



Security Council

Seventy-second year

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New York

President: Mr. Lambertini (Italy)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
China	Mr. Shen Bo
Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
France	Mr. Delattre
Japan	Mr. Bessho
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Senegal	Mr. Ciss
Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Hickey
United States of America.	Ms. Sison
Uruguay.	Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/982)

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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

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/982)

The President: 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 wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/982, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Last week, we released the United Nations *2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Syria*. It lays out the continued plight of the Syrian people after almost seven years of conflict. Some 13.1 million people urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection. Of those, some 5.6 million are in acute need. Syria remains the world's largest and most dynamic displacement crisis, with half of all Syrians displaced from their homes. More than 6,500 people have been displaced on average every day in the first nine months of 2017, while some 2,500 people have gone back home.

The crisis continues to affect the vulnerable most severely. An estimated 1.75 million children, or almost one school-age child in three, are out of school. One-third of schools are damaged or destroyed. Fewer than half of Syria's health facilities are fully operational, leading to thousands of preventable deaths from injury or disease. Nearly 3 million people continue to live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas throughout Syria, including close to 420,000 in 10 besieged areas. The vast majority of them — 94 per cent — are in eastern Ghouta. The remaining 6 per cent are in Fo'ah and Kefraya in Idlib governorate, and in Yarmouk in Damascus.

I want to touch first upon specific issues of concern, and then I will update the Council on the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Fighting has escalated in eastern Ghouta and Damascus. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that from 14 to 17 November, 84 people were killed and 659 were injured, including hundreds of women and children. Earlier this week, air strikes on Duma and other areas reportedly resulted in further civilian deaths. Over the same period, more than 200 mortar shells and rockets were reportedly fired on residential areas in Damascus, resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries.

Against this background, news over the past two days of a ceasefire in eastern Ghouta would, if true and sustained, be important. But I am extremely worried about the food crisis in eastern Ghouta. Despite efforts made to reach them, only 100,000 people out of an estimated population of 400,000 in the enclave have received food assistance this year, and those people are getting only occasional, one-off deliveries. The closure of the only crossing point into the area on 3 October, together with the increase in air and ground strikes, has resulted in a rapid deterioration of the situation. The World Food Programme (WFP) reports that agricultural areas in eastern Ghouta are difficult to access because of the fighting, and that their output is very low because of a lack of water for irrigation. I am also deeply concerned about a growing number of people, including children, with complex medical cases — now reaching nearly 500 — who require urgent medical evacuation.

The available evidence suggests that severe acute malnutrition rates among children in eastern Ghouta have increased fivefold in the past 10 months. United Nations staff have seen this first hand through assessments made during convoys to Kafr Batna and Duma over the past two months. Children's deaths from malnutrition are preventable if we get more, and more regular, aid convoys in. I had constructive discussions on this in Moscow and Tehran last week, and I hope that they will result in meaningful progress.

The situation in north-eastern Syria also remains a cause for concern, as fighting continues down the Euphrates river towards the border with Iraq. Since the beginning of the offensive against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in November last year, airstrikes and clashes have displaced more than 436,000 people from and within Raqqa governorate. Another 350,000

people have been displaced from and within Deir ez-Zor governorate since August.

The risk from explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices continues to hamper humanitarian access throughout the north-east, including to the cities of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. This is reportedly resulting in trauma incidents and deaths as civilians return to Raqqa city. New restrictions on humanitarian access and deliveries in the north-east are limiting the number of people we had previously been able to reach with help. Since 9 November, the United Nations has faced a series of bureaucratic impediments imposed by the parties in the area. As a result, the delivery of humanitarian assistance has been curtailed for much of the past month. This has happened as needs continue to rise, with 125,000 displaced people moving north in Deir ez-Zor governorate so far this month.

At least 30,000 Syrians remain stranded in dire circumstances on the berm along the Syrian-Jordanian border. Following my visit to Amman last month, I remain hopeful that we can find a sustainable solution, while at the same time enabling immediate life-saving assistance for these people.

I am also concerned about increasing displacement in north-western Syria. Nearly 70,000 people have been displaced to Idlib governorate in recent weeks, while over 27,000 people have been displaced within different parts of the governorate in the same period. As previously, I repeat the Secretary-General's call on all parties to the conflict in Syria to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure as required under international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need.

Despite the constant challenges that are inherent in operating in the midst of a violent conflict, the United Nations and its partners continue to provide life-saving assistance to millions of people across Syria every month. In September, United Nations support ensured that 4.3 million people received food baskets, 1.7 million people benefitted from water and sanitation assistance, and 1.7 million received medical procedures.

I will briefly update the Council on United Nations aid delivery, first to areas controlled by the Government of Syria; secondly, across lines; and thirdly, through the cross-border programme.

