



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional*

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Wednesday, 28 August 2024, 11 a.m.

New York

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*President:* Mr. George . . . . . (Sierra Leone)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Gaouaoui
China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Kumanga
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
Slovenia . . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Acting Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** This month marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions — a timely reminder to all parties in the Syrian conflict of their obligations under international humanitarian law, which must be adhered to in both letter and spirit. It is deplorable that civilians continue to be killed and injured on an almost daily basis in the Syrian Arab Republic and across the region. The violence this past month has not only taken a toll on civilians but has also presented new threats to international peace and security. Tensions in the region have reached dangerous new levels with a series of incidents, including: the attacks on a soccer field in the village of Majdal Shams in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan, which resulted in civilian casualties, including children; Israeli strikes in Beirut; the targeted killings of Hamas leaders in Tehran and then Hizbullah in Beirut by Israel; and the significant escalation of hostilities witnessed last week, which included Hizbullah strikes in Israel and Israeli strikes in Lebanon.

Syria and Syrians have not been exempted from that escalation. In mid-August, we saw Syrians killed in Israeli air strikes in Lebanon, including children. There were further air strikes in Homs, Hama, Dar'a and then again today on the Syria-Lebanon border by Israel. In July and August, there were also attacks on United

States military positions in north-east Syria after a months-long lull, attacks that the United States claimed were carried out by armed groups backed by Iran and that resulted in injuries to United States servicemen. We have also seen reports of rocket and drone strikes from Syrian territory towards the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan. We must redouble our efforts towards regional de-escalation in the interest of long-term peace and stability for all, including with an urgent ceasefire in Gaza, a return to calm in Lebanon and across the Blue Line, and wider regional de-escalation.

It is extremely important to note that the same de-escalation is needed in the Syrian conflict itself. I remain deeply concerned about the ongoing tense and violent situation across many fronts in the country. This month, there were again multiple clashes, air and drone strikes and exchanges of artillery and rocket fire, across north-east and north-west Syria, including a brief uptick in pro-government drone strikes on Idlib and a spike in hostilities involving the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and armed opposition forces near Azaz. A significant escalation in hostilities took place between the SDF and some Arab tribal forces in Deir ez-Zor, with reports of dozens of deaths and injuries, displacements and strikes on civilian infrastructure. The SDF claims that pro-government forces were involved in some of the hostilities. South-west Syria remains turbulent, with multiple security incidents in Dar'a and further tensions in Suwayda', where a peaceful protest movement has been ongoing for more than a year now. Meanwhile, as Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism Voronkov recently briefed the Security Council, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has increased its operational pace in Syria, with a surge of attacks, especially in the central desert area.

All those realities are why I reiterate my long-standing call for an immediate and sustained de-escalation of hostilities in Syria, towards a nationwide ceasefire and a cooperative approach to countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups in line with international law.

The file of the detained and missing still demands urgent action, with arbitrary detention and arrest, torture in detention and disappearances continuing in all areas of Syria. Such repressive practices must stop. I continue to call for unilateral releases, including, as a priority, those of women and children and people who are old or sick. Meanwhile, let me stress the need to address the dire situation of camps and places of detention in north-

east Syria. I reiterate my call on Member States and the relevant authorities to significantly step up efforts on repatriations from Al-Hol and other places of detention.

The humanitarian situation remains dire, and Ms. Msuya will provide more details on that. However, let me welcome the Syrian Government's decision to extend authorization for the use of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings. Unimpeded aid access through all modalities is needed, both cross-border and cross-line. The financial pledges made in Brussels must be urgently disbursed, including for early recovery.

Let me also stress the need to mitigate and avoid any adverse effects of sanctions, in particular by the active engagement of sanctioning States to counter overcompliance. And let us not forget the economic catastrophe that Syrians still face. Syrians are struggling to put food on the table. The World Food Programme says that the minimum wage in Syria only covers 11 per cent of a household's basic needs. Meanwhile, the situation for refugees and the displaced across Syria and the region remains alarming. Syrians must be protected wherever they are, including in host countries. Anti-refugee rhetoric and actions must cease. Equally, we must collectively redouble efforts to address the obstacles that refugees themselves say inhibit their return — both material and livelihood concerns and protection concerns, including in relation to safety, security and mandatory military conscription. Here, let me again note that we are closely following the ongoing communications from and announcements by the Syrian Government, including those related to military service.

Syria's de facto division, its ongoing military conflict, the deep involvement of outside actors, the presence of listed terrorist groups, the myriad human rights abuses, the humanitarian suffering, the country's economic collapse, its institutional degradation, its social disintegration, its continuing displacement tragedy, the fate of the detained and disappeared — none of those problems are separable from the deep political cleavages among Syrians and regarding Syria. Those problems cannot be addressed meaningfully without a political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) — a process, I stress, that is realistic, sustainable and inclusive; that involves genuine compromise, far removed from absolutist positions or demands; that realizes the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people; and that restores the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

At the core must be a United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian political process. I continue to work to foster joint efforts to advance such a process. I recently had in-depth discussions with the Syrian Negotiations Commission here in Geneva, and I look forward to engaging with Syrian Government officials in Damascus at the earliest opportunity. Equally, we continue to engage with the broader voices of Syrian women and youth and more broadly with Syrian civil society, whose inclusion is essential.

My message on the immediate priorities remains consistent: urgent work on de-escalation in the region and in Syria towards a nationwide ceasefire; breaking the deadlock on reconvening the Constitutional Committee; confidence-building measures moving forward step-for-step; and exploring ideas on how to prepare the ground for a new and comprehensive approach to resolving the conflict. I am also working to bring about better coordination among international stakeholders; the political process must be Syrian-owned and -led, but that requires the unified and cooperative support of key international stakeholders.

In conclusion, let me state the following: we have no illusion that any of that will be easy, but it would be a mistake to conclude that it is impossible or that the conflict can only be managed and not resolved. There are clear and realistic ideas on the table on what all parties could do to make progress. What is needed is political will for the Syrian parties to come together and for international cooperation. I of course realize that geopolitical alignments on Syria remain challenging, but there is a way forward. I hope that I can count on the Council's collective support for that approach in the period ahead.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

**Ms. Msuya:** The people of the Syrian Arab Republic continue to face a profound humanitarian crisis. More than 16 million people — upwards of 70 per cent of the population — require assistance. Three quarters of them are women and children. And, as Mr. Pedersen has just set out, the recent escalation of hostilities in the north-east, along with regular attacks in the north-west and other places, continue to deepen people's suffering.

Since 6 August, at least 25 civilians have been killed because of the fighting in Deir ez-Zor. An estimated 3,500 families were forced to flee their

homes, although the majority have since been able to return. Critical public infrastructure, including water treatment facilities, has been affected, adding to the ongoing water crisis. And the fighting has restricted the movement of civilians and aid workers, including through the closure of Euphrates River crossings. Access to parts of the cities of Al-Hasakah and Al-Qamishli was restricted for nearly a week, disrupting water and food assistance to more than 100,000 people. And the restrictions have caused a further increase in the prices of food, fuel and other critical items. Respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and unhindered humanitarian access remain essential.

