hundreds of thousands who have had to flee as a result of the recent hostilities. The humanitarian needs of these people on the move go far beyond the physical. There is also a psychological component that will be incredibly difficult to overcome. And we must focus attention on the millions of refugees currently in Turkey. While recognizing Turkey's immense generosity and humanitarian vocation, we would like to emphasize the importance of the arrangements for repatriating millions of these refugees to the so-called safe zone. These arrangements must not only be made in close coordination with the relevant international refugee entities, but also with a view to maintaining these people's security and dignity by ensuring their meaningful participation in decisions about their future.

Finally, we commend the holding of the first meeting of the Constitutional Committee in October. We reiterate our commitment to the broad political process and the inclusive and renewed spirit fostered by the Special Envoy. We insist that this element of the process must be supported by even greater confidence-building measures that can have a tangible impact for the Syrian population. Achieving a national ceasefire and releasing detainees and information on missing persons are only a few examples of these kinds of urgent measures.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation joins others in thanking Mr. Mark Lowcock for his detailed and useful update. We reiterate our full support for him and his work.

As Mr. Lowcock described, the overall picture of the humanitarian and security situation in Syria remains troubling, given that the civilian population in the north-east of the country continues to suffer terribly as a result of air strikes, land attacks, shootings, executions and fatalities due to improvised explosive devices and remnants of war. This deplorable situation shows that the ceasefire agreed to last month by the United States and Turkey in order to supervise the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from the border between Turkey and Syria continues to be violated. The security situation in the north-west, particularly in Idlib, has not improved either, with increases in both land and air attacks, as well as deliberate bombings of medical facilities, which constitute war crimes, as we have frequently emphasized.

Considering this appalling situation, we must continue in our efforts to de-escalate the situation and protect civilians in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. The Government of Equatorial Guinea is particularly concerned about the precarious human rights, humanitarian and security situations in Syria that thousands of highly vulnerable civilians, including women and children, are dealing with while being held in inhumane conditions in the overcrowded Al-Hol and Rukban camps. We urge the United Nations, humanitarian organizations and the entire international community to spare no effort in providing an adequate response to help prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian crisis in Syria. As UNICEF recently highlighted, that will involve a response plan estimated at \$3 billion for improving water supplies, providing sanitation and hygiene services and health and nutrition

assistance and vaccinating thousands of children. While the hostilities persist, my Government also affirms that the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid remains a priority that must be guaranteed by the Security Council. To that end, it would be very helpful if as usual we were unanimous regarding the next renewal of that aid.

Finally, we want to once again highlight the significant progress that has been made in the political process within the framework of the Constitutional Committee, which continues to be the only viable means of providing a lasting solution for normalizing the situation in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive and informative briefing. We agree that we continue to see the most difficult humanitarian and military situation in the territories outside the control of the Syrian Government on the eastern bank of the Euphrates and in the Idlib de-escalation zone and the United States-occupied zone around Al-Tanf.

Our colleagues have given a number of fair and critical assessments of the situation in north-eastern Syria. We want to point out that the issues in this area are not new and were not created by the Governments of Syria, Russia or Turkey. To a significant degree, the root cause of the destabilization in the area beyond the Euphrates is its illegal occupation and the dangerous experiment in demographic engineering introduced there to spite the Syrian Government. Achieving strong, lasting stabilization in Syria as a whole is possible only if the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country is respected. Syria must be liberated from the illegitimate foreign military presence there as soon as possible, even if its oil resources, so important to our American colleagues, are at stake. They belong not to the United States but to the Syrian people, for whom the actions of the United States are simply plundering and pillaging. Incidentally, the restoration to Syria of its oilfields would constitute a genuine contribution by the United States to the humanitarian assistance efforts for the people of Syria.

Russia has been trying to rectify the situation to the best of its ability in order to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and civilian deaths. The situation in north-eastern Syria has been brought under control thanks

to the signing of a Russian-Turkish memorandum on 22 October in Sochi. Russian military police have begun joint patrols of the zone along the border, while Syrian Government troops have been sent to the agreed border posts and Kurdish self-defence units have withdrawn.

Turning to the Idlib de-escalation zone, we once again heard nothing, or nothing clear, in members' statements about the main thing, which is that the area continues to be a hotbed of international terrorism, and that is precisely why Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), was hiding in Idlib province, while the so-called international coalition was even obliged to launch strikes in the area earlier. We can see that our colleagues are becoming increasingly convinced that it is controlled by terrorists who are utilizing the civilian population as human shields.