Assistance to areas under the control of the Government of Syria continues to represent the majority

of the United Nations response. In October, some 2.8 million people in these areas were reached with food assistance, delivered through some 1,500 WFP convoys. WHO treated over 123,000 patients with medical conditions. UNICEF provided nutrition assistance to 183,000 people. Other agencies — including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — all provided lifesaving assistance through their humanitarian programmes in areas under the control of the Government of Syria.

Secondly, cross-line convoys continue to be heavily restricted. On average, just over a quarter of the beneficiaries planned to be reached in the bimonthly plans receive aid. That limited response is despite an agreement with the Government of Syria on bimonthly access plans and the creation of de-escalation zones that cover two of the main areas we attempt to access, that is, eastern Ghouta and northern rural Homs.

So far in November, only four cross-line convoys have gotten through, namely, two to northern rural Homs, reaching just over 200,000 people, and two to besieged eastern Ghouta, Duma and Nashabiyeh, in rural Damascus, reaching just 28,000 people. The convoy to Nashabiyeh, serving about 7,000 people, reached its destination only yesterday, at the second attempt, after having to turn back on Monday because of the fighting. Airstrikes were reported in the vicinity, despite security assurances from all sides.

Medical items continue to be removed from convoys. As the Secretary-General has said, improved access through cross-line convoys is critical to ensuring that the severe and worsening situation of civilians, including children, is improved.

Thirdly, the United Nations continues to deliver life-saving assistance to those living in north-western and southern Syria via cross-border deliveries. This month, approximately 800,000 people have received food assistance. In addition, medicines, educational supplies and other non-food items are regularly delivered cross-border to hundreds of thousands of people.

United Nations cross-border assistance is checked and verified by the United Nations monitoring mechanism at designated border-crossing points — Bab

Al-Hawa, Bab As-Salam and Al-Ramtha. Every truck is checked to ensure that it contains only humanitarian supplies. Deliveries are confirmed by United Nations-contracted third-party monitors upon arrival at warehouses inside Syria. They check the items being off-loaded against the waybill. There is then post-distribution monitoring, including by independent third parties and incorporating community feedback. United Nations cross-border assistance is also subject to the normal accountability mechanisms between the donors and the delivery agencies, and that too includes a verification system.

In the first 10 months of 2017, on average each month more than 750,000 people were reached through United Nations cross-border activities. That sustained assistance is essential for those in need.

It is clear that each of the three modes of delivery by the United Nations is critical for the people of Syria, and that there is complementarity between them. As needs remain high, it is important to preserve all means of access. Civilians in areas not under the control of the Government are reached in much larger numbers, with much greater consistency and with much more comprehensive support, through cross-border operations than through cross-line operations. It is for that reason that the Secretary-General has called for a renewal of resolution 2165 (2014). As I have told the Security Council before, the renewal of the resolution is essential to save lives.

Finally, I want to let the Council know that, following consultations with the authorities, I plan to visit Syria in early January to assess the situation and discuss how we can improve assistance to those in need.

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

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

Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his very complete briefing.

As we do every month, let me acknowledge the constant work, sacrifice and courage of the staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and of its partner agencies in Syria and bordering countries, who risk their lives every day to try to alleviate the living conditions of millions of Syrian civilians.

In a scenario that unfortunately, month after month, is presented as negative, yesterday we received the much-anticipated news of a ceasefire, the lifting of the siege and the entry of humanitarian assistance to the area of eastern Ghouta. According to the reports, conditions in that area are desperate due to famine and malnutrition and the continuous bombings of recent days, despite being one of the violence de-escalation areas under the Astana process. We hope that the conditions that made that agreement possible will be maintained and that we will not return to a situation of extreme violence and destruction, neither in eastern Ghouta nor in any other part of the Syrian territory.

That announcement, which took place at the beginning of the eighth round of intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva, is a sign that we are on the right path — a confidence-building measure that can make possible the bridging of positions in order once and for all to discuss issues of great importance for the political transition in Syria, such as a constitutional process and a call for future elections.

We have little to add that we have not said in relation to this conflict and the suffering of the Syrian people. Nevertheless, we would like to reiterate some messages that are very important for Uruguay.

Over the past two years, Uruguay, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, has made the protection of civilians and international humanitarian law a central focus of its efforts, constantly working to prevent the hindering of access and the distribution of aid throughout Syrian territory, including besieged and hard-to-reach areas, without distinction between besieged and besiegers. We are concerned that humanitarian access continues to face serious difficulties every month. Immediate, safe and unhindered access is needed to serve all those in need in Syria. We appeal to countries with influence over Syrian authorities to take steps to ensure that access is guaranteed by way of permanent cooperation and coordination with OCHA.

