



Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

9817th meeting

Tuesday, 17 December 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield/Ms. Wu (United States of America)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. Dharmadhikari
Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone	Mr. George
Slovenia	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0928 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



The meeting was called to order at 10.05 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 Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq 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; Mr. Thomas Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Waad al-Kateab, filmmaker and co-founder of Action for Sama; and Mr. Bader Jamous, Chair of the Syrian Negotiations Commission.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: I brief the Security Council from Syria. I am here together with my Deputy. And, as the President just said, Tom Fletcher is also here and will brief the Security Council on the humanitarian situation.

Of course, what we have seen during the past few weeks are events of historic proportions. After the Al-Assad regime, which ruled Syria for some 54 years, fell in two short weeks, Syria now faces a whole new reality.

Let me start by reiterating my sincere condolences to the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who lost loved ones over the nearly 14 years of conflict and my solidarity with the millions who have faced displacement, exile, destruction, detention, abuse, suffering and loss as a result the conflict under the decades-long former regime. I express my heartfelt solidarity with families still searching for information about their missing loved ones.

It seems unreal, but it has been only 11 days since the fall of the former regime. I have already had the pleasure of meeting with a whole range of actors, and my outreach to the Syrians will continue. I hear hopes, and I hear fear. There is a profound and shared sentiment among Syrians that the new situation belongs to them

and that it is their moment to realize their legitimate aspirations. There is great hope that Syria now has a real chance to move towards peace, economic stability, growth, inclusion for all Syrians, accountability and justice.

But many are apprehensive about the future. The challenges ahead are enormous. I worry that, if this is not handled right by both the Syrians and the international community, a turn for the worse will once again be possible. Let me update the Council on the situation on the ground, outline the challenges Syria faces, focus on what the political transition process requires and address accountability.

As Council members are aware, a caretaker authority has assumed power in Damascus, installed by the leadership of the Military Operations Command, the dominant armed coalition in Syria, which is led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and its Commander, Ahmed Al-Sharaa. So far, the caretaker authority is composed of Ministers from the Syrian Salvation Government, which had been the de facto governing authority in Idlib for some years under the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Bashir.

At the same time —and this is important — there are armed opposition groups that operate outside of the Military Operations Command — for instance, parts of the Syrian National Army, most of which act under the auspices of the opposition Syrian National Coalition. In addition, the north-east, as well as some neighbourhoods in Aleppo, remain under the control of the Syrian Democratic Force, supported by the United States. There had been significant hostilities in the past two weeks before a ceasefire was brokered between Türkiye and the United States along the Euphrates River. The five-day ceasefire has expired, and I am seriously concerned about reports of military escalation, as well as reports on military build-ups. Such an escalation could be catastrophic.

Moreover, there is a new situation in the south-west. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force continues to observe Israel Defense Forces personnel and equipment in multiple locations in the area of separation and one location in the area of limitation in the vicinity of the Bravo line. There are media reports of Israeli advances several kilometres into Syrian territory. Israel has carried out more than 350 strikes on military facilities, equipment and supplies across Syria

since the former regime fell, and they have continued, including an enormous attack in Tartous.

Such attacks place a battered civilian population at further risk and undermine the prospects of an orderly political transition. We have also seen reports of the Israeli Cabinet's plan to expand settlements in the Golan. Israel must cease all settlement activities in the occupied Syrian Golan, which are illegal. Attacks on Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must stop.

Let me now turn to the challenges that Syria faces.

The first major challenge, of course, is that the conflict has not ended. Yes, we are seeing a Syria that is stable at present in many parts. Many in Damascus tell me that law and order have improved significantly after two initial days of instability. But stability can be fragile in many parts of Syria. And, in the north-east, there are still front lines and open hostilities in which civilians are being killed, injured and displaced. Civilians must be protected wherever they are. There must be de-escalation towards a nationwide ceasefire, as well as efforts to address tensions among military factions.

The second challenge is the sheer scale of needs. Syria's economy has been ravaged by this dreadful conflict and its infrastructure destroyed, with 90 per cent of Syrians living in poverty. Let me just stress that those are enormous challenges that will require all of our support in a manner that will have to go beyond humanitarian needs, in terms of economic development, reconstruction and a process to address, and ultimately, sanctions.

Of course, the third challenge is political. The Syrian people have sacrificed much so that they can determine their own future and realize their legitimate aspirations. We must ensure that the political process remains on track. Otherwise, I fear renewed instability.

Before travelling to Damascus, I joined representatives of the Arab contact group on Syria, along with Ministers and representatives of Bahrain, France, Germany, Qatar, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. At the meeting the common belief was expressed that the transitional political process must be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and produce an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative Government formed through a transparent process, based on the principles of resolution 2254 (2015). The Aqaba statement emphasized support for my mandate.

In addition, I think that there is a broad understanding that, in the new circumstances, resolution 2254 (2015) cannot be applied mechanically. But the core principles enjoy broad Syrian consensus. While resolution 2254 (2015) identified two parties, one of which has been toppled and no longer figures in the process, it is still the case that the political transition is needed and that it will require an inclusive intra-Syrian process. What would that look like?

First, Syrians need an orderly transition that provides for the preservation of State institutions that serve their interests and provides them with critical services. In that regard, let me take note of the efforts to ensure that already, in terms of safeguarding ministers of the former Government to transfer power and calling on State employees to continue their work. That provides a strong first basis, but it is not enough in itself.

Secondly, the transition must also be credible and inclusive, including the broader spectrum of Syrian society and Syrian parties, so that it inspires public confidence. In that regard, let me emphasize that this is a clear desire expressed by the Syrians themselves. Just as we saw significant military coordination between many groups in the recent operations, now, as we are moving forward and into a full political phase, that should be matched by inclusive political engagement.

Thirdly, there must be a new constitution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Fourthly, there must be free and fair elections, inclusive of all Syrians, as resolution 2254 (2015) envisages, in accordance with international standards. In that regard, let me say that I fully appreciate the need to ensure quick service delivery and law and order. Stability is fundamental. Competence is key too, but none of that is incompatible with a credible and inclusive political transition. It is precisely such an approach that can enable stability and, indeed, prevent new conflict.