At the same time, militants continue to engage in provocations and shell Government troops. Approximately 600 such attacks were recorded in October alone. One of the heaviest attacks took place on 11 and 12 November, targeting Tal Turki, Madaya, Khwein Al-Kabir and other villages in southern Idlib. There was shelling of residential areas of Aleppo on 10 November in which a child was killed and dozens of other people injured. There are reports of executions, detentions and violent dispersals of demonstrations by ordinary people protesting the terrorists' control in Idlib, as Mr. Lowcock mentioned. In the silence about those crimes we see yet another attempt to divide terrorists into good ones and bad ones. Whatever names these groups go by — ISIL, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham — we want to once again warn against flirting with jihadists for short-term interests, whether by providing them with political cover or financial or material support, and especially by portraying them as so-called moderate radicals.

Today, unfortunately, we once again heard accusations that the Syrian army and its allies conducted air strikes on civilian facilities in Idlib. As we learned from other media outlets, the source of that information was once again the infamous White Helmets. We have spoken in detail about the problem of the reliability of the information shovelled out by media outlets and regurgitated in our Security Council colleagues' statements. On 16 September we held a detailed press conference in which, based on irrefutable evidence, we pointed out that some of the most serious-sounding cases of alleged attacks on civilian targets in Idlib

by the Russian and Syrian armed forces had actually turned out to be fake. However, as a number of our colleagues' statements today showed, that information was ignored. It is of course far more convenient to talk about the humanitarian problems in Syria without doing anything to save civilians from terrorists.

For our part, we continue to work together with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with the aim of resolving the humanitarian situation, including in the interests of making the de-confliction mechanism more accurate. We have frequently spoken about its existing problems. We welcome the fact that mistakes were acknowledged—and we hope that they were unintentional—in relaying the coordinates and descriptions of alleged civilian facilities that when verified turned out to be bases and shelters for militants. Against that backdrop, we are pleased that OCHA intends to review the methodology for collecting the de-confliction mechanism data, which is a step in the right direction.

We share the concerns expressed today about the danger of an increase in the terrorist threat in various parts of Syria that are not yet under Government control. We call on those who maintained or established prisons in north-eastern Syria not to shift the responsibility of preventing jihadists of every stripe from spreading throughout the region onto others.

Russia, together with the Government of Syria, is taking steps to create the necessary conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Almost 2 million Syrian citizens have now returned to their homes, of whom more than 1.3 million were internally displaced. A total of 914 educational and 212 medical institutions have been restored, and electricity, water supply and industrial facilities are also being built or restored, numbers that are irrefutable proof of the effectiveness of the measures taken by the Syrian authorities to create the necessary conditions for the voluntary, dignified and safe return of refugees. We call on international organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant humanitarian bodies, to step up their efforts to that end. Unfortunately, we have seen that such activity is often artificially held up.

With the assistance of the Government of Syria and Russia's Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, together with the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red

Cross, efforts are continuing to resettle people from the Rukban camp. However, owing to the efforts of the armed groups in the area to maintain their control there, that work has stalled. We hope that the problem of refugees and IDPs there will be resolved as soon as possible. As for the Al-Hol camp, the situation there continues to be disastrous owing to humanitarian agencies' limited access and to funding shortages.

The President: I would like to ask the representative of the Russian Federation to start wrapping up, as it has been nearly 10 minutes since he began.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am about to conclude, Madam President.

Everything has got worse since a significant number of refugees from other camps in the north-east moved there. Half of the residents are women and children. It is high time to think about handing over the illegally occupied territory to the Syrian authorities in the interests of resolving the IDP problem.

Mine clearance continues to be a pressing issue. We welcome the start of work on United Nations Mine Action Service projects in Syria. Russia is involved in demining in Syria both in a national capacity and through its contribution to the Mine Action Service. In that regard, we urge all countries that are genuinely concerned about Syria's humanitarian welfare to join these and other humanitarian efforts and to deliver humanitarian assistance to all Syrians, without discrimination, politicization or preconditions. That includes not only post-conflict reconstruction projects but also lifting unilateral sanctions in the interest of normalizing Syrians' lives.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that despite various factors and spikes in tensions, the situation in Syria continues to return to normal, primarily as a result of the gradual restoration of increasing areas of territory to the control of the legitimate Government. One positive factor was the launch of Syria's Constitutional Committee in Geneva on 30 October. Its establishment and launch of its work, with the decisive assistance of the Astana format, are undeniable achievements for the Syrian people. We welcome the first round of inter-Syrian dialogue, which is aimed at defining the country's future. As the guarantor countries of the Astana process, Russia, Turkey and Iran are ready to continue to help the Syrian parties and Special Envoy Pedersen in the quest for a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We believe that the situation on the

ground should not be allowed to influence the work of the Committee.