In view of the pressing needs still facing the Syrian people, we believe that it is of the utmost importance that the Security Council be able next month to renew resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions in order to allow the entry of cross-border aid from neighbouring countries. We reiterate that the Government of Syria has the primary responsibility to allow its own population access to food, water,

medicines and supplies for their survival until the conflict is definitively ended.

We have also constantly called for ensuring the protection and safety of humanitarian workers as they carry out their tasks. As we have said so many times before: civilians are not targets; hospitals are not targets. Humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law must be respected in all conflicts. When they are violated, as has happened blatantly and repeatedly in Syria, and when very serious crimes have been committed that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, the only option is to find a way to hold those responsible for such acts accountable to justice. In that regard, we once again support the call by Secretary-General António Guterres that cases committed in Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court. We also hope that full cooperation will be given to 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, which was established at the end of last year.

With regard to the Astana process, it must be emphasized that it and other regional initiatives to achieve a cessation of local hostilities made possible a significant reduction in violence. However, the continuous bombing of eastern Ghouta by the Syrian Government and its allies shows that the terms announced at the beginning of May by the three guarantor countries have not been fully respected. Although there have been important advances, it is necessary to ensure unrestricted access by the United Nations and to humanitarian aid in those areas, including freedom of movement to enter and leave those territories voluntarily, which would afford guarantees that the basic principles of international humanitarian law are being respected.

The priorities in Syria are clearly defined: a political solution must come about that puts an end to the war and ushers in a peaceful transition in Syria; the ceasefires must be consolidated until a cessation of hostilities is achieved throughout the entire territory; all sieges must be lifted; and humanitarian access must be guaranteed for the millions of people who still depend on assistance for their subsistence.

In conclusion, in the next stage, which we hope will not be too far-off, reconstruction, national reconciliation

and the return of the millions of internally displaced persons and refugees in third countries will also become a priority and a course of action for the future.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia appreciates the briefing provided by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, and we wish to assure him of our full support in the tasks entrusted to him.

Bolivia commends the joint declaration that was issued after the latest session in Astana, held on 30 and 31 October, which underscored the progress made in the implementation of the de-escalation areas, as well as the significant reduction of violence on the ground as a specific result of the measures taken to strengthen and maintain the ceasefire. In that regard, we welcome the efforts made by Russia, Iran and Turkey as guarantors of the process, which is complementary to the Geneva negotiations.

Nevertheless, we underscore that the establishment of de-escalation areas and security must be a temporary measure, based on consensus among the guarantors, and that this should not undermine in any way the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

We also wish to highlight the important work that the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic is undertaking, both as a guarantor of security in the supply of humanitarian assistance and in the evacuation of people from the towns where armed confrontations have taken place. Proof of this is the fact that since 20 November it carried out a total of 1,681 humanitarian operations.

My delegation wishes to highlight the significant achievements made with regard to the progressive liberation of the Syrian territory from Da'esh control. We believe that the courageous efforts to eliminate the presence of that terrorist group must undoubtedly be accompanied by strategies to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

In that regard, we note — according to what was reported in the report (S/2017/982) of the Secretary-General — the existence of explosive remnants of war, anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices in the field. We believe that demining and the removal of those explosive devices is an essential task in ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance and the

return of more than 6 million internally displaced persons who have been uprooted since the beginning of the conflict.

Likewise, we view with concern the reports of asymmetric attacks and possible violations of human rights that have been committed by the parties to the conflict during the period under review, which has led to a total of 61 deaths and 238 wounded. That terrible figure is in addition to the more than 7,000 deaths recorded so far this year, and the more than 500,000 fatalities since the beginning of the conflict.

We recognize the cooperation and coordination between the Syrian Government and the different various humanitarian assistance agencies to improve the delivery of assistance. We call for improvements in order to avoid any administrative impediments that would undermine or otherwise hamper such aid delivery.

We believe it is urgent that the humanitarian aid arrives swiftly to the population that most needs it. We therefore reiterate that the parties to the conflict, within the framework of international humanitarian law, have an obligation to ensure unconditional and unfettered access to humanitarian assistance. They must safeguard its security and integrity, avoiding the identification of convoys and humanitarian personnel and ensuring that medical care centres do not become military targets under any circumstances.

In that regard, based on the report of the Secretary-General, we express our strong condemnation of the destruction, by aerial bombardments, of vaccines that were intended to combat the outbreak of measles and polio. On the other hand, we reiterate once again our highest appreciation for, and tribute to, the work carried out by the staff of various agencies and humanitarian organizations, who put their lives at risk in the performance of their work.

Finally, it is important to note that the humanitarian situation that currently affects more than 13 million people in Syria should be resolved only through an inclusive political process, negotiated and concluded by and for the Syrian people. That is the only way to achieve a peaceful solution to this prolonged conflict..