Displacement persists at staggeringly high levels. More than 6 million Syrians continue to live as refugees or asylum-seekers outside Syria's borders, many of them in neighbouring countries. Within Syria, some 7.2 million people, or nearly one third of the population, are displaced, most of them for more than a decade. Every one of Syria's 14 governorates hosts people displaced by the conflict, with all but three hosting more than 100,000 people. Women and girls are particularly affected. In northern Syria, female-headed households report being unable to meet their basic needs at twice the rate of male-headed households. Many of the displaced live in tents or overcrowded informal settlements and have been forced to move multiple times. They are people like a 23-year-old woman in Aleppo — we will call her Rosheen — whose family was forced to move multiple times in search of safety until it arrived at a displacement camp.

The majority of displaced people across Syria depend on humanitarian assistance for their most basic needs. They are therefore among the worst affected by the alarming shortfall in humanitarian funding. Nearly nine months into the year, less than \$1 billion of the \$4.1 billion required for the response has been received. As a result, food assistance and water services had to be cut. The World Food Programme reports that many families are eating smaller portions and skipping meals and have a less diverse diet, putting them at risk of malnutrition. Negative coping mechanisms, including forced and child marriage and child labour, have also grown more prevalent.

Water trucking services for internally displaced people have had to be scaled back, affecting, for example, at least 50,000 people in Tal Rifat. Without an increase in funding, nearly 200 camps in the north-west

will be cut off from water and sanitation support by next month, affecting nearly 250,000 camp residents, most of them women and children. And by the end of the year, approximately 230 health facilities — half of the functional health facilities in the north-west, including maternal and children's hospitals — are heading towards full or partial closure, affecting access to life-saving and emergency health care for more than a million people.

Beyond life-saving assistance, greater investment in early recovery projects is also critical to providing more sustainable solutions to the displacement crisis. Such a project has provided agricultural inputs to people returning to their homes in Deir ez-Zor in order to help restore their livelihoods. For the same reasons, the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is supporting an early recovery and livelihood project that aims to provide professional training and to rehabilitate markets and schools. We urge donors to redouble their efforts for the humanitarian response, including for early recovery.

Nearly half of those displaced in Syria are in Idlib and northern Aleppo. For those people, the cross-border operation from Türkiye remains a lifeline. It facilitates not only the passage of relief supplies but also assessment visits by United Nations staff to ensure the efficient and effective distribution of assistance. We welcome the Government of Syria's extension of permission to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings for a further three months. We hope that the use of those crossings, alongside Bab Al-Hawa, will remain available as long as the current levels of need persist. Given the scale of those needs, we will also continue efforts to expand the use of cross-line routes to reach underserved areas in the north-west and in other parts of the country. We remain concerned by persistent challenges to carrying out planned cross-line missions.

We cannot afford to lose focus on Syria. The United Nations and its partners continue to provide critical assistance to millions of people every month. Nevertheless, as humanitarian needs continue to reach record levels, we need a significant increase in humanitarian funding and much more investment in early recovery projects to help rebuild livelihoods, reduce dependency on aid and provide solutions to the displacement crisis. However, the key to a sustainable solution is a definitive end to the conflict — all the more so given the concerns about insecurity in the

wider region. We have already seen growing numbers of people migrating out of Syria, increased activity by armed groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and an increase in trafficking.

I therefore once again urge the Security Council to support the parties and Special Envoy Pedersen in securing genuine progress towards a lasting peace.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Msuya for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya for their briefings.

Switzerland remains very concerned about the persistent outbreaks of conflict and tension in Syria. We call for a nationwide ceasefire, as advocated by resolution 2254 (2015). In addition, it is vital to avoid the conflict expanding within the Middle East region, given the risk of regional escalation. The time has come to relaunch dialogue and peace negotiations under the aegis of the United Nations, within the parameters proposed by resolution 2254 (2015). To that end, Switzerland continues to support the work of the Special Envoy in the search for a political solution, which remains the only possible way out of the conflict.

In the pursuit of that objective, we salute the unwavering determination of civil society, in particular women. Whether they are ordinary citizens, displaced persons, refugees or human rights defenders, they are still threatened with repression throughout the country for their work. They are also committed to shedding light on the fate of those detained and disappeared.

As we commemorate this Friday the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, we recall that the right to know is a rule firmly anchored in the Geneva Conventions. That is one of the reasons why Switzerland actively contributed to the establishment of the Geneva-based Independent Institution for Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, with its eminently humanitarian mandate. We call on all parties concerned, in Syria and at the international level, to cooperate with that Institution. Providing answers to those who have been waiting for so long means working towards reconciliation and lasting peace.

In parallel with those efforts, Switzerland will continue its commitment to ensuring that serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights do not go unpunished. To that end, we support the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, as there can be no peace without justice in Syria.

On the humanitarian front, the conflicts and the prolonged, multidimensional crisis in Syria continue to inflict immense suffering on the civilian population. More than 70 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian aid, including 7.2 million internally displaced persons.

Health needs are also overwhelming. The disrupted health system is struggling to provide vital services. Some 65 per cent of Syrian hospitals and 62 per cent of primary health-care centres are closed or only partially functional. Combined with poor access to water and sanitation, the threat of epidemics, in particular cholera, is real. Humanitarian actors are faced with the impossible choice between continuing their life-saving interventions and putting an end to essential health programmes.

The scale of the humanitarian funding shortfall in Syria is worrisome. Both humanitarian actors and the Syrian population are directly affected. Syria must not become a forgotten crisis, and Switzerland remains committed to supporting people within the country and in the region. Therefore, we are maintaining our contributions at a stable level and have pledged more than \$65 million for the current year.

We welcome the continuation of United Nations humanitarian operations through the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings, which have been authorized for a further three months. However, open-ended authorizations are still needed to ensure greater predictability and effective programming, funding and planning. To meet the scale of needs in the country, all aid modalities, including cross-border aid and aid delivered across the front lines, are essential. We recall that international humanitarian law obliges all parties and third-party States to allow and facilitate the passage of humanitarian aid. Thus, all parties must allow and facilitate the transport of humanitarian aid throughout Syria, while guaranteeing rapid, safe, sustainable and unhindered access to all civilians in need.



The Syrian people deserve the solidarity of the international community, and the Council must not forget their plight.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings. This month's meeting marks a handful of sobering milestones.

One year after the Syrian regime announced it would allow United Nations aid deliveries via Bab Al-Hawa and two other border crossings, it continues to grant consent only in short-term increments. On 12 August, the regime extended permission for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings just one day before their authorization expired. And it once again granted consent for only three months, until 13 November. While that extension was welcome news for the people who depend on and deliver humanitarian assistance, the United States continues to urge the Council to call on the regime to allow for more predictable and longer-term access. That would enable humanitarian actors to plan, deploy staff and use resources more effectively.

The United States has long called for humanitarian access to all Syrians in need, through all modalities, and we mean it. That is why the Syrian regime should immediately allow unhindered United Nations access to the Rukban camp in south-east Syria.