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

I once again thank the Under-Secretary-General and his teams on the ground.

The previous speaker referred to the normalization of the situation in Syria. I have to say that what we heard from the Under-Secretary-General today does not sound much like normality to me. We continue to have huge concerns about the situation on the ground and the ongoing struggle to deliver humanitarian assistance, which is still not straightforward, to put it mildly. From what has been said, my understanding is that assistance is used to punish or reward particular communities or areas for their perceived loyalty. The situation on the ground is therefore far from improved.

We share the sentiments of other colleagues who said that it is vital that we renew resolution 2165 (2014) for another 12 months. It is not a political tool but a lifeline for those in desperate need. The United Kingdom is one of the largest donors to the Syrian response, and we will continue to work with the United Nations to ensure that our funding supports a principled, predictable and coherent response, prioritizing humanitarian needs through both in-country and cross-border operations, and to ensure that the current structures for supporting that are maintained.

At this juncture, I want to echo what the representative of France said about reconstruction. I want to put down a marker with regard to our concern about the humanitarian implications of recent events in north-eastern Syria. We hope that the United Nations can scale up its response in the area. Humanitarian actors must have unrestricted access to people in need and be protected from any violence. We share the concerns of others about returns, which must be in line with internationally agreed principles. We also share the concerns of others about the operation of international humanitarian law.

One of the speakers referred to salvaging individuals from the hands of terrorists. I think that if there is any salvaging being done it is by the rescue workers clearing bodies out of places like Idlib, where the situation looks less and less like a ceasefire every day. We too remain deeply troubled by the reports of renewed air strikes. Any further escalation in the

violence will have inconceivable humanitarian costs, so we appeal to all the parties to make sure they do everything they can to avoid that. With regard to Idlib, I want to take this opportunity to call on the Secretary-General to make public the findings of the board of inquiry's investigation into attacks on United Nations de-conflicted and supported infrastructure in north-western Syria.

I want to conclude by joining the United States representative in what she said about the White Helmets and about the death of their founder, James Le Mesurier, in particular. Were it not for this group of Syrian volunteers, a great many more people would have suffered and would still be suffering at the hands of the Syrian authorities. We have heard Russia and Syria make many charges against them. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs only recently referred to Mr. Le Mesurier as a spy. In the wake of his sad death, I want to take this opportunity to once again state categorically that he was not a spy. He was a humanitarian who was working for the good of the people of Syria, which, if I may say so, is more than their own Government has been doing.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I would first like to support and underline what you said about the White Helmets, Madam President. However, I would like to ask a question of the Russian representative relating to what you said about the board of inquiry and with regard to the press conference that Russia gave some weeks ago about the attacks conducted in Syria and who was behind them. In that context, I note that today there are news reports about the board of inquiry and the possibility that Russia might be putting pressure on the Secretary-General to keep its findings secret. I just wanted to ask the Russian representative to assure us that this is not the case and that he fully supports the board of inquiry and the publication of its results.

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

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I see that the representative of Germany still reads the *New York Times*. We long ago turned to more reliable sources of information and advise him to do the same.

As we understand it, the board of inquiry is an internal mechanism of the United Nations. Its report will be presented to the Secretary-General and it is for him to decide what to do with it. There are corresponding procedures that the Secretary-General has to follow. For the rest of it, the representative of Germany can listen to our regular reports to the media, press conferences and so forth. He can rest assured that they are far more reliable than his sources.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): There is a big, raging elephant in Syria that some Council members do not see. There is an occupation by the United States, which is also conducting an armed robbery of Syrian oil. There is a Turkish occupation. There are operations designed to change the demographics of some areas along the border between Syria and Turkey. There is terrorism in Idlib perpetrated by terrorist groups that are publicly supported by their sponsors. Certain Governments, some of which are unfortunately represented here in the Council, are encouraging separatist groups in Syria in a process similar to what their clumsy policies led to in Iraq. There are Governments that are refusing to take back their terrorists from Syria. Some are choosing to ignore the big raging elephant in the room. All they care about is moving forward with the extension of the mandate in resolution 2165 (2014) on cross-border operations. The attempts to renew that mandate reflect a sad reality in the Council, however. In other words, the Council is not seeking to implement its own resolutions, which all stress respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We will come back to this point later on. My delegation would like to affirm the following points.

First, all Member States, inside and outside the Council, must commit to respecting the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, pursuant to the principles of international law, the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the Security Council's resolutions on Syria, which number approximately 25.