I have discussed all of those elements in depth in Damascus. I met with the Commander of the new Administration, Mr. Ahmed al-Sharaa, and Prime Minister of the caretaker authority, Mr. Mohammed al-Bashir. I also met here in Damascus with representatives of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, including armed group representatives, who remain in contact with their leader, Badr Jamous. I also met with Syrian civil society and women. It was heartening

to see so many of them, who for years were speaking across front lines now together in their capital here in Damascus. They continue to be at the forefront of the emergency response and relief to all Syrians. Their inclusive participation is a cornerstone of sustainable peace.

Concrete movement on an inclusive political transition will be key in ensuring that Syria receives the economic support it needs. There is clear international willingness to engage. The needs are immense and can be addressed only with broad support, including a smooth end to sanctions, appropriate action on designations and full reconstruction. It is clear that the period ahead will be critical, and there are international signals that broader measures can gain traction, with progress on a credible and inclusive political transition. That was an important theme of the meetings held in Aqaba, Jordan, which stressed that Syria, at last, has a chance to break decades of isolation. That chance must be seized.

Finally, let me highlight my meeting with Syrian women here in Damascus, as well as the engagement of my Office with women across Syria and those in exile. Syrian women seek assurances that their status and rights will be respected and built upon in any transitional arrangements, with the needs of women and girls fully taken into account, because the reality remains that, in recent years, Syrian women have reported significant backlash. Not only that, but Syrian women must also be part of the transition itself. Otherwise, it cannot be considered to be inclusive.

Yesterday I saw with my own eyes the dungeons and torture and execution chambers of the Saydnaya prison, a testament to the barbarity of the fallen regime towards its own people. I met a man released from Saydnaya just 10 days ago, who told me how he was tortured. An elderly woman also recently released said she wanted justice, first and foremost. Another woman was desperately seeking clarity on the fate of her son, who was detained and whose four children she raised single-handedly.

Of course, Syrian, United Nations and other organizations have been documenting that for years, thanks to the courage of survivors and witnesses, but seeing the reality first-hand was a stark reminder of the centrality of transitional justice and the need for clarification on the fate and whereabouts of missing and disappeared persons and for ensuring due process in

criminal prosecutions as a necessary safeguard against acts of revenge. Without that, Syria and Syrians will not be able to heal. In that regard, let me stress an urgent first step: the protection of evidence and material, as well as the sites of mass graves. We must safeguard the right of the victims and their families and survivors to both truth and justice. We need the immediate release of all those still arbitrarily detained across the country.

Let me say that on this and all fronts, I have been in contact with many parts of the United Nations system, and there is a determination across the system to strengthen the United Nations presence here in Syria.

Syria is for all Syrians. Now is the time for Syrians to step forward and lead. Now is the time to reassure all Syrians that their stake in the future is understood and that it will be embodied in the credible and inclusive transitional arrangements. I have made clear in Damascus my invitation to a dialogue on resolution 2254 (2015) and all other issues relevant to Syrians, so that we can identify a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led way forward.

Of course, it is only 11 days since the fall of the former regime. My door is open, and I hope that in the coming days we can build that dialogue. I understand — we all do — the massive challenges facing the authorities and the need to help concretely now. We understand the need for stability, but stability will not last long if not built on credible and inclusive foundations. The time to build those foundations is now.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Fletcher.

Mr. Fletcher: I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his unflagging work, which I have had the privilege to see first-hand here in Damascus.

As members have heard from Mr. Pedersen, the pace of developments in Syria over the past three weeks has been dramatic. What has not changed is the scale of the humanitarian crisis. Syria was already one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, with 17 million people — more than 70 per cent of the population — in need of support. More than 7 million people were displaced across the country, with millions more Syrians living as refugees. Nearly 13 million people were facing acute food insecurity.

The recent escalation has only added to those needs. More than a million people were displaced

in less than two weeks. Hundreds of civilians were killed or injured, at least 80 of them children. Health services and water supplies, already corroded by years of conflict and declining funding, were interrupted. More than 12,000 schools were temporarily shut down, affecting millions of students. With borders and commercial routes closed, there have been shortages of bread, fuel and other key items. Likewise, the flow of humanitarian support was severely disrupted, with most organizations temporarily suspending operations. Several warehouses have been looted. Multiple aid workers from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent lost their lives.

Thankfully, the situation has begun to stabilize. As I have seen this week, markets, roads and health facilities are reopening. Children have gone back to school. Aid operations are gradually resuming across most of our hubs, including in Aleppo, Homs and here in Damascus. It is critical that we adapt the humanitarian response to the new, albeit still rapidly shifting, conditions. And that is why I am here in Syria.

First, I am here to ensure that we are coordinated. Over the past two days, I have been looking closely at our systems for working together. We want to further support humanitarian leadership by drawing flexibly from the resources from across our hubs, including in Amman and Gaziantep, while leveraging the strength of the system in place for Syria. We are also finding more ways to work closely with cross-border actors in north-east Syria, not only to align efforts but also to ensure the safety of humanitarian actors. Those efforts will ensure that we have a cast-iron grip of the coordination effort and as clear a picture as possible of the emerging needs across the country, and that we can direct resources in a swift and agile way using all available channels.

Tomorrow I will travel to Aleppo, where we are already embarking on that approach. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs there is bringing together United Nations agency teams and NGOs that were previously working in areas formerly controlled by the Al-Assad Government with those working on the cross-border response. I then plan to visit Idlib, where the humanitarian needs are among the most severe. As the situation evolves, and following my visit, we will also swiftly issue an overview of the critical-funding needs for the next three months.

The second reason for my visit is to ensure that the humanitarian community has the best possible conditions in which to work. While here in Damascus, I have met with representatives of the new caretaker Government, including the Commander of the new Administration, Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Mohammed Al-Bashir. I have been encouraged by those discussions, and I am pleased to report that they have committed to what will be an ambitious scaling-up of vital humanitarian support. We have received assurances that they will facilitate the movement of aid personnel and supplies from neighbouring countries, including from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, for as long as humanitarian operations are required. Again, that includes routes into areas controlled by other parties in the north-east.

The intensification of conflict between actors in north-east Syria and its potential humanitarian fallout is a case for concern and warrants urgent attention and efforts for de-escalation.

We also received assurances that access to people in need will be facilitated wherever they are in Syria, including across lines of conflict and in the north-east.

We have received commitments on the issuance of visas, work permits for aid workers and NGO registration documents. The Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria and the authorities are developing a set of guidelines on that.