Equally troubling, it has been more than two years since the last meeting of the Constitutional Committee, and the regime shows little interest in engaging meaningfully in the political process called for in resolution 2254 (2015). We continue to support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to resume a political process and call on the regime not only to agree to a meeting of the Constitutional Committee, but also to commit to meaningful participation regardless of the location.

Moreover, we reiterate that we will not fund regime-led reconstruction and that United States sanctions will remain in place until, at a minimum, there is concrete, measurable progress towards a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

When it comes to the political process, the Al-Assad regime's default approach is to delay. Yet when it comes to the illicit trade of Captagon and other synthetic drugs, the regime is all business. The United States, meanwhile, is working closely with Jordan, Lebanon and other partners to help address the security and health

challenges posed by the production and distribution of Captagon. We remind our partners in the region that normalization with the Syrian regime will not bring about an end to, or a decrease in, Captagon production. The international community must continue efforts to reduce Captagon production and trade emanating from Syria.

Twelve terrible years have passed since American journalist Austin Tice was abducted in Syria and held by the Syrian regime. The United States has repeatedly pressed the Government of Syria to work with us so that we can, at last, bring Austin home. Today I echo President Biden's call for his immediate release. The freedom of the press is essential, and journalists like Austin play a critical role informing the public and holding those in power accountable. We stand in solidarity with Austin, his family and all Americans wrongfully detained and held hostage abroad. And we will continue to do everything possible to advocate for their release and support their loved ones until they return home.

More generally, we continue to support the Syrian people's calls for peace, dignity, security and justice, and we support the exercise by Syrians of their rights of peaceful assembly and the freedom of expression. Syrians have suffered for far too long, and their increasingly dire plight demands a robust response from the international community. We must recommit ourselves to providing the political will and collective action to help Syrians who are in desperate need.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, for their briefings on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Unfortunately, on top of the many familiar problems that this friendly country is facing, now comes the unprecedented escalation in the Gaza Strip due to the ongoing Israeli military operation, affecting Syria and the entire region. Syria is suffering directly as result of the clashes that have been taking place in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict over the past 10 months and from indiscriminate strikes by the Israeli Air Force on the Syrian Arab Republic and the territories of neighbouring countries, in violation of the provisions of international law. Almost every week, the Israeli Air Force strikes Damascus and its suburbs and other provinces in Syria. The strikes are grave violations of

Syria's sovereignty and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations — violations to which Western members of the Council remain indifferent. We are in no doubt that, were we discussing a State loyal to them, as opposed to a country that is unafraid of pursuing its own independent foreign policy, the response would be completely different and they would regularly raise the subject in the Council.

A clear example of the risks of the spiralling escalation is the tragic incident in Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan, on 27 July, which claimed the lives of 12 children. We vigorously condemn any acts of violence against civilians. Tragedies of that kind might inflame an already volatile climate in the region and become a trigger for a new full-scale war in the Middle East — something to be avoided at all costs. It is regrettable that this is not understood by our American colleagues who, like Israel, are fomenting lawlessness in Syria, not only by carrying out strikes on its territory but also by using terrorists entrenched in the area beyond the Euphrates River and Al-Tanf, where American forces are illegally present, in order to destabilize and stir up the political and socioeconomic situation in the country.

Another hotbed of terrorism is the Idlib de-escalation zone, under the control of the Security Council-listed Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham fighters, whom Washington is trying to shield from criticism. Unfortunately, United Nations humanitarian agencies are also playing into that; they continue to maintain direct contact with those fighters and are afraid of saying it as it is.

An end to the foreign military presence, which violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, is an imperative for the sustainable stabilization of the country. We further demand an unconditional cessation of air strikes on Syrian territory. Without that, all efforts towards a political settlement would be doomed to failure and our discussions in the Council will go around in circles, becoming more and more reminiscent of the musings of medieval scholars.

And so it is clear from the statements from today's briefers that specific progress on a political settlement in Syria within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) is, in the current turbulent circumstances, still noticeably lacking, is it not? For our part, we continue to support the process for a political solution in Syria, led and owned by the Syrians themselves and mediated by

the United Nations. There is no alternative to that. We continue to advocate for direct intra-Syrian dialogue, and the Constitutional Committee is, and remains, the appropriate platform. However, we are convinced that the decision on the venue for the subsequent rounds should be taken by Syrians themselves, without external pressure or interference, as much as some would like to make the choice for them.

Against that backdrop, the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hit new lows. Millions of citizens continue to suffer from food shortages. Over the past five years, the number of people facing nutritional problems has tripled. There are still difficulties affecting health care and the provision of decent sanitation. In the past year, the cost of living has doubled in Syria. Many Syrians simply cannot afford basic goods and necessities.

At the same time, international humanitarian assistance to Syria is still being held hostage to the politicized approach taken by the West, which is doing its utmost to undermine the position of the legitimate Syrian Government and is disinterested in recovery of the country and the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees to their homes. That, alongside sanctions and the plundering of Syrian natural resources, is having an impact on the lives of civilians, who are doomed to hunger and suffering. That, however, does nothing to boost the popularity of Washington and its allies in Syria and in the Middle East as a whole. The Arab public is fully aware of the true nature of American aims in the region.

The report recently published by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the impact of unilateral sanctions is further proof of not only how the hammer of Western sanctions is blighting the socioeconomic development of Syria, but also of how the collective West is persistently ignoring that fact. We also recall another publication, the report on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights (A/HRC/54/23/Add.1) written by Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan after her visit to Syria in 2023, in which she came to the unequivocal conclusion that unilateral restrictions had to be lifted. Whether the United States likes it or not, the truth of the Washington-led collective punishment of Syrians is gradually coming to light. For our part, we have consistently denounced the illegal restrictions imposed by the United States and European countries, which undermine the ability of Syria to recover, let alone enjoy sustainable development.

Against that backdrop, it is perplexing that representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) give no assessment of the ESCWA report, or of Ms. Douhan's report; it as if those publications did not exist. After all, the documents address issues that fall squarely within OCHA's remit, namely, how sanctions complicate the implementation of humanitarian programmes and related development projects. We would like to hear a clear assessment by OCHA. So far, all we have are occasional, timid statements about the importance of humanitarian exemptions and, even then, only in the context of the 2023 earthquake in Syria. We urge OCHA and its staff to be guided by the principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity and to publicly highlight the difficulties that Syrians, as well as humanitarians discharging their noble mission, are facing as a result of sanctions. Silence on that issue undermines not only the foundations of the work of the humanitarian wing of the United Nations, but also the moral principles promoted by the Organization.

Another persistent challenge is ensuring humanitarian access to Syria. Cross-line deliveries have not yet been set up. This state of affairs is unacceptable. It is important to act in close coordination with the official authorities in order to ensure the operation of all possible humanitarian routes, including from Damascus-controlled territory. We cannot allow a situation where there is no humanitarian access to the north of the country. We must therefore establish an effective cross-line mechanism. The example of the temporary closure of the crossing point on the border with Türkiye, in July, due to the escalation of hostilities clearly shows the possible risks.