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock warned us today about dire conditions in the besieged community of

eastern Ghouta. He warned us about children on their deathbeds due to severe, acute malnutrition and about hundreds of sick people who desperately need to be evacuated for life-saving treatment.

In fact, he has been giving us those warnings for months. One Syrian mother in eastern Ghouta is running out of options. That mother reportedly came into a clinic recently. She was crying as she brought in her four malnourished children to be treated. But what this mother told the clinic's doctor was shocking to hear, even for a doctor working in the midst of one of the worlds' worst war zones. The mother said that all she could do was give her four children damp pieces of newspaper to chew on so they would stop screaming. That is all she had left — damp pieces of newspaper to feed her children.

To my colleagues around this table, therefore, I say: tomorrow morning, when we pick up a newspaper, we need to think about what this mother is going through and realize that that is just one family. That is just one family out of the nearly 400,000 people living under siege in a region just a short drive away from Damascus. One can say that it is ironic that eastern Ghouta is a so-called de-escalation area, but it is no coincidence that in the past week dozens of civilians have died from relentless air strikes and shelling there. It is no coincidence that those air strikes were carried out by the Al-Assad regime with the support of the Russian Government.

The Syrian regime is pummeling a population of starving, desperate people who have been cut off from food and medicine for months. It is the latest version of the Al-Assad regime's despicable starve-and-surrender strategy. The objective is not peace, but domination. The regime does not even try to hide its strategy. This month the Al-Assad regime allowed the United Nations to make only one shipment of aid to a besieged area. That one delivery helped 21,500 persons, but the 398,000 other Syrians living in eastern Ghouta and nine other besieged areas got nothing. They received no food, no medicine, no vaccines. They will spend another month collecting whatever scraps of food they can find or, when that fails, chewing on things like grass or damp newspapers. Moreover, the 2.5 million civilians living in hard-to-reach areas are also suffering profoundly and struggling to survive. In October, thanks to the Al-Assad regime's strategy of denying aid to its political opponents, the United Nations could

deliver humanitarian assistance to only about 6 per cent of its population.

But the cruelty does not end there. The Al-Assad regime and its allies, like Hizbullah, steal pieces of assistance out of United Nations convoys all the time. They have taken out more than 630,000 medical items from United Nations trucks since the beginning of 2017. The regime and its thugs grab surgical gloves, ultrasound equipment, ventilators and, as we have all heard, even formula for infants, from United Nations trucks before they reach the Syrians in need.

Some members of the Council urge us to put more faith in the Al-Assad regime. They ask us to trust that the regime will allow for aid deliveries. They act like the regime makes decisions in the best interests of the Syrian people. But why would we ever expect a regime that literally steals medicine from the sick to do the right thing? Why would we ever expect a regime that has spent years starving Syria into submission to do the right thing? Why would we ever expect a regime that has gassed its own people, fire-bombed its cities and turned its schools and hospitals into rubble to do the right thing for its people?

One thing is clear: those countries with influence over the Al-Assad regime must use their influence. That is especially true of Russia, which is both a permanent member of the Security Council and a nation that has stated its commitment to a Syrian political process. We must all demand that every besieged area and all civilians in need receive assistance. We must all demand that Al-Assad and the militias allied to the regime stop plundering aid provided by the United Nations. That is a simple message, but one that the Al-Assad regime has almost never accepted in the history of this conflict.

As members of the Security Council, we have another extremely important responsibility coming up. In December, the Council must renew the authorization for cross-border deliveries of aid into Syria, originally granted in resolution 2165 (2014). The consequences of this mandate are enormous. It is no exaggeration to say that renewing it is a life-and-death question. Since 2014, the United Nations has conducted more than 663 cross-border convoys, with 16,844 trucks containing aid passing through border crossings approved by the Security Council. On average, that assistance reaches more than 1 million Syrians every month. Again, 1 million people get aid as the result of a mandate from the Security Council. We can only imagine the number

of lives saved by this one resolution. To give just one example, in October the World Health Organization sent supplies for nine health-care facilities and 80,567 people in two cross-border deliveries. More than 546,600 Syrians benefited from access to clean water through cross-border shipments in October as well. We are therefore talking about hundreds of thousands of Syrians who will not get sick this month because of the Council's cross-border-assistance mandate.

Nor can we forget that this assistance is also closely monitored. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic looked at 420 trucks used in 20 shipments in October. For each truck, the Monitoring Mechanism confirmed that every delivery was humanitarian and notified the Syrian authorities about what was in it and where it went. Despite our divisions on Syria, the Council's rare moment of unity on cross-border assistance has had a vital impact. We managed to set politics aside and come together to establish this mandate and then renew it for each of the past two years. We must once again stand with the Syrian people and renew that authorization. The lives of far too many Syrian depend upon us living up to our responsibility to help.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing.