And we have received commitments on protecting and respecting the principled nature of humanitarian operations. That includes the conduct of independent needs assessments and the selection of beneficiaries, the ability to choose our own partners, including those who have been working in Government-held areas and those currently working in the north-east, and assurances that there will not be restrictions on employing women, who are absolutely essential to our mission. Those commitments alone will not relieve people's suffering, but they are an essential basis for us to scale up operations.

The third reason for my visit is to ensure that I can make concrete requests of the international community, including the Security Council. We therefore need three things from Council members.

First, we need strong, unequivocal messaging that international humanitarian law must be respected, both in any ongoing hostilities and in meeting people's

basic needs. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected. Those on the move must be allowed to do so safely. The missing must be accounted for. Where hostilities have ended, landmines and explosive remnants of war must be removed. And, as the authorities agreed, unhindered humanitarian access to those in need, wherever they are, must be facilitated.

A second request: we need more money. I recognize the generosity of donors for the Syria crisis over the years. Since 2016, more than \$38 billion has gone to the United Nations coordinated appeals for Syria and for the regional refugee response. But this year's humanitarian appeal — the largest country appeal in the world right now — is also one of the most poorly supported. With just two weeks left in 2024, it is less than one third funded — the largest-ever funding gap for the Syria response. Now is the time to invest in the Syrian people, to support flexible funds so that we can respond to changing needs. The Central Emergency Response Fund has already allocated \$32 million to Syria this year. Now is also the time for Member States to work on development support towards rebuilding Syria, reducing dependence on humanitarian support and maintaining essential services.

A third request: we need all States to facilitate the humanitarian effort, including by ensuring that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures do not impede humanitarian operations.

I will travel next to Ankara to discuss the crisis with the Government of Türkiye. Türkiye's facilitation of cross-border humanitarian operations in Syria for many years has been a lifeline. I will also be discussing the crisis with authorities in Lebanon and Jordan, which have been such generous hosts of Syrian refugees.

When war erupted in Syria 13 years ago, I was in Lebanon — just a short drive away that I took yesterday — and neither I nor anyone could have imagined then the full extent of the suffering that the people of Syria would endure for more than a decade. The world let them down. We let them down. But, as the Secretary-General has said, there is now a historic opportunity to put that right and support the Syrian people, especially women and girls, in their hope for a more peaceful future.

I pay tribute to the Syrian people for their patience, but they have waited too long. Giving them that support now will take patience, creativity and determination. The progress we make will be inconsistent, and the

risks of failure great, but that should be a galvanizing project for the United Nations and for the humanitarian movement. And so, at a moment of hope and peril, we must rise to the challenge and back the people of Syria.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. al-Kateab.

Ms. al-Kateab: On 8 December, millions of Syrians scattered across the world — in refugee camps, in exile or inside our homeland — held our breath as we watched the news. It was a moment we sacrificed everything for; a moment of joy, but also one of deep grief — a chapter in Syria's history that will forever remain bittersweet. For the first time, Syrian activists began announcing their real names, reclaiming the identities they had hid for years out of fear. Groups from the early days of the revolution began to reactivate, inspired to think about their role in the Syrian future. It was a moment of victory, born from years of unimaginable suffering.

It is ironic how, eight years ago this very week, I was forcibly displaced from my city, Aleppo. I carried my one-year-old daughter in one arm and my unborn baby in my womb. My hard drives were hidden beneath my clothes, containing the truth of our struggle. I did not know whether we would survive, but I held on to one truth: that the evidence of our suffering would remain, even if I did not make it.

Since that day, many countries have told us to accept the new reality: that they had normalized relations with Al-Assad, a man whose regime killed our loved ones, destroyed our homes and turned our dreams to dust. I refused to believe it, but I began preparing myself for a life in which I would never see a free Syria. Every day I whispered to myself: "If not for me, then for my daughters to see".

When I made my film, *For Sama*, I travelled the world sharing our story. Over and over again, leaders, politicians and diplomats told me: "We wish we had done more; we should have done more." Today I stand here to tell them that they can do more. Yes, history repeats itself, but it rarely gives us the chance to correct our mistakes. This is their chance today.

The fall of the Al-Assad regime did not happen in 11 days or through one recent battle. It happened because of the countless sacrifices, struggles and losses of the Syrian people. It happened because 13 million Syrians were forced from their homes, hundreds of thousands drowned at sea, countless others killed

in bombed schools and hospitals, and hundreds of thousands detained, tortured and forcibly disappeared. It happened when the Syrian people lost everything except their voices, their courage and their hope.

It was not announced with military victories or grand declarations. It was announced by civilians: two young men riding a motorcycle past an empty tank in Umayyad Square, four women blasting an Abdel-Basset al-Sarout song — “Rise up, rise up, Dara’a” — from their car, waving to a future they had not yet seen. These were ordinary people — civilians, not soldiers, not even activists — declaring the fall of a tyrant. But that moment is not the end of our struggle. It is only the beginning of a new chapter.

We ask the Council to act in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and to help us to achieve a real political transition — one that includes all Syrians from all regions and also the diaspora. The transition must lead to a new constitution and free and fair elections. It must adhere to international standards of transparency, justice and accountability.

But that transition cannot happen without justice. The Al-Assad regime has turned Syria into a theatre of unimaginable crimes. Families have been searching for their loved ones for over a decade. In recent days, the release of detainees from Saydnaya was a tragic reminder of that brutality. Heartbreaking videos of the chaos outside prisons filled our screens: families desperately searching for their loved ones, while documents burned and records were destroyed forever. The regime’s cruelty was not just about detention. It was about erasing lives, silencing the truth and leaving families in endless uncertainty.

The father of a dear friend of mine, Wafa Mustafa, was detained in 2013 and his fate is still unknown today. She asked questions that left us all heartbroken: “Where was the United Nations?” “Where was the International Committee of the Red Cross in those critical days?” “Why am I supposed to identify my father’s body on Instagram?” “Why are we seeing documents and identification cards scattered on the ground?” Those are precious pieces of evidence of our beloved ones. They could hold the only truth about what happened to them, and yet we are being denied even that.

The international community must act. Families and loved ones deserve access to the truth, to every prison, to every mass grave and to every part of justice. The bombing must be stopped. Israel’s recent strikes

are a blatant breach of international law, and they must be held accountable. The protection of civilians is vital. In north-east Syria, violence and instability continues to devastate lives. A unified, coordinated approach is urgently needed to build a safe, stable future for all Syrians. We must also not forget the millions of Syrian refugees all over the world. Their future remains frozen, their dignity denied. They are not numbers, they are families — mothers, fathers and children — who deserve stability and the chance to rebuild their lives.