At the same time, despite Western claims to the contrary, we note that the Syrian authorities are not indifferent to the fate of their citizens in areas not yet under the control of the Syrian Government. That is evidenced, *inter alia*, by Damascus, which once again showed its goodwill and its constructive approach in its work with the United Nations by deciding to extend the authorization to use the Bab Al-Salam, Al-Rai and Bab Al-Hawa border-crossings. We welcome that important step.

The West must be willing to abandon its uncompromising anti-Damascus position and establish normal, equal and mutually respectful relations with the Syrian Arab Republic in order to bring about peace and security in and around Syria. In that regard, we

note some positive developments in the position of a number of European capitals. We hope that these seeds will sprout and add to the efforts undertaken by Syria's neighbours in the region to ensure a constructive shift in normalizing relations with Syria. That would benefit not only Syrians, but all of us.

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

In the light of the current situation, I would like to make three points.

First, to firmly uphold Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, we call on the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and make concrete efforts to maintain the stability of the countries of the region, including Syria. We urge Israel to cease its attacks on Syria, and the foreign forces to end their illegal military presence in Syria. And we expect major Powers outside the region to play a constructive role in easing the situation in the region.

Secondly, to uphold the overall direction of a political solution to the Syrian issue, China supports Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to continue to work with all parties in line with the Syrian-led and -owned principle and looks forward to the collaboration of the existing dialogue mechanisms, which will give impetus to a political solution on the basis of communication and consultations with the Syrian Government. A stable political process cannot be achieved without a favourable security environment. China supports the Syrian Government's intensified counter-terrorism efforts and calls on the international community to join forces to adopt a zero-tolerance approach in combating terrorist forces within Syria, in line with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, we must fundamentally improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. Thanks to the joint efforts of the Syrian Government and the United Nations, the cross-border relief mechanism has been operating smoothly. We urge the parties concerned to demonstrate flexibility and make efforts to resume cross-line relief operations. We call on donors to follow through on their aid commitments and to guarantee that humanitarian projects throughout Syria are adequately funded. Unilateral sanctions and the illegal plundering of resources have seriously weakened Syria's ability to recover economically and develop socially. They must, therefore, be stopped immediately.



**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their detailed briefings today. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye in today's meeting. As highlighted in their remarks, the political and humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire.

Today I wish to emphasize several points.

First, the Republic of Korea expresses its strong support for the Special Envoy's efforts to pursue step-by-step confidence-building measures on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). The prolonged division and conflict have left many Syrians struggling for their survival. Recent reports of a resurgence in attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, along with the violent clashes in north-east Syria, underscore the urgent need for renewed international attention and more concerted action by relevant parties and Powers. We hope that the Special Envoy's initiative will lay the crucial foundations for achieving a peaceful and sustainable resolution. We therefore call on all parties to actively participate in his initiative.

Secondly, we call on all States to scale up humanitarian assistance in order to bridge the critical funding gap. Despite the Council's repeated call for increased funding for the Syrian humanitarian response plan, it is deeply concerning that more than three-quarters of the requirements remain underfunded. For our part, Korea has more than doubled this year's pledge of humanitarian assistance — from \$12 million to 26 million — for the Syrian people, including Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, as committed at the Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region, in May. Given the regional implications of Syria's multifaceted humanitarian crisis, we appeal to regional stakeholders to play a more substantial role in engaging on that issue so as to prevent further destabilization.

Thirdly, we urge all parties to take every measure to ensure unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access, pursuant to resolution 2730 (2024). Even well-funded efforts may falter without such access. In that regard, we welcome the additional three-month extension of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, which has served as a lifeline for more than 1 million people in north-west Syria. We strongly advocate an open-ended authorization of all crossing points so as to ensure greater predictability and continuity in humanitarian assistance at scale.

Fourthly, the issue of missing persons remains of paramount importance. As we approach the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, on 30 August, we are reminded of the urgent need to determine the fate of more than 100,000 missing people in Syria, the largest number since the Second World War. To that end, the Republic of Korea contributed \$10.9 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross. With regard to justice and reconciliation, we reiterate our support for the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, established through the adoption, last year, of General Assembly resolution 77/301, and we look forward to the speedy implementation of the resolution, including the appointment of the head of the Independent Institution.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea once again strongly urges all parties in the region to more enthusiastically explore common ground in order to identify a way out of the country's long-standing nightmare.

**Mrs. Blokar Drobič** (Slovenia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, as well as Ms. Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

Against the backdrop of escalating tensions that have engulfed the wider region, progress on a political solution in Syria is urgently needed. We have said it before, but it is worth repeating — Syria is not immune to the spillover effects of regional escalation, in particular the war in Gaza, which has had a direct impact on Syria. Continued violence in various parts of the country, the spike in hostilities and the resurgence of Da'esh continue to kill, injure and displace Syrians. The situation is far from sustainable. De-escalation and a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), are needed more than ever.

In my intervention, I will focus on three points.

First, the situation is becoming more dangerous and unpredictable with each passing day. We call on the Syrian parties to find a way to have an inclusive dialogue and a substantive engagement with the Special Envoy. We also call on key international actors, including the Arab contact group and the participants in the Astana process, to resume dialogue and to cooperate with the Special Envoy within the parameters of resolution 2254 (2015), in order to find a lasting political solution in Syria. Renewed dialogue among all Syrians and

international parties and the United Nations should make it possible to identify the common ground needed to break the deadlock in that process.

Secondly, millions of Syrians continue to live in a climate of fear and are still fleeing the country, whether owing to the violent conflict, oppression, economic crisis, persistent human rights violations and abuses or the desperate humanitarian situation, and they have been doing so for over 13 years. Every instance of instability or escalation threatens their lives, undermines their livelihoods and further diminishes their access to food, water and health care, as we now see happening in Deir ez-Zor. Allowing humanitarian access through all available crossings is critically important. We take note of the authorization for the continued use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossing points and call for the opening of the crossings along the Euphrates River as soon as possible. Syrian refugees abroad are increasingly caught between pressures and resentment in host countries and the lack of confidence that their concerns regarding protection and livelihood will be sufficiently addressed if they return to Syria. We reiterate that conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees are not met yet. The dignity and well-being of Syrian refugees must be protected wherever they are.

Thirdly, there cannot be lasting peace without accountability. Over the past 14 years, impunity and lawlessness have shaped a grim reality for Syrians with no end in sight. Slovenia reiterates its call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure compliance with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice. Slovenia will continue to support efforts to gather and preserve evidence, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. We reiterate our call on all parties to take every measure to protect civilians, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian operations, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support for the Special Envoy's efforts, and we call on the parties to cooperate fully with a view to achieving a lasting political settlement in Syria for the sake of the Syrian people and their future.

**Mrs. Shino (Japan):** I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General Musya for their informative briefings.

The Syrian crisis, now in its fourteenth year, shows no signs of abating. The humanitarian situation is worsening: 6 million Syrians remain refugees, 7 million are internally displaced persons and more than 70 per cent are in dire need of assistance. Economic hardship is leading many young people to leave the country, while others resort to militancy or illicit activities. They cannot afford to wait year after year for a political solution that is nowhere in sight. It is also deeply alarming that many civilian lives are being lost to armed clashes and an increased number of terrorist attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

Given all of that, I would like to make three points today.