Our successes in eliminating terrorist nerve centres and taking de-escalation measures in the framework of the Astana process have enabled us to significantly improve the situation in Syria. What we also need is progress on the political front, increased international humanitarian aid, and assistance in restoring the infrastructure of the liberated areas and in mine clearance. However, the inadmissibility of attempts to establish preconditions, a principle that we traditionally apply to the Syrian parties involved in the political process, is also true for humanitarian assistance from our international partners.

We would like to draw attention to the fact that the 11 November statement of the Presidents of Russia and the United States included a call to the States Members of the United Nations to increase their contributions to meeting the Syrian people's humanitarian needs in the next few months. The same subject was included in a joint statement on 22 November by the Presidents of Russia, Iran and Turkey that emphasized assistance with humanitarian mine clearance, preserving

historical heritage and restoring basic residential infrastructure, including socioeconomic facilities. Russia has consistently advocated for expanding humanitarian assistance to Syria and does not divide its inhabitants into “us” and “them”. We have been helping Syrians on a daily basis and have kept the Security Council regularly informed about that. On the other hand, we have been seeing unilateral sanctions that do not allow Damascus to buy medicines or acquire and repair medical equipment. That is eloquent testimony to various international stakeholders’ real attitude to Syrians.

We are extremely concerned about the humanitarian catastrophe in Raqqa, primarily caused by the indiscriminate violence of the coalition. Now the United States and its major allies are taking steps, including in the information space, to hide the serious consequences of their military operation. The United Nations is still unable to get into Raqqa in order to conduct an assessment. The official version — that it is too dangerous — is frivolous fudging aimed at people with short memories. A year ago, when the terrorists were withdrawing from their last refuge in eastern Aleppo, a few members of the Security Council literally tried to drag representatives of the United Nations and its partners there by force, including by adopting a resolution. Then everything was organized, both the evacuation and the monitoring, and received high praise from the humanitarian workers.

We have been assured that Raqqa has long ago been liberated from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) without any controlled evacuation or signs of monitoring, but what is going on there is the mystery of the seventh seal. The banal reason is that the coalition has something to hide from the international community — significant numbers of civilian victims and huge destruction. An unattractive picture is emerging from communications concerning a deal that, as we understand it, was cut when Raqqa was liberated between ISIL and the paramilitary groups allied with the coalition. We are concerned about the situation of the people fleeing Raqqa, who are held in inhumane conditions in camps for displaced persons, in a zone that is de facto controlled by armed groups protected by the coalition.

There have been reports that various local authorities have been established in districts liberated from ISIL, with the direct participation of the coalition, and that economic recovery measures are being negotiated

with them. They are not discussing such issues with the Syrian authorities. We have listened to people voicing unfounded fears that establishing de-escalation areas could affect Syria’s territorial integrity. We have consistently refuted such insinuations. What the coalition is doing, however, is taking real steps to pull the country apart. Basically, the foreign presence is in Syria illegally, however hard individual officials in the United States try to find legal grounds for it, because there are none. Moreover, we are seeing the occupying forces attempt to gain a foothold in Syria an indefinite period that has nothing to do with the counter-terrorism efforts that we are assured are the coalition’s only goal.

We recognize the importance of providing assistance to the people of Raqqa and its environs, as well as to the hundreds of thousands of displaced people who have been forced to leave the city. However, that assistance cannot be supplied at the expense of other parts of the country, including those liberated by the Syrian army. In order for the coalition to gloss over its actions in Raqqa as a distraction, it needs an alternative tragedy of the month. That job has recently fallen to eastern Ghouta, where terrorists remain and clashes between various armed groups continue. We have been cultivating intensive contacts in eastern Ghouta, including with armed groups, in order to help to resolve emerging humanitarian access issues, and we are discussing the parameters of medical evacuation. Those are all very delicate issues requiring work on the ground. A tripartite mechanism with the participation of Russia, Syria and the United Nations has great potential, and cooperation of that kind is essential to finding solutions to complex issues. I should point out, by the way, that the Syrian authorities have just announced a truce in eastern Ghouta.

We have already said that the Security Council will have to have a serious discussion about cross-border operations in the absence of proper monitoring. It is non-governmental organizations that are the concertmasters in this area, with the United Nations playing second fiddle. The requirement of resolution 2165 (2014) — that the assistance being dispatched through the border crossings it designates must go to every area of Syria — is not being met. We have no way of knowing where it actually ends up. There is an understanding that in this way only the areas held by armed groups are supplied. We have heard Mr. Lowcock’s information about the cross-border deliveries, but it is not enough, and we want to know

more. We want a briefing on cross-border deliveries at the beginning of next week under the heading of “Any other business”.