For too long, Syria has been left to bleed while the world debated and hesitated. For too long, we have been waiting for action. The time for excuses is over. This is the time for action. We, the Syrian people, have shown the world our resilience, our courage and our unwavering belief in freedom. I am asking the Council to stand with us, to support our demand for justice and accountability and to help us to build a political transition that reflects the dreams and sacrifices of all Syrians.

To my fellow Syrians, whether in camps, in exile or still holding on inside our homeland: we carry a great responsibility today. The sacrifices of the past 14 years have brought us to this moment. We must rise together, united, to rebuild our country with justice, dignity and freedom for all. This is our chance, and we cannot let it slip away.

To all oppressed people around the world, to political prisoners, to displaced persons and to refugees: hope lives in every voice that refuses to be silenced, in every heart that refuses to give up. Hold on, because the freedom is coming, and it belongs to us all.

As I conclude, I want to pay tribute to all those who sacrificed their lives so that we could see this day. We carry their memory, their courage and their dreams with us. Today, as the Security Council holds its first briefing on Syria with freedom, Syria without Al-Assad, we take our first steps into a new future. This is only the beginning.

The President: I thank Ms. al-Kateab for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Jamous.

Mr. Jamous (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I pay tribute to the souls of the martyrs of Syria who died for the sake of our country.

I stand before the Security Council today on behalf of the great Syrian people, to express our pride and honour on this historic day when the sun of freedom rose over Syria. The day of 8 December represents the triumph of the will of the Syrian people, which compelled the authoritarian regime to flee Damascus. That day will remain immortalized in the memory of Syrians.

We had warned time and again that the patience of the Syrian people, who were committed to seeking a negotiated peaceful settlement, would not last forever. Unfortunately, the Syrians lost their trust in the ability of the international community and the United Nations to protect the humanitarian principles and to obtain justice for those peoples seeking it.

For 13 years, the Syrian opposition, represented by the Syrian Negotiations Commission, spared no effort and showed maximum flexibility to ensure a peaceful political transition, but the authoritarian regime remained the main obstacle. It ignored all the initiatives led by the four international envoys, while the Syrians paid the highest price with their blood and lives.

Syrians were displaced all over the world. They were forced to become refugees, seeking security and dignity. The opposition took it upon itself to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people towards a State of law, freedom, justice and citizenship. Our battle was not only with the regime, but also with the regional and international polarization that made our task more difficult. Yet we did not stop the struggle despite the difficult questions we faced. Where is the political solution? Where is the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015)? Today, after the fall of the regime, the extent of the crimes and violations committed by that regime against our people has become clear to the world. Prisons and detention centres have revealed brutal atrocities that will remain a stain on the history of humankind.

From this platform, we affirm that we will continue to prosecute the regime and its fugitive President judicially, and we will spare no effort to achieve justice and redress for the victims. Transitional justice and accountability are not an option, but a necessity to ensure that those crimes do not happen again.

We value the efforts being made by the current Administration and its President, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, and the Head of the interim Government, Mr. Al-Bashir, in Damascus, to restore security and provide services

to citizens. We affirm our joint efforts to build a new Syria, a State in which everyone has equal rights and duties, free from foreign interference and maintaining balanced relations with its neighbours and friends. This victory would not have been possible without the sacrifices of all Syrians: the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for freedom, the detainees who endured patiently in the cells of injustice, the refugees who suffered for many years in camps, the revolutionaries who faced death to liberate the homeland, the journalists who conveyed the voice of truth, the politicians who fought in international forums, the civil society that innovated practical solutions despite the challenges, the legal professionals who pursued criminals, the Syrian women who embodied steadfastness and determination and the Syrian youth who invested in their education to build Syria's bright future.

I would also like to express our sincere thanks to the States that stood by us until the very end, supported us and believed that the Syrian people are capable of change and will not give up until they achieve their freedom. Those States have been a key partner in supporting our right to freedom and dignity, and we will never forget their courageous stand with us.

The tyrannical regime has left Syria in economic ruin, with 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. The time has come to lift the economic sanctions imposed on the Syrian State and increase humanitarian and relief support in order to enable us to rebuild our country. Despite the changes that Syria has experienced, we still believe that the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015) constitutes the road map for realizing the aspirations of our people. While it is true that the circumstances have changed and that the regime that was party to that resolution has collapsed, the resolution and its essence of achieving self-governance by the people through fair elections under the supervision of the United Nations is still the principle on which we rely, to start a dialogue in Damascus for all national forces under the supervision of the United Nations. Accordingly, we call for the formation of an inclusive transitional national Government that represents all segments of the Syrian people, including revolutionaries, politicians, civil society and all components of the Syrian people, while ensuring the representation of women and youth.

Secondly, there is a need to convene a comprehensive national conference, organized by the transitional Government, to select a constituent assembly of elders, experts, scientists, politicians, statesmen, prominent

figures in society, veterans and youth to draft a new constitution that expresses the aspirations of Syrian men and women.

Thirdly, there is a need to organize a referendum on the new constitution and move towards free and fair elections in a safe and neutral environment, under the supervision of the United Nations. We also emphasize the importance of taking the following measures: establishing a fund to support released detainees to ensure that their needs are met and reintegrate them into society after years of suffering; and establishing a fund to support the families of the martyrs of the revolution who died under torture in the regime's brutal detention centres, on the battlefields or in wars launched against innocent civilians, to honour their sacrifices and compensate their families, which is the least that can be done in response to the tragic realities that can be seen on television screens today, in Saydnaya or elsewhere, or in the mass graves that we discover every day.

Fourthly, it is necessary to immediately reinstate those who defected from the regime and were unjustly dismissed from their jobs, and pay them all their financial dues, as they paid everything they had to stand by their people and their families. A fund should also be established to support refugees and displaced persons in their return to Syria in order to ensure that their needs are met and ensure their return in a dignified and safe manner.

We are determined to build a new Syria — a State of law and justice and a republic that belongs to this age and protects all its citizens without discrimination, that will remain united, land and people. The future Syria will be a model of a modern State governed by the minds and free will of its people.

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

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

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General and Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. Tom Fletcher, and Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen, not only for their briefings but also for their invaluable work over the past few days, including in Syria. I would also like to thank Mr. Bader Jamous, Chair of the Syrian Negotiation Committee, for his briefing and

Ms. Waad al-Kateab, co-founder of the Action for Sama foundation, for sharing her story with us.