First, the Middle East is now full of sparks, any one of which could set the region aflame, as highlighted by the exchange of fire across the Blue Line over the weekend. To prevent that, we need to address the biggest flash point. Namely, we must minimize the impact of the Gaza conflict on Syria. That requires a lasting ceasefire in Gaza without delay. Regional stability is necessary for Syrian stability and vice versa. If Syria is drawn into a regional conflict, it could further destabilize the country and trigger new violence. We must lose no time in extinguishing the sparks and lowering regional tensions.

Secondly, it is essential to support the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the United Nations under resolution 2254 (2015). Even though the Constitutional Committee may not be fundamentally resolving the Syrian crisis, it still offers the best path to a lasting political solution. In that vein, we strongly support the role of Special Envoy Pedersen and his efforts to address all conflict-related issues, including the resumption of the Constitutional Committee, through a comprehensive approach. Yet, more than two precious years have been lost with the lack of agreement over the question of venue. Both the Syrian Government and the opposition must set aside their narrow interests and prioritize the long-term future of the country. Likewise, it will be difficult to achieve a major political breakthrough without rebuilding mutual trust between the Syrian Government and key stakeholders. Japan believes that the key is engagement and dialogue. In that regard, we are aware of ongoing

efforts to rebuild diplomatic relations between the Syrian and Turkish Governments, and those positive efforts must continue.

Thirdly, cross-border assistance from Türkiye remains a vital lifeline to north-west Syria. While we welcome the Syrian Government's decision to extend the United Nations use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months, we call for a longer extension from the perspective of ensuring predictability. However, the need for aid is nationwide. Even in Damascus, electricity shortages are severe, and many people require urgent assistance. While humanitarian needs throughout Syria are at an all-time high, funding is at an all-time low. Therefore, the humanitarian response to Syria must be conducted more efficiently than ever before. It is critically important for the international community to support the livelihoods and living conditions of the Syrian people through early recovery and resilience assistance with medium- to long-term impact in areas such as education, health care, water and electricity. In that regard, we strongly support the United Nations-led development of an early recovery strategy and the creation of an early recovery trust fund. Japan, as a major donor, will continue to extend its hand to the Syrian people.

Finally, Japan will continue its engagement and dialogue with the Syrian Government and key stakeholders and will make utmost efforts, as a responsible Security Council member, towards a sustainable resolution of the Syrian crisis, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the briefers for the information they provided.

The escalation of violence in the region is exacerbating the dynamics of the protracted war in Syria and aggravating its effects on the civilian population. Ecuador echoes the call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to reopen channels for political negotiation in good faith. Syria must reactivate the pluralistic political dialogue, build confidence and promote the de-escalation of violence and its destabilizing effects on peace and security in the region.

For several months, we have heard Special Envoy Pedersen speak about the importance of fostering a commitment on the part of stakeholders to resume the meetings of the Constitutional Committee and break the political deadlock in Syria. I reiterate Ecuador's

support for any initiative aimed at promoting the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), pluralistic and inclusive dialogue with the participation of all social and political sectors, a cooperative approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism, and actions to facilitate the access of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population.

The humanitarian needs arising from the conflict are growing increasingly complex in many ways. Water scarcity, the collapse of critical infrastructure, the financing crisis and the precarity of the economic situation attest to the serious situation facing the Syrian population, as we heard this morning. Displaced persons, in particular women, girls and persons with disabilities, as well as Syrian refugees in third countries, are more vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian assistance. Addressing common threats and fostering cooperation for development are necessities in the context of a regional approach to countering terrorism and other challenges. Practices that violate human rights must cease. We are still waiting for answers regarding the fate of the more than 100,000 people who have disappeared or have been arbitrarily detained. The Council's deliberations must urgently be translated into actions that facilitate Special Envoy Pedersen's diplomatic work and motivate the parties' political will, with the aim of achieving peace and security in the region, restoring the rule of law and ensuring the well-being of the Syrian people.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the African members of the Security Council plus one (A3+), namely, Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and my own country, Guyana.

We thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Msuya for their valuable briefings.

Month after month, the briefings on the situation in Syria indicate the dire nature of the situation in the country and the lack of progress in the political process. The suffering endured by Syrians continues to escalate. There is but a faint glimmer of hope that conditions will improve and that displaced Syrians will soon be able to return to their homes. The A3+ reiterates its call for all parties to set aside their differences, prioritize the interests of the Syrian people and engage in good faith with the Special Envoy, Mr. Pedersen, to bring an end to the crisis that has afflicted Syria for more than 13 years. We believe that it is the inalienable right of

Syrians to decide the future of their country and that the international community should provide the requisite support in their pursuit of a better future.

The A3+ reaffirms its unwavering commitment to a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process that would provide a lasting and sustained political solution to the Syrian crisis in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The A3+ renews its call for respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and condemns all violations thereof. We urge all actors to exercise maximum restraint and avoid any further escalation. The situation in Syria is still fragile and may deteriorate at any moment given the current dynamics in the region. The A3+ has followed with deep concern the fighting in the Deir ez-Zor governorate that resulted in the loss of 25 civilian lives, injury to 28 persons and the temporary displacement of families. We unequivocally condemn all acts of violence. It is in no one's interest — particularly not that of the Syrian people — for Syria to experience a resurgence of violence, especially at a time when the looming threat of a regional war is imminent and the real risk of terrorism re-emerging. The A3+ reiterates that combating terrorism is a collective responsibility and calls for enhanced cooperation in that regard.

The worsening humanitarian situation in Syria has been compounded by the unilateral sanctions imposed on the country. At present, 70 per cent of Syrians are in need, with women and children being the most affected. We note that, while the scale of needs in Syria continues to increase, funding for the humanitarian response plan is at its lowest level — 24 per cent. Moreover, with 16.7 million people in need, aid reaches only 2.7 million people per month. The A3+ urges donors to honour their commitments and fund the humanitarian response plan, thereby enabling the humanitarian community to improve the lives of the 12.9 million people who are food insecure.

We welcome the decision of the Syrian Government to extend the authorization for the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings and call for the utilization of all available means, including cross-border and cross-line mechanisms, to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need. While humanitarian action is crucial, Syrians cannot rely solely on international aid. The A3+ believes that all measures should be taken to allow the Syrian economy to recover, improve the livelihoods of Syrians and facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified return

of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes. We call for the protection of Syrian refugees everywhere and condemn the attack that cost the lives of 10 refugees in Lebanon on 17 August.

In conclusion, the status quo in Syria will only prolong the suffering of the Syrian people. If we do not contribute to ensuring a political settlement of the crisis that has ravaged their country for 13 years, we risk failing the Syrian people. For that reason, the A3+ calls on all Syrians to engage without further delay in the efforts of the Special Envoy and make necessary compromises to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Together, we should help the Syrians to build a better future for Syria and its people.

**Mr. Camilleri (Malta):** I extend my gratitude to Special Envoy Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya for their comprehensive briefings.