This mechanism cannot be maintained in its current form. It usurps Syria’s sovereignty and is contrary to the principles of emergency humanitarian assistance endorsed by the General Assembly. It is an unprecedented and extreme measure that must now be reassessed.

Positive changes in the situation on the ground, thanks to the Astana process, help to increase the volume of convoys through the line of contact. We are encouraging the Syrian authorities to engage constructively. At the same time, there needs to be order in the distribution of humanitarian aid so as to ensure that it does not fall into the hands of terrorists to then be resold to the Syrian people at higher prices.

We are troubled by the humanitarian situation in the Al-Rukban camp, at the border with Jordan. As the Syrian Government has no access there, we cannot ask it to do the impossible. This is an area under the control of the American military, which arbitrarily established the camp around the Al-Tanf military base. In that time, the area has become a black hole through which terrorists freely flow. We trust that our United States partners will assist the United Nations in normalizing the situation in that area.

In conclusion, we note that the assessments pointing to a reduction in the volume of humanitarian assistance to besieged and hard-to-reach regions need to be continuously verified so as to ensure that they align with reality. Assistance is reaching those areas except when, for objective reasons, it cannot do so due to ongoing hostilities.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We express our deep appreciation, Sir, for the update by Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock on the humanitarian situation in Syria and commend his efforts.

Kazakhstan remains committed to all Security Council resolutions aimed at resolving humanitarian issues in Syria. We believe that it is of the utmost importance to preserve all possible humanitarian access modalities, including cross-border systems that are indispensable to bringing humanitarian aid to millions of people in northern and southern Syria. We appreciate the efforts of the United Nations, under the leadership of Mr. Lowcock and colleagues from the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs at Headquarters and in the field, to supply food, fuel and drinking water to devastated areas of Syria in need of urgent assistance, and to organize the evacuation of civilians. We also support the humanitarian activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Syrian Red Crescent Society and United Nations agencies, which are operating under extremely complicated conditions.

We also support members of the military contingent who are carrying out demining actions in the liberated territories. Efforts should be focused on creating the conditions necessary to further stabilize those areas. That includes ensuring compliance with the ceasefire, including in the de-escalation zones. It is also essential to comply with international humanitarian law. All parties to the conflict should use their influence to ensure unhindered humanitarian access, including assistance in providing medical assistance and evacuation.

The issue of ensuring that the large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in the camps receive assistance should be addressed. The Astana process draws attention to the problem of the large number of explosive devices left behind by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant militants in the territories liberated from terrorists. We urge support for the United Nations initiative to clear those territories. That will allow for the elimination of unexploded ordnance, the launching of humanitarian operations and the return of refugees to their homes. Ensuring the continuous delivery of humanitarian assistance will facilitate that, but international support is required. It is therefore important to unite the global efforts of all United Nations Member States.

Kazakhstan continues to support all international efforts aimed at finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We hope that the agreements reached within the Astana platform and the Geneva process will be fully implemented. We are also of the strong view that civilians should be protected. Therefore, in our capital and within the Astana peace process, careful work is being done to strengthen measures to build trust between the parties. In particular, efforts are now directed towards the release of detainees and hostages, the transfer of bodies of the dead, and the exchange of information on missing persons. Our main priorities are to address the appalling flight of detainees, abductees and missing persons and to ensure full humanitarian access to any besieged or hard-to-reach area, including eastern Ghouta. As the country

hosting the Astana platform, Kazakhstan will make every effort to ensure that progress in de-escalation will result in increased humanitarian access. We thank all those who continue to provide substantial humanitarian assistance to Syria through international organizations and bilateral channels.

Lastly, we are convinced that only full compliance with the ceasefire agreement will directly improve the humanitarian situation and reduce the level of violence. We commend the efforts of the stakeholders of the Astana process and other interested parties to achieve this goal. However, we stress that no initiative aimed at establishing peace in the world's conflict zones can be successful and efficient without the support of the Security Council.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive and objective briefing, and to emphasize the extent of France's concern at the recent developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria. In that context, I would like to highlight three points that are essential in our view: the critical situation of the people in eastern Ghouta, who are besieged and without humanitarian assistance; attacks against hospitals and medical facilities; and the persistent restrictions on access to humanitarian assistance in Syria.

First, in eastern Ghouta, the Syrian regime has established a veritable blockade that has trapped the Syrian people. Dozens of civilians have died in recent days, victims of the intensified bombing by the regime, which continues to use famine as a means of war. No United Nations convoy has been authorized since that sent to Duma on 12 November. The population, exhausted by over four years of siege carried out in disregard of the fundamental principles of humanitarian law, has been subjected to every kind of suffering.