In the space of just a few weeks, a new chapter has begun in Syria. The Syrians face a colossal and formidable task: they must ensure that justice is done for the darkest pages of the previous chapter. And I would like to join the Special Envoy in extending my condolences to all the Syrian families for all the suffering they have endured. Now is the time to write a new page of history. Switzerland will continue to support the Syrian people's quest for freedom, justice, dialogue and reconciliation, the promotion of a plural identity and the rebuilding of a nation on the foundations of the rule of law.

During our two-year term on the Security Council, Switzerland has reiterated that only an inclusive political solution, led by and for the Syrians, facilitated by the United Nations and its Special Envoy and based on international law, can put an end to the conflict. The emerging authorities in Syria now have a historic opportunity to clearly distinguish themselves from their predecessors by supporting an inclusive and sustainable political transition, in line with the main elements of resolution 2254 (2015). Those elements include a national ceasefire, which must also be observed by all parties to the conflict, starting with Syria's neighbours; respect for the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and human rights, including the protection of minorities, and for Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity; inclusive governance, with the active participation, in particular of women and civil society, whose vital role Switzerland has constantly promoted; the rejection of all forms of terrorism; consideration of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in all their diversity, and the holding of free, inclusive, transparent and fair elections.

Switzerland is also deeply concerned by the latest developments in the occupied Syrian Golan. We call for any violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement to cease immediately and reiterates our support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Switzerland recalls that the Golan Heights constitute occupied territory. We condemn the announcements by the Israeli Government that it intends to double the number of settlements there, which are illegal under international humanitarian law.

Switzerland will continue to make Geneva available for all peace talks and initiatives under the aegis of the United Nations and its Special Envoy. And Geneva is already currently hosting two key institutions for the transition.

The recent release of many detainees in Syria has confirmed the scale of the atrocities committed in the Syrian Government's infamous prisons, but it has also brought a glimmer of hope to families still awaiting news of their loved ones. The right to know the fate of missing relatives is firmly anchored in the Geneva Conventions. The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria, whose mandate is strictly humanitarian, is well placed to shed light on the fate of tens of thousands of missing persons throughout the country, in cooperation with associations of the families of victims and other humanitarian actors.

Finally, Switzerland reiterates that there can be no lasting peace without justice in accordance with the principles of the rule of law. Evidence, especially that which is established by archives and accounts of victims and witnesses — which can support the judicial authorities in holding perpetrators accountable — must be preserved. In that regard, Switzerland underscores the critical role of 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.

Over the past two years, Switzerland has served as the penholder on humanitarian issues in Syria. During its term on the Council, and especially after the terrible earthquakes of February 2023, Switzerland has been committed to ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches all those in need safely, quickly and without hindrance, using every possible means of delivery, and throughout the entire territory of Syria. We have underlined the importance of humanitarian exemptions from sanctions to facilitate humanitarian activities, particularly in the areas of health, education and food security. And we will continue to advance discussion on that issue in the light of the changes to the country's leadership.

The overlapping crises over the past 13 years have claimed more than half a million lives, destroyed critical infrastructure, pushed more than 90 per cent of the population below the poverty line and displaced more than 16 million people. Millions of refugees are now contemplating a return, which must be voluntary,

safe and dignified, in accordance with international law, to ensure the protection of refugees and human rights in general. Switzerland reiterates its solidarity with the Syrian people. In that connection, we have just allocated a further SF2 million for emergency aid in Syria.

We welcome the visit to Syria by the Under-Secretary-General and Director of OCHA, Mr. Fletcher. He has taken stock of on the commitments made by the emerging authorities to protect civilians, continue essential services and to open all border crossings for humanitarian aid. Those commitments must be put into practice and maintained over time.

As Switzerland concludes its time on the Security Council, it calls on all members to pursue the path opened up on 8 December in the same spirit of cooperation and to fully support a political transition led by and for the Syrian people. The search for a political solution in Syria in accordance with the terms adopted by the Council has stalled for too long. It is time to demonstrate unequivocal support towards achieving peace and security in Syria and in the region as a whole.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Tom Fletcher. We also listened to the assessments by the Chair of the Syrian Negotiating Committee, Mr. Bader Jamous, and the representative of civil society, Ms. Waad al-Kateab.

We are closely following the developments in the brotherly country of Syria, which has entered a new — “transitional” — period in its history after the majority of the country's territory came under the control of an alliance of armed groups. It is clear that no one can predict today the outcome and the political and socioeconomic ramifications of the seismic shifts taking place in the country. We are all hoping for the best. I would like to underscore that the Russian Federation has always stood with the brotherly Syrian people. We have always provided, are providing and will continue to provide them with the necessary support.

It is the Syrian people, in all their ethnic and religious diversity, who must determine Syria's future — a future that is currently very uncertain given the internal instability, which poses a palpable threat to its sovereignty and statehood. The territorial integrity of the country is now more vulnerable than ever, and there is a real risk that Syria will break down along

ethnic and religious lines into a number of cantons. Syrians today must make every effort to ensure a truly inclusive national dialogue without separating people into losers and winners. That is a very serious and difficult task, and the international community must make every effort to contribute to it.

Another equally serious threat for Syrians today is posed by the actions of Israel, which, using the artificial pretext of self-defence and security, has essentially launched a full-scale operation to destroy the country's defence capabilities. The Israeli Air Force, which also used to carry out arbitrary massive air strikes in the past, has reportedly carried out more than 500 air strikes since 8 December alone. As a result, Syria's navy, along with 90 per cent of its air defence and missile defence systems and half of its air force, have been virtually destroyed. In addition, massive bombardments have targeted Government buildings, as well as dozens of manufacturing and storage facilities in Damascus, Al-Suwayda, Dara'a, Homs, Tartus, Latakia and Palmyra. Idlib, Al-Tanf and other areas across the Euphrates River obviously remain outside of that equation. In the early hours of 14 December, the Israeli air force struck facilities in Damascus on Mount Qasioun, destroying electronic warfare stations.

Furthermore, we cannot fail to mention the land incursion by Israeli troops into the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, which is a flagrant violation of the provisions of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and an open encroachment on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a neighbour. According to reports, Israeli troops have not only occupied the Syrian side of the line of separation but have also advanced much further. Israeli military equipment has been spotted almost 20 kilometres away from Damascus. The arguments that peacekeepers must be protected sound particularly cynical against that backdrop, given that the peacekeepers are now essentially very deep behind Israeli lines.