Secondly, the Security Council must assume its responsibility to end the illegitimate presence of foreign forces in my country. It must compel the Governments of known States to end their attacks, their support of terrorist groups, their sponsorship of separatist militias

and their collusion with those militias to loot the assets and resources of Syria, including Syrian oil, even while some believe themselves to be the guardians and brokers of that oil, in violation of the international law and the Charter. It is essential to support the efforts of the Syrian Government and its allies to combat terrorism, pursuant to the relevant Council resolutions, at a time when certain members of the Council are doing everything they can to undermine the efforts of the Syrian Government and its allies to combat the terrorism of Al-Baghdadi's Da'esh and Al-Julani's Al-Nusra Front in Idlib governorate.

Some countries have boasted of carrying out an alleged operation in Idlib that led to the death of the leader of Da'esh and a number of other leaders. That alleged operation reaffirms what we and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions and 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities have said, which is that terrorist groups control Idlib. They are using its residents as human shields. It is therefore our obligation as a State to free our fellow citizens there from the control of those groups. There are some on the Council who have been hypocritical enough to present themselves as heroes who killed Al-Baghdadi. At the same time they have ignored the fact that they filled the halls of the United Nations with indignation and mobilized the Organization's mechanisms against the Syrian State when my country sought to eradicate that terrorist and his group, as well as Al-Julani, the head of the Al-Nusra Front, and others in Idlib. The same people targeted the Syrian Arab Army as it was attempting to reach areas to the east of the Euphrates River in order to eradicate the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, as has happened at Al-Tharda Mountain in Deir ez-Zor, the area of Al-Hajeen and elsewhere. Notice the link between Al-Baghdadi, Al-Julani and Mr. Le Mesurier in Idlib.

Fourthly, there must be an immediate lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people; those measures constitute an act of economic terrorism. They are a collective punishment against the Syrian people. They themselves rebut the allegations and lies of those who imposed them claiming that they had done so to benefit Syrians. What kind of humanitarian act deprives Syrians of milk, food, medication, medical equipment, health-care requirements or even wheelchairs for the disabled?

Those are all very important things that Mr. Lowcock does not see.

Fifthly, it must be recognized that the efforts of the Syrian State and its humanitarian action partners, such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, are the main factor in improving the humanitarian situation despite the many challenges they face. It must also be recognized that United Nations and its agencies would have failed had it not been for the cooperation, facilities and conditions of safety and security that were provided to them by the Syrian Government.

Sixthly, an end must be put to promoting the violation of Syrian sovereignty through useless cross-border operations and offices that are hostile to Syria, such as the Gaziantep Office, whose continued work represents a reward to Erdoğan for sponsoring terrorism, occupying Syrian territory and continuing to blackmail and threaten Europe and the world. There must be engagement with the Syrian Government within the framework of an ethical, realistic and credible legal relationship, including cooperating with it as a key partner in the humanitarian and development fields, free from any political preconditions, dictates or attempts at blackmail aimed at undermining reconstruction efforts and the return of displaced persons.

Artificial terrorist groups must no longer be qualified as humanitarian groups, as is the case with the White Helmets terrorist group. European and American newspapers two days ago reaffirmed that the founder of the White Helmets, James Le Mesurier, was a British intelligence officer. We have stated that fact time and again, but some have tried to cover it up. The promotion of information campaigns spreading lies concerning the use of barrel bombs and chemical weapons got under way, and shortly thereafter followed the appearance of

the White Helmets. Iraq had been invaded and Baghdad had been occupied, and shortly thereafter Al-Baghdadi appeared. Some States deployed Al-Nusra Front terrorists across the line of separation in the occupied Syrian Golan, and shortly after that Al-Julani appeared. Notice this sophistic link: the occupation of Iraq and the invasion of Baghdad, and then we got Al-Baghdadi. Terrorists are deployed in the Golan, then Al-Julani appears. Claims are made of the use of barrel bombs and chemical weapons, and shortly thereafter a British intelligence officer named Le Mesurier appeared. All of them are connected to Idlib.

The President: I will now make a very short additional statement in my national capacity.

I wanted to say again that the late James Le Mesurier was not a serving British officer. He did begin his career in the British military; my Military Adviser here served with him. He then left the armed forces, became a humanitarian and founded Mayday Rescue and the White Helmets. I want that to be on the record.

The second thing I wanted to do was address the Syrian Ambassador's point that if you have a cross-border resolution, that somehow contravenes Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity. It does not. We have the resolution precisely because of sovereignty and territorial integrity. In other words, we need authorization. I did not want a misimpression to gain currency there.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.