The recent figures reported by the non-governmental organization Médecins Sans Frontières in eastern Ghouta are terrifying. Hospitals sponsored by that organization treated 576 wounded and recorded 69 dead between 14 and 26 November. One-quarter of those victims were women and children. Moreover, as stressed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/982), the regime continues to refuse to deliver the necessary authorization for emergency medical evacuations. More than 470 people are concerned, including 193 children. France once again calls on States with influence on the regime to persuade it to

authorize enable those evacuations. Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure must end.

More broadly, and beyond eastern Ghouta, the regime continues to remove medicines and medical material from convoys. Medicines and medical material for more than 12,000 people were removed from convoys last month. In total, over 630,000 medicines have been removed since the beginning of the year. We have already had occasion in the Council to strongly denounce that practice, which is entirely unacceptable.

Equally unacceptable are ongoing restrictions on access for humanitarian assistance in Syria. The report of the Secretary-General is clear. De-escalation zones have not led to a genuine improvement in humanitarian access. Violations of humanitarian law are still being observed. Humanitarian assistance across the front lines remains greatly limited despite the establishment of a tripartite coordination mechanism. On average, in 2017 only 26 per cent of those targeted were able to benefit each month, and only 10 per cent were able to benefit in October. Obstacles remain to the provision of humanitarian assistance, including, *inter alia*, myriad bureaucratic restrictions that have been duly documented and reported.

We can never sufficiently emphasize that the priority is to ensure safe, full, immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory. Any form of obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance is unacceptable and must be firmly denounced and condemned as such. France calls on the States guarantors of de-escalation zones to fully exercise their responsibility so as to put an end to the violence and to ensure that humanitarian assistance can reach people in need without obstacle.

Cross-border assistance remains absolutely essential to the humanitarian response in Syria. Nearly 800,000 people enjoyed such assistance last month. Since the establishment of the cross-border monitoring mechanism in July 2014, the United Nations has provided significant humanitarian and health assistance, as well as medical treatment for millions of Syrians, through that channel.

The Council will soon address the renewal of resolution 2165 (2014), and we call for it to demonstrate unity and responsibility to safeguard that fundamental achievement. It is indeed vital — in the true sense of the word — to ensure access to people in need as promptly and effectively as possible. The renewal of resolution

2165 (2014) is therefore a top priority for France. The critical situation requires more than ever before an effective cessation of hostilities throughout the entire territory, with a genuine monitoring mechanism and sanctions in place for violations. Ongoing bombardment makes humanitarian operations more difficult. We therefore call on the guarantors to do their utmost to ensure effective implementation.

As a new round of intra-Syrian talks began yesterday in Geneva, I recall that a lasting cessation of fighting and improvement in the humanitarian situation will hinge solely on a political solution, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). United Nations mediation, with all of our support, despite our differences, is the only way to bring about a negotiated democratic transition. We reaffirm our support for Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

Lastly, we strongly reaffirm France's ongoing support for humanitarian operations, but neither reconstruction efforts nor requests for financial contributions to that end will make sense until a lasting political solution is implemented in Syria, with the support of all.

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

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country's Government has reviewed the forty-fifth monthly report (S/2017/982), submitted by the Under-Secretary-General for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). While we note the improvements that it contains, we continue to hope that future reports will reflect the reality on the ground in an objective, transparent and professional manner.

In the same vein, my country's Government looks forward to the announced visit by the Under-Secretary-General to Syria in January and will remain open to putting the relationship back on track and bridging the confidence gap resulting from some mistakes made recently by OCHA. We confirm the need for there to be no double standards or politicization in the work of OCHA. Furthermore, it should not submit to the pressure being imposed on it by some permanent States members of the Council to use humanitarian file as a tool to exert influence over the Syrian Government.

My country's Government confirms that those preparing the monthly report should work on the basis of respect for the content of relevant United Nations resolutions, and in particular full commitment to respecting the sovereignty and territorial unity and integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the provision of humanitarian support in Syria without politicization or selectivity.

On Monday, we sent an official letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, laying out the position of the Syrian Government on the current report. However, I should like to make the following points.

The current report, like its predecessors, continues to suffer from a major flaw. Those preparing it have relied on politicized and other open sources that lack credibility, while continuing to ignore trusted Syrian Government sources. The Syrian Government regrets that the report's writers refer to what they call "administrative impediments and deliberate restrictions" that they claim limit the delivery of humanitarian aid to unstable areas. Despite the fact that armed terrorist groups continue to shell cities in residential areas and to escalate and perpetrate violations in the de-escalation zones, my country's Government offers every possible facility to ensure the delivery of that aid when directed to eligible Syrian citizens and when the necessary and proper arrangements are made according to Syrian laws and regulations.