Nonetheless, the ability to effectively defend one's borders, which Israel is now directly attacking, is one of the basic factors of Syrian sovereignty. We urge everyone to call a spade a spade and not to sweep the facts under the rug if they are inconvenient for West Jerusalem. If Israel really wants to have good relations with its neighbours, then those relations should be built not from the position of force but on an equal and mutually beneficial footing.

At the current juncture, one of the main tasks, in our view, is safeguarding Syrian State institutions and making sure that they are performing their functions to support daily life in Syria. It is important to ensure the rule of the fundamental norms of law, to protect the rights of the civilian population, including the vulnerable categories, to ensure civil peace and national harmony and to prevent acts of vandalism, violence and bloodshed. In that context, we note the statements made by the de facto Syrian authorities expressing their intention to facilitate the work of the State apparatus, maintain order and security, firmly suppress the acts of criminal elements and to prevent the administering of extrajudicial justice. We hope that those approaches will be supported by all Syrian stakeholders.

On a separate note, we would like to emphasize that Syria is a place where Muslims and Christians have lived together for many centuries, just as Damascus is the seat of the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, John X. He is the Head of the Antioch Church, which is a sister-communion of the Russian Orthodox Church. We hope that Syria will continue to remain a homeland for all its citizens, regardless of their religion.

We are convinced that the path towards sustainable normalization in the Syrian Arab Republic lies through the launching of an inclusive inter-Syrian dialogue that takes into account the legitimate interests of all ethno-religious groups in society, aimed at achieving national harmony and promoting a comprehensive political settlement process in accordance with the basic principles set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

We support Geir Pedersen's efforts to facilitate national de-escalation and launch a political process, with the mediation and support of the United Nations. We remain convinced that there is a need to harmonize the approaches of the main international players in order to create conditions that are conducive to stabilizing the situation in Syria. We believe that the Special Envoy should play a leading role in coordinating that work. In that context, we welcome Mr. Pedersen's initiative to convene an international conference on Syria and call on all parties concerned to assist in implementing that proposal.

Given the dramatic changes in Syria, we believe that it would be premature to make any optimistic forecasts or talk seriously about the improved humanitarian conditions of ordinary Syrians. We too would like to see Syria prosper, but Syrians are

still facing a profound humanitarian crisis today. Some 90 per cent of the population lives in poverty, and 70 per cent of the population needs urgent food aid. Spiking inflation and currency devaluations triggered by recent developments have aggravated the socioeconomic conditions of Syrians. In some parts of Syria, bread prices have increased by 900 per cent since 27 November. The disruption of supply chains due to the closure of borders may lead to increased shortages of resources and means of sustenance.

Another pressing issue is the forced displacement of people. Some refugees are returning to Syria, but there is also an outflow of people from the country. More than 1 million people have been forced to flee their homes since the fighting escalated, the majority of whom are women and children, driven by extremely difficult conditions both within and outside the country. We must also remember those who have recently fled Lebanon into Syria because of the Israeli bombings. They need help and at the very least they need their safety to be assured.

We are concerned about reports that humanitarian activities in Syria are extremely limited now. Humanitarian workers have reported security issues, power cuts and instances of looting. In Damascus in particular, warehouses holding humanitarian aid have been looted. At the same time, we support the determination of United Nations humanitarian agencies to maintain their presence on the ground and continue providing assistance to those in need. The humanitarian crisis in Syria, which has reached a catastrophic level, requires urgent and coordinated action by the entire international community. Regrettably, the United Nations humanitarian appeal on Syria is seriously underfunded and has received only one third — 32 per cent — of the required funding. In that regard, we would like to ask the so-called traditional donors whether they will uphold the principles of humanity and impartiality when it comes to the Syrian humanitarian file, or whether they will persist with their customary sanctions crusade against the Syrian population. Sanctions must be lifted because — as we have always said — they affect ordinary people. For our part, we will continue to provide assistance to the brotherly Syrian people.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings, in particular because of their valuable work in this complex situation.

I listened closely to Ms. al-Kateab and Mr. Jamous, whom I also thank.

On behalf of Ecuador, I extend our support to the Syrian people and solidarity with their aspirations for a future of genuine peace and development. The current situation in Syria is an opportunity to restore the rule of law, encourage national reconciliation and offer the Syrian people the conditions of well-being and security that they were denied over the past 13 years. Ecuador agrees with the words of the Secretary-General on the need to restore the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. We also support the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and reiterate our position of not recognizing the annexation of territories by force.

We commend Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to support and assist in a comprehensive and participatory political transition process, based on the principles of resolution 2254 (2015), which should be respected, as Mr. Pedersen mentioned. Over the past two years, we have stressed the need to comply with international humanitarian law and prioritize a Syrian-led inclusive and participatory political dialogue, with the support of the region, the United Nations and the international community as a whole. That position remains unchanged. Establishing a meaningful and sustainable dialogue based on genuine concern for the Syrian population is an ethical imperative.

The conflict in Syria has had devastating consequences for civilians. Some 70 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance, 7 million internally displaced people, half a million children with severe malnutrition problems — those are numbers that illustrate the precarious conditions that civilians face and the urgency of improving them. All cross-line and cross-border modalities for humanitarian access must be kept operational to ensure the predictability and sustainability of humanitarian assistance, while adapting it to the new reality. Hostilities must end to make way for the restoration of the more than 12,000 schools that were closed, the rehabilitation of health and protection systems and the rebuilding of civilian infrastructure decommissioned as a result of the conflict.

Given the current circumstances in the country, Ecuador calls on the Syrian transitional authorities to adopt and implement the necessary measures to prevent non-State actors from gaining access to, and

using weapons of, mass destruction, in particular chemical weapons, pursuant to the implementation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Today more than ever before, it is essential to facilitate the population's access to transparent accountability mechanisms and strengthen efforts to obtain information on the fate of the more than 100,000 disappeared persons.

At the end of our term in the Security Council, the situation in Syria has met with unexpected change. Given the complex situation, we hope that genuine dialogue in good faith will be prioritized. We also hope that the international community's channels of communication and assistance to Syria will remain open to promote a rebuilding of the social fabric, the establishment of pluralistic institutions and a lasting peace and security in Syria and the region.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and my own country, Algeria, as well as Guyana (A3+).