As we heard today, Syria remains trapped in a desperate crisis. The presence of non-State actors, foreign military forces and active conflict zones continues to expose civilians to serious humanitarian and human rights consequences. Malta is profoundly alarmed by the escalating violence within the country's borders. The clashes in the governorates of Deir ez-Zor and Al-Hasakah, coupled with the ongoing shelling across front lines, are exacerbating an already dire humanitarian and protection situation on the ground. The violence is severely restricting population movement, displacing families and hampering access to essential services. The ongoing illegal Israeli air strikes on Syrian territory further threaten regional escalation, with potentially catastrophic consequences. As always, it is Syrian men, women and children who bear the brunt of the relentless violence. Women and girls remain subject to indiscriminate attacks, detention and enforced disappearance. Growing numbers of widows and female heads of household report facing challenges in accessing housing, their property rights and inheritance. Early and forced marriages are increasing, both to alleviate financial hardship and in response to increasing sexual violence. Malta calls on all parties in Syria to engage meaningfully with the United Nations to end and prevent those violations and to fulfil their obligations under international law.

Malta welcomes last month's United Nations-brokered agreement with Damascus to extend the authorization of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings, which serve as a crucial lifeline in delivering essential



humanitarian aid to more than 1.1 million people each month in the north-west. We continue to advocate for the authorization and operation of all crossings for as long as humanitarian needs persist. We reaffirm our support for all aid delivery modalities that utilize the most direct routes, including cross-line operations. While the increase in funding for the United Nations humanitarian response plan is encouraging, it is concerning that the response remains only 24.1 percent funded. Additional resources are urgently needed to prioritize early-recovery, resilience and livelihood programmes, which are essential for fostering sustained and dignified living conditions for the Syrian people.

The continued delay in resuming the work of the Constitutional Committee only deepens the chasm between Syria's crisis and the possibility of a just and lasting peace. Malta once again urges all parties, particularly Damascus, to return to the negotiating table with genuine intent for the future of Syria. There is no viable path to credible and meaningful progress outside of resolution 2254 (2015). Enhanced engagement with the Special Envoy and his good offices is vital, including sincere participation in his steps-for-steps initiative. We also underscore the importance of ensuring the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women at every stage of the political process.

A tragic hallmark of Syria's brutal conflict has been the issue of those missing, disappeared and arbitrarily detained. Progress and cooperation in that area would provide closure to hundreds of thousands of grieving families and demonstrate a genuine commitment to accountability for crimes committed. In that regard, Malta reiterates its support for the United Nations Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. We urge that its mandate be carried out in a gender-responsive and survivor-centred manner. For Syrian refugees who wish to return, we reaffirm that all returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified. We are concerned by recent reports of forcible returns to Syria from the region and stress that Damascus has a responsibility to ensure the rights, safety and security of all returnees.

In conclusion, Malta once again emphasizes the critical need for all parties involved in this conflict, along with their international supporters, to seek compromise. Leadership and vision are urgently required to bridge the divide.

**Mrs. Paolini** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Joyce Msuya for their briefings.

France recalls its deep concern at the increasing tensions in the Middle East. The possibility of those tensions spreading to Syria would have dramatic consequences, especially in a context where violence in Syria is continuing, as shown by the recent attacks against the international coalition against Da'esh, which we condemn, and the expansion of Captagon trafficking and the resurgence of Da'esh.

I would like to reiterate once again that, in the current context, only a political solution based on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), in all its aspects, will allow for the achievement of a just and lasting peace in Syria. On that basis, the international community stands ready to explore with the Syrian regime all prospects for restoring stability to Syria. In that regard, we support Mr. Pedersen's efforts.

Only if tangible progress is made in a credible and inclusive political process will the sanctions we have adopted be lifted and we will be able to consider financing reconstruction.

We will continue to support the millions of Syrian refugees in the region, as well as the countries hosting them. At the same time, France is continuing to work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to ensure that the Syrian regime creates the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees to Syria and implements all the necessary guarantees in compliance with the relevant provisions of international law. The obstacles to return are not only economic, but also security and political. Ignoring them will not encourage anyone to return.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with 70 per cent of the population now dependent on humanitarian assistance. With food insecurity affecting nearly 13 million people, France has decided to step up its support for the World Food Programme, including through a pilot project on the wheat value chain in the north-west. The renewal of the two crossing points, at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, on 13 August is good news. We urge the Syrian regime to renew all authorizations for crossing points without time limits so that humanitarian workers can have the predictability they need to respond to growing needs. France and the European Union will remain fully mobilized to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrian civilians.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings today.

I will make three points.

First, this month we have seen yet another series of attacks by Iranian-backed militia groups against coalition forces in Syria. Malign actors continue to seek to capitalize on the instability to secure their influence and in turn destabilize the region. Violence by regime forces, backed by Iran, against the Syrian Democratic Forces along the Euphrates River risks further destabilizing a country already marred by conflict. That instability will continue to play out across the borders in Lebanon and in Iraq.

Secondly, a number of anniversaries this month have served as a stark reminder of the devastating impact of the conflict on the lives of Syrians. It has been 11 years since the Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons to kill over 1,400 people in Ghouta. A decade has passed since Da'esh began committing genocide against the Yazidis. And I want to highlight the plight of missing Yazidi women and the families that have been torn apart by those horrendous acts. As we mark the International Day of the Disappeared, we recall that forcibly disappeared persons account for around 5 per cent of the total Syrian population. All parties must engage in good faith as the Independent Institution on Missing Persons is established to clarify the fate of the missing.

Thirdly, despite the deep trauma of those horrific crimes, the Syrian people have continued to demonstrate bravery and resolve in demanding freedom and democratic rights. There has now been a year of protests in Suwayda standing up to and demanding change from the Al-Assad regime. The demonstrations serve as dramatic testimony to the unresolved issues that first drove people to the streets in 2011. We continue to call on the Al-Assad regime to realize the protesters' demands for political, civil and human rights and to end the systemic subjugation of Syrians fairly seeking freedom, democracy and change.

Ultimately, it is within the Al-Assad regime's gift to implement resolution 2254 (2015). That offers a pathway out of conflict that would protect the rights of all Syrians. The United Kingdom honours the perseverance of those bravely seeking truth, justice, freedom and stability.

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

**Mr. Dandy** (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country on successfully managing the Council's work this month.

We meet today at a time when our region is experiencing a dangerous escalation that threatens to set it on fire and blow it up, with repercussions that do not only affect the region, but the world at large. That is the result of the continued crime of genocide perpetrated against the Palestinian people of the Gaza Strip by the Israeli occupation entity, which persists in attacking countries of the region, including my own country, Syria, the last incident being its treacherous aggression against the Syrian town of Majdal Shams in the occupied Syrian Golan on 27 July.

My country's delegation reiterates the contents of the two identical letters dated 14 August 2024 from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2024/617). The letters state Syria's categorical rejection of the falsehoods presented by the representative of the Israeli occupation entity during the emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on 13 August (see S/PV.9704). Syria reiterates its condemnation, in the strongest terms, of the fact that, as part of his showmanship, all-out tricks and attempts to distort facts, the representative of the Israeli entity displayed photographs of Syrian children martyred in the Israeli attack on Majdal Shams in the occupied Syrian Golan and claimed they were Israeli children.