In that regard, I note the reference in the report to the fact that the United Nations has managed to deliver humanitarian aid to millions of people in need inside Syria. That could not have been achieved without the cooperation, coordination and support of the Syrian Arab Republic and its institutions. On this matter, I remind the members of the Council of the trilateral cooperation mechanism that was established in September, which includes the Syrian Government, the friendly Russian Federation and the United Nations. It has worked effectively and regularly to avoid any gaps and obstacles with a view to facilitating coordination and enhancing humanitarian access, and has achieved positive results of late.

We ask those preparing the report to inform the Member States of the real facts and figures that reflect the tangible progress made in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian access to its eligible beneficiaries, thanks to the efforts of the Syrian Government and

its allies to liberate most Syrian territories from abominable terrorism.

The Government of Syria regrets the continued insistence of those preparing the report on promoting cross-border aid delivery. We confirm that most of that aid continues to fall into the hands of armed terrorist groups present throughout the targeted areas. How else can we explain the continued suffering of civilians in those regions as a result of terrorists' controlling and seizing the nutritional material and aid that is delivered and then reselling it at exorbitant prices to those who need it?

My country's Government further notes that the border crossings of Bab al-Hawa, Bab Salama and Ar-Ramtha are being used to smuggle arms and equipment to the very same armed terrorist organizations in Syria. We believe that the express desire of the Secretary-General and his aids in Syria to turn over a new leaf of professional work and cooperation with the Syrian Government runs counter to the continued inclusion by the report's writers of baseless claims promoting cross-border aid, tainting the image of the Syrian Government, or even ignoring its efforts, thereby effectively serving the political goals of some States that have a negative influence in the Security Council, including by promoting urgent claims for the renewal of resolution 2165 (2014).

My country's Government confirms the need for United Nations personnel in Syria to refrain from dealing with any secessionist entities, illegal so-called local councils or unlicensed civil society organizations. We warn that most of those organizations have close ties, amounting to subservience, to the armed terrorist groups. Moreover, we call on the United Nations and its agencies to stop using the border crossing of Fish Khabur because it is an illegal crossing that is used by certain parties and organizations that enter Syrian territory illicitly.

The Syrian Government continues to have grave concern over the persistent use of exaggeration and hyperbole by those writing the reports, their use of the expression "besieged areas" and their inclusion of misleading information about the situation in eastern Ghouta, in rural Damascus. Civilians in eastern Ghouta are actually under an internal siege that is being imposed by the various armed organizations present there, which take advantage of civilians and use them as human shields. Those armed organizations seize, monopolize

and distribute humanitarian aid to their supporters or sell it at inflated prices to those who need it, as was the case in the neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo.

On the other hand, my country's Government calls on those who wrote the report to be transparent and clear in holding the so-called international coalition led by the United States responsible for the destruction of Raqqa city and the massacres perpetrated by the United States-led coalition in Raqqa city — which was completely destroyed — and other Syrian areas, killing hundreds and destroying many residential areas; and for using internationally prohibited weapons — especially white phosphorous — that constitute illegal war actions tantamount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

My country's Government also calls on those who prepared the report to be transparent and credible by clear stressing in future reports the deeply negative impacts of the unilateral economic coercive measures imposed on Syria by the United States of America, members of the European Union and other States, which have affected even the activities of the United Nations agencies and foreign non-governmental organizations operating in the country. Those measures have led to the stalling of several important projects that were designed to respond to the needs of the Syrian people.

Moreover, my country's Government calls on those who prepared the report to not simply take stock of the rate of funding but to express clearly and openly that some donors who made pledges are not fulfilling their financial commitments, and that some have imposed political conditions for the funding of international organizations operating in Syria and obstructed the Syrian Government's plans for the rehabilitation of infrastructure and the return of internally displaced persons to their homes once security and stability are restored.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic rejects the call of the Secretary-General for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We affirm that the ICC has no jurisdiction over the situation in Syria. The Court has lost all credibility since it was rendered a mere political tool to impose the law of force and not the force of law. The Syrian Arab Republic also rejects the Secretary-General's call for cooperation with the so-called International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism

to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and calls on Member States to read document A/71/799, which contains the text of a letter from our Permanent Mission to the Secretary-General, setting out the serious legal flaws of General Assembly resolution 71/248, which established an illegitimate mechanism that is not recognized by my country's Government or by the Governments of several other Member States.

The Syrian Arab Republic calls on the Under-Secretary-General to focus transparently and

professionally on improving ties with the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as on supporting coordination and reaching out in order to preserve the humanitarian file from any political pressure or foreign considerations that some influential Governments are trying to impose on the United Nations agencies working in the humanitarian sector.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.