At the outset, the A3+ would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Fletcher for their valuable briefings. We listened carefully to the briefings by the representatives of civil society.

Our meeting is being held in a unique context. Syria, a nation exhausted by conflict, can now choose the long road to peace. That situation brings immense hope for Syrians. However, it also causes significant concern, as the fragile calm of recent days risks being disrupted, which would plunge Syria into a renewed crisis that no one wishes to see.

The A3+ firmly believes that the time has come for a genuine Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process under the auspices of the United Nations for a new Syria that unites all Syrians — yes, all Syrians — regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination. All Syrians, including women and young people, should be fully and meaningfully engaged in that political process. The involvement of civil society is also key to ensuring a successful transition in Syria towards the realization of the aspirations of the Syrian people.

In that regard, we fully support the efforts of the Special Envoy and call for the meaningful implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), including

the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body with full executive powers. We also stress the critical role of the United Nations at this juncture, underscoring that the Syrian people should be able to rely on the Organization's support and expertise as they navigate the path ahead towards building a strong and sustainable culture of good governance. It is time for inclusivity, not division. It is time for dialogue, not arms.

The A3+ reaffirms its unwavering commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. We firmly reject any attempt to divide Syria. To move forward from its history of violence, Syria should not be an arena of polarization or for the rivalry of external Powers. The A3+ stresses that only the Syrian people will freely decide the future of Syria.

The fragile situation must not be exploited for the resurgence of terrorism. In that context, decisive and collaborative action is required.

Furthermore, the A3+ reiterates that Syria's territorial integrity must be respected by all. In that regard, we express our grave concern over the recent military incursions by the Israel Defense Forces into Syrian territory, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We emphasize the critical role of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in maintaining peace and stability in the region. We also reject any unilateral actions undermining its mandate or mission. The A3+ reaffirms the United Nations resolutions related to the Golan Heights, underscoring that the Golan is a Syrian territory under occupation. We call for full respect for the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, including the status of the area of separation. We urge all parties to comply with their obligations in that regard,

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire, representing one of the most pressing challenges for the international community. Nearly 17 million people are now in need of assistance. The latest developments have exacerbated the situation, with over 1 million people displaced in recent days. The A3+ expresses its grave concern over those developments, and we call for broad mobilization to enable humanitarian actors to address the urgent needs of the population.

Continued fighting, particularly in the north-east, will only worsen the humanitarian situation. We urge all parties to comply with their obligations under

international humanitarian law, including those related to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We call for an immediate nationwide ceasefire to ensure freedom of movement for humanitarian actors. Unhindered humanitarian access must be guaranteed through all available mechanisms, including cross-border operations, to provide essential assistance to those in need. The A3+ calls upon donors to mobilize adequate funding for the humanitarian response plan in Syria. Increasing needs demand more resources. The Syrian people must not be abandoned.

We stress that the return of displaced Syrians to their homes must be voluntary, safe and dignified. No one should be forced to return. Conditions must be created in Syria through early recovery and reconstruction to facilitate that process.

The latest developments in Syria have shown that unresolved crises do not simply fade away — they re-emerge. If a comprehensive and inclusive solution is not found for the situation in Syria, the repercussions will be disastrous for the region. For the A3+, it is the responsibility of the international community to stand with the Syrian people and help them build a brighter future for their country. The international community should not repeat the mistakes made elsewhere in the region.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their informative briefings. I also thank Ms. Waad al-Kateab and Mr. Bader Jamous for their words.

Since 27 November, we have witnessed rapid and dramatic changes in the state of affairs in Syria. Although it is premature to use concrete terms in relation to the de facto authorities, we take note that the current caretaker Government has expressed its will for a smooth and peaceful transfer of power. In that regard, we appreciate the efforts made by Special Envoy Pedersen, including by meeting with Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa and Mr. Mohammed Al-Bashir in Damascus, as well as with other relevant counterparts. Japan is committed to backing the efforts of the Syrian people to realize a political transition process in the spirit of the principles of resolution 2254 (2015) that leads to credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance. The future Government must ensure respect for the rule of law and human rights, including women's rights. It also needs to provide protection to all Syrians, including religious and ethnic minorities.

There has been a succession of reports of the tragic evidence of the atrocities committed by the Al-Assad regime, including torture in detention centres such as the Saydnaya prison. The former regime must be held accountable for its crimes and justice must be served. As the Special Envoy said, providing immediate and necessary support to the victims and their families is urgent. We support the roles of the relevant bodies in that regard in shedding light on what has happened, and is happening, in order to restore the dignity of detainees and determine the fates of the missing.

Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of continuing our efforts through the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and other partners to secure, declare and destroy Syria's remaining chemical-weapon stockpiles. We must prevent terrorist and extremist groups from acquiring any weapons of mass destruction.

We must not forget those who are suffering as a result of the nearly 14-year civil war. More than 70 per cent of the population still need humanitarian assistance and the current upheaval has only increased that need. We understand that, in some border areas, the movement of refugees returning to Syria has been observed. The authorities must ensure conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary returns of all those who were forced to flee the country.

Japan is concerned about the deployment of Israeli forces beyond the area of separation in the Golan Heights. Although the Israeli Government has described that move as a temporary and defensive measure, we believe that further explanation is required as to the grounds for those military actions, including how they could be justified under the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. We are also concerned about the recent announcement by the Israeli Government of the expansion of settlements in the Golan Heights, the annexation of which by Israel the Government of Japan does not recognize. Such settlement activities are a violation of international law. Japan urges Israel to avoid any actions that would exacerbate the situation.

The door to a new era is beginning to open. Beyond it, there is a need to build a new nation that is open and truly a land of peace for the Syrian people. We cannot accept the occurrence of a new round of oppression, violence or tragedy. The future of Syria should be determined by the Syrian people themselves. We stand with the people of Syria.

Mr. Dharmadhikari (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher for their briefings, as well as Mr. Bader Jamous and Ms. Waad al-Kateab for their briefings and first-hand accounts of the current situation.