Syria stresses that our people in the occupied Golan are Arab Syrians. They have always been, and will always remain, part and parcel of the Syrian people. They cling to their homeland, Syria, and their national identity. They reject the Israeli occupation and look forward to ending that occupation and its criminal practices against them. Syria reiterates its legitimate right to regain the entire occupied Syrian Golan. That is an established right that is not subject to bargaining, pressure or statute of limitation. It is a right ensured by international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular resolution 497 (1981).

The risks in the region are being exacerbated by certain Western countries, led by the United States, which claim to uphold human rights while instead mobilizing their fleets and armies to support the criminal Israeli occupation entity to continue its crimes, massacres

and attacks, rather than playing their role as permanent members of the Security Council, which would enhance the Council's mandate in maintaining international peace and security in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

The Syrian Government continues to take steps to ameliorate the humanitarian situation and provide basic services to Syrians, including improving the administrative and legislative infrastructure. In that context, legislative decree No. 19 was issued last month to provide, among other things, for the establishment of a national council for persons with disabilities. That council has responsibility for all affairs relating to persons with disabilities, including providing them with protection, helping them to integrate into society and meeting all their needs, while providing them with social protection and suitable infrastructure to ensure their participation in political and public life.

The Syrian Government maintains its positive approach and constructive cooperation with partners on humanitarian and development matters. It continues to provide them with support and the necessary facilitation and has renewed authorization for the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings by the United Nations for an additional three months so as to ensure that aid reaches the Syrian civilians who need it in the north-west of Syria.

As the world commemorates World Humanitarian Day, my country, Syria, continues to suffer from the politicization and obstruction of humanitarian action by some Western countries, which withhold funding for humanitarian action and link it to political conditions to serve their interests, at the expense of the security, stability and livelihoods of the Syrian people. Their adopted hostile policies have caused great damage to the relevant efforts of the Syrian Government and the ability of the United Nations and its specialized agencies to carry out their mandates and support the resilience of Syrians, including supporting early-recovery projects in essential areas mentioned by Security Council resolutions, such as health, education, water, electricity and shelter.

Eighteen months ago, Syria was struck by a devastating earthquake. At the time, owing to a lack of machinery and modern equipment as a result of unilateral coercive measures, many Syrians had to use their bare hands to dig in search for their loved ones and rescue them from under the rubble. And today, as Syria is hit by new earthquakes, the most recent of which took place two weeks ago with a 5.5 magnitude on the Richter scale, the

catastrophic situation continues. That is because some Western countries, led by the United States, continue to move ahead with their destructive policies of collective punishment by imposing unilateral coercive measures targeting all Syrians without exception. The lack of such modern machinery and equipment is just one of the catastrophic impacts resulting from the unilateral coercive measures, which also directly target vital sectors such as banking, finance, oil, energy, aviation, construction and other vital sectors that have an impact on all Syrians' daily lives.

My country's delegation takes note of the positive points referenced in the report issued by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian Arab Republic, which contains additional evidence of the catastrophic impacts of those illegal measures. The report refutes the claims promoted by those who impose such measures. Yet my delegation stresses that the main problem is the imposition of those coercive measures, which constitute a stark violation of international law, and not just over-compliance or unintended effects of those measures. My country's delegation looks forward to the Secretary-General's report on the monitoring and study of the impact of the imposition of unilateral measures on affected countries, in implementation of General Assembly resolution 78/135, entitled "Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries".

Syria reiterates its commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process without any external interference, with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We reiterate our continued cooperation and dialogue with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in his capacity as facilitator. We look forward to the success of his efforts to convene the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee in Baghdad.

We also stress that a political solution in Syria requires the end of the illegal presence of United States forces, which have looted Syria's wealth and supported terrorism and their proxy militias, which do not hesitate in criminally attacking innocent civilian who defend their families, villages and properties in Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah and Al-Qamishli, as well as other areas in eastern and north-eastern regions, with direct support from the United States forces present illegally on parts of Syrian territory.

Syria stresses that there are no legal grounds for the illegal presence of United States forces in Syria without the consent of the Syrian Government. Their presence runs counter to the established provisions of international law, treaty law and customary law. The lies and allegations by the United States about ensuring the defeat of Da'esh as a pretext for its continued illegal presence are false and baseless and have no legal grounding. On the contrary, such presence in fact obstructs the efforts at combating terrorism in Syria and hampers national efforts as part of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which clearly stresses national ownership to counter terrorism and respect for State sovereignty. Accordingly, that foreign illegal military presence on Syrian territory must come to an end, along with the related acts of aggression, support for terrorist entities and militias and plundering of national wealth associated with it, and to restore the authority of the State and the rule of law throughout its national territory.

Lastly, as to the false and baseless accusations uttered by the representative of the United States Administration about narcotics, I would like to state the following. The terrorist war in Syria led to an increase in criminal activities by terrorist organizations and affiliated groups — of course, with the support of the United States Administration. Such organizations funded their crimes by trafficking in drugs. Despite the ongoing challenges it faces, the Syrian Government spares no effort, including by cooperating with neighbouring countries, to address that phenomenon. It has made important achievements in that regard.

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

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): As this is our first statement of the month, we congratulate Sierra Leone on its presidency of the Council and commend its successful leadership to date. We thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their insightful briefings.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire, and the Syrian people continue to suffer severe economic hardships. The politicization of humanitarian aid and the obstruction of international support for Syria's reconstruction, largely driven by the United States and its Western allies, have prolonged the conflict and intensified the suffering of the Syrian people. In addition, the United States continues to use inhumane unilateral

sanctions as a tool to collectively punish the Syrian population. Those illegal actions impose unnecessary hardships and hinder Syria's recovery.

We reiterate our call for the immediate removal of those harmful measures. They must be lifted, both as a legal obligation and as a moral imperative. Similarly, providing impartial and non-politicized humanitarian aid to all regions of Syria is crucial to saving lives. Early-recovery projects should be prioritized in order to offer comprehensive support and to help communities rebuild and strengthen their resilience. Facilitating Syria's reconstruction and ensuring the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their original places of residence must be integral to any comprehensive solution to the current conflict in Syria. The interests of millions of Syrian refugees should not be manipulated for political purposes by certain countries. Delaying the return of Syrian refugees only prolongs their suffering and places an undue burden on neighbouring countries.

Iran welcomes the Syrian Government's decision to extend United Nations access to the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings for an additional three months, until 13 November, along with the extension of access to the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months, approved last month.

We strongly condemn Israel's ongoing aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, and Israel's continued occupation of the Syrian Golan. Israel's malicious activities in the region pose a serious threat to international peace and security. With ironclad support from the United States and the political support of the United Kingdom, the occupying regime of Israel continues to perpetrate its daily atrocities and systematic war crimes against the people of Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank and violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon with full impunity. The Security Council must unequivocally condemn the brutal regime of Israel for its malevolent activities in the region and take decisive action to force that terrorist regime to end its occupation of the Syrian Golan, cease all acts of aggression against Syria and Lebanon and stop the ongoing genocidal war against the Palestinian people.

We share the view expressed by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic that any political solution must include ending the illegal presence of United States forces, halting their exploitation of Syrian resources and stopping their support for terrorist groups and militias. The recent attacks and violence committed



by United States-backed militias and terrorist groups against innocent civilians in Deir ez-Zor, Al-Hasakah and other areas in the eastern and north-eastern regions are alarming.

Iran is committed to a political resolution of the Syrian crisis. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy and commend his active engagement with all parties involved in resolving the conflict. Iran strongly advocates the prompt resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings and supports efforts to hold the ninth round of constitutional discussions in Baghdad, as that option has gained the support of most parties. Furthermore, Iran, along with its Astana format partners, Russia and Türkiye, remains dedicated to achieving long-term normalization in Syria. In that context, we fully support the resumption of Syrian-Turkish dialogue, recognizing its importance in those broader efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the responsibility of the United States for the current situation in Syria and the region. The illegal presence of United States forces is the primary source of instability and insecurity in Syria, providing cover for terrorist groups to strengthen their positions and commit further atrocities. It violates Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, international law, the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015). The claim of fighting terrorism cannot in any way justify those egregious violations. Yet, instead of taking concrete action to stop those severe violations, the United States continues its violations and, at the same time, stands by Israel and actively provides it with substantial military, intelligence and financial support and diplomatic cover to continue its atrocious crimes against other nations of the region.

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

**Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye):** I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings.

The 13-year conflict in Syria has caused immense suffering for millions of Syrians, who are faced with restricted political space, a worsening economy, mass displacement, terrorism, violence and an ever-deteriorating humanitarian situation. Those multiplying crises could have been avoided if the root causes of the conflict had been addressed in a timely manner, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Unfortunately, not only has the Syrian crisis not been resolved, but the region has now been plunged into grave and complicated turmoil.

At this critical juncture, it should be a key priority for all to prevent Syria from descending into a further spiral of regional violence. The gravity of the situation in the Middle East should be a wake-up call that exposes the urgent need for a durable settlement of the Syrian conflict. Inside and outside Syria, all actors have to face that reality and avoid treating the Syrian crisis as a frozen or a post-conflict situation. The only permanent solution lies in a Syria that is governed by the will of all Syrians, with its territorial integrity and unity preserved. A durable settlement is not possible unless all relevant actors put forth a common effort and a common vision focused on four priorities: first, revitalizing the political process by convening the Constitutional Committee without further delay, although unfortunately, obstruction of that effort continues; secondly, creating conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrians to their country; thirdly, combating separatist terrorism to preserve the territorial integrity and unity of Syria; and fourthly, ensuring the uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need in Syria. The Constitutional Committee is at the centre of the United Nations political process for Syria. It is essential to ensure its continuity. With the developments that can be achieved in the political process, further steps can be taken to easily improve people's lives in ground.

There are alarming developments in north-east Syria that should be a source of deep concern for everyone who genuinely cares about preserving the unity and territorial integrity of the country. The latest events in Deir ez-Zor once again show how misguided and unsustainable the support extended to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units (YPG)/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) terrorist organization is. The oppressive practices and grave violations of that terrorist organization against the local population in north-east Syria, especially against children, has been widely documented for years, including by the United Nations. They are doing almost the same in parts of Iraq.

Most recently, as recorded in reports by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the PKK/YPG/SDF terrorist organization revealed yet again its true ugly face by restricting access to the local population in Deir ez-Zor to basic food supplies and drinking water, as well as hindering the delivery of cross-line United Nations humanitarian assistance to the areas of Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad. The PKK and its offshoot, the so-called SDF, have been trying to subjugate the people of Syria for years under the pretext of fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), while

in reality releasing ISIL affiliates and being focused only on its own separatist agenda, as exemplified by its so-called social contract and local election attempts. As such, the PKK is the biggest threat to the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as a grave danger to any meaningful effort towards achieving peace and stability in that country.

Syria also remains beset by a significantly deteriorating humanitarian situation. In the fourteenth year of the crisis, a record 16.7 million people are in need of humanitarian aid inside the country. Despite that, the United Nations humanitarian response capacity is heavily constrained by uncertainties about access and the inadequacy of funding. While we note the continued use of three border crossings for United Nations life-saving cross-border aid deliveries, we call for needs-based, predictable cross-border access rather than artificial time-bound extensions. Last-day, last-minute and short-term extensions are not proper. Similarly, it is necessary to preserve the whole-of-Syria approach, which has been the backbone of the massive United Nations humanitarian response in this complicated conflict situation.

In the light of the worsening humanitarian situation, it is also critical that humanitarian funding for Syria not be decreased and that pledges be swiftly fulfilled. As Türkiye, we will continue to facilitate humanitarian aid deliveries to Syria. We are also cooperating with the United Nations to develop lasting solutions to the water and electricity problems in the north of Syria, and I thank the Acting Under-Secretary-General for mentioning that.

In conclusion, we need a recalibrated focus by the international community, with broader coordination and a holistic approach to Syria. Any meaningful step towards genuine national reconciliation in line with the expectations of the entire Syrian population will contribute to the solution of the Syrian conflict.

I wish you success, Sir, during your presidency of the Council.

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

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor, but I need to respond to some comments that were made by the representative of the Al-Assad regime.

Let us be clear: no one has inflicted more harm on the Syrian people — whether it be economic, political or military — than the Al-Assad regime. Let us not

forget how that war started. The regime can try to deflect blame to others, but the international community will not be fooled by those typical diversions. The regime remains a major security threat to the Syrian people. It has carried out unimaginable atrocities against Syrians, most frighteningly through the regime's use of chemical weapons. It is no wonder that Syrians outside of the country are reluctant to return. Those atrocities will not be forgotten by the international community, and the Syrian regime will be held to account.

My last point: some here made the point that the United States is plundering Syria's resources. That is absolutely, patently false. The United States is not plundering Syria's resources. American soldiers are present in Syria to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, as we have said countless times in the Council. I would therefore call on those who continue to make those false charges about what the United States is doing in Syria to end those false accusations and hold themselves accountable for what they have done to the Syrian people and the prospects for Syria's future.

**The President:** The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

**Mr. Dandy** (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are used to the lies and false allegations put forward by the representative of the United States Administration. Everyone knows that there is no legal basis for the presence of United States troops in my country, under the pretext of combating and defeating Da'esh. I explained that a moment ago and will not speak at length about it. I would just like to refer members to an explicit confession by General Mark Milley, former Chief of Staff of the United States Army who said,

"Before we all get self-righteous about what Israel is doing, and I feel horrible for the innocent people in Gaza dying, we shouldn't forget that we, the United States, killed a lot of innocent people in Mosul, in Raqqa [...] We destroyed 69 Japanese cities, not including Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We slaughtered people in massive numbers [...] men, women and children."

Those words illustrate a very small aspect of the crimes that have been committed by successive United States Administrations throughout history and across the different regions of the world, including my country, Syria.

*The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.*