The fall of Bashar Al-Assad's regime has ushered in a historic new phase for Syria and the Syrian people. After years of brutal repression, suffering and deep divisions, the time has come for reconciliation and reconstruction in Syria and for justice for the thousands of men, women and children victimized by the regime. Some 13 years of civil war have left the country utterly depleted, with immense needs. A large part of the population has been forced to flee far from their homes. The economy must be rebuilt, and the country rebuilt. The immediate priority must be to bring about a cessation of hostilities throughout the country. We must break the cycle of violence. All civilians, including ethnic and religious minorities, must be protected in compliance with international human rights law. International humanitarian law must be respected. We have taken note of the first encouraging statements of the de facto authorities in that regard. France, which has high expectations concerning those issues, will judge the authorities based on their actions over time. Humanitarian aid must finally reach all civilian populations in need in Syria throughout the country.

At the same time, an orderly political transition process that is representative of all Syrian opposition movements and de facto authorities must be established, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and its main objectives, while preserving State institutions. The United Nations, through the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, has a key role to play in facilitating that process. All segments of Syrian society must come together at the same table to discuss the future of their country. The relaunching of a political process should be led by the Syrians, in particular by women and young people, and must lead to building a future that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people in all their diversity. The process must include human rights guarantees and the fight against impunity, in particular for those who disappeared, were tortured or were arbitrarily detained under the Al-Assad's regime.

It will also be critical that the new Syria does not give way to a resurgence of extremism and terrorism,

against which the fight must continue, in particular the fight against Da'esh. The utmost vigilance must also be exercised with regard to the dispersion of weapons, including from Syria's chemical programme. The fall of Bashar Al-Assad's regime offers a historic opportunity to destroy those chemical weapons. The new de facto authorities must seize this opportunity and cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. As part of the process, France stands ready to continue assisting the Syrian people while their humanitarian needs remain immense. In the immediate term, it is vital that humanitarian assistance reach all Syrians safely through all routes possible.

Lastly, France is following with concern the developments in the Golan. We call on Israel to withdraw from the area, to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to fully comply with the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, which must be upheld by its signatories — Israel and Syria. France reiterates its full support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, whose security must be preserved.

For 13 years, France has stood by the Syrian people in their fight for freedom and against barbarism. It has supported, and continues to support, the Syrian political opposition, which has a central role to play in the political transition under way in Damascus. France will continue to stand by the Syrian people in this new period of hope that is unfolding before them.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings. I have also listened attentively to the statements made by the other briefers.

The recent significant changes in the situation in Syria have been a matter of great concern to China, which has long pursued a policy of friendship and cooperation with Syria, has not interfered in the country's internal affairs and has respected the choices of the Syrian people. We sincerely hope that Syria will achieve peace and restore stability as soon as possible, and we are ready to play a constructive role to that end.

I would like to share the following four points.

First, it is imperative to stabilize the security situation. We call on all concerned parties in Syria to remain calm and refrain from taking any action that would escalate the situation or trigger new conflicts.

All parties are obliged to take measures to put an end to attacks targeting civilians and to protect the security of diplomatic missions and foreign nationals. We hope that Syria's State institutions will remain operational to create the conditions for the restoration of social order and that influential countries, especially countries in the region, will play a constructive role in stabilizing the situation in Syria. We are gravely concerned about Israel's recent air strikes against Syria and its entry into the Golan region, as well as its claim that it will expand settlements in the Golan, and we call on Israel to cease those actions.

Secondly, the long-term solution is to promote a political settlement. China supports Syria in implementing resolution 2254 (2015), advancing its domestic political process in line with the principle of a process that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and developing a national reconstruction plan through inclusive dialogue. The international community should effectively safeguard Syria's independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity; respect Syria's ethnic and religious traditions; and allow the Syrian people to make their own decisions. The will of the Syrian people must be respected to avoid national division and the fragmentation of the situation in the country. China supports the active mediation role of the United Nations and the work of Special Envoy Pedersen in facilitating dialogue among all parties and reaching an arrangement that accommodates the interests of all sides.

Thirdly, the clear bottom line is the fight against terrorism. Terrorism, a common enemy of humankind, poses a serious threat to international peace and security. In future, Syria must stand firm against all forms of terrorism and extremist forces. The Syrian territory must not be used to support terrorism or threaten the security of other countries. With regard to counter-terrorism, States have an obligation to combat all terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party. The international community should draw all lessons from the past and reject double standards.

Fourthly, it is the responsibility of all parties to alleviate the humanitarian situation. The dramatic change in the situation in Syria has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis. China appreciates the efforts undertaken by United Nations agencies to resume humanitarian operations in Syria and

calls on all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access in order to facilitate the humanitarian operations of United Nations agencies.

The international community must lend a helping hand to Syria to help it improve its humanitarian situation. The illegitimate unilateral sanctions long imposed on Syria by some countries have seriously impeded Syria's economic and social development and caused great harm to the Syrian people. They must be lifted immediately.

For more than a year since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict, the Middle East has witnessed relentless turmoil. Tensions have escalated in the Palestinian-Israeli, Lebanese-Israeli, Iraqi-Israeli and Red Sea situations coupled a recent shift in the situation in Syria. The Middle East region is mired in constant turbulence and frequent conflicts, seriously affecting international peace and security. If left unchecked, the situation will only drag more countries and peoples into the quagmire of war. The international community must work with a greater sense of urgency and responsibility to find ways to de-escalate the conflicts and promote the return of peace and stability to the region at an early date. To that end, China supports the Security Council's efforts to speak out as soon as possible on the situation in Syria, sending a positive signal of commitment to settling the Syrian issue and reflecting its important role.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that, as a strategic partner of the Middle East, China is ready to work with the international community and continue to make unremitting efforts to bring lasting peace and stability to Syria and to restore peace and tranquillity to the Middle East region.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I would also like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Tom Fletcher for their comprehensive briefings. I also thank Ms. al-Kateab and Mr. Jamous for sharing their personal stories and insightful observations.

After 13 years of devastating civil war, Syria has demonstrated that a Syrian-led political transition, once dismissed by some as a hollow ambition, is now proving to be an achievable goal. However, how we navigate this transformative juncture will determine whether Syria can rebuild itself as a legitimate State for all Syrians.

Let me highlight the following points in that regard.

First, the caretaker Government should ensure a peaceful transition of power through a political process based on the principles enshrined in resolution 2254 (2015). The keys here are legitimacy and inclusiveness. We note the Prime Minister's statement that his term will last until 1 March of next year. His emphasis on the temporary nature of the caretaker mandate is a good start, and we look forward to a peaceful, free and fair election as early as practicable. Sustainable governance for Syria, a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian State, inherently requires inclusivity. No community or group, including ethnic or religious minorities and women, should be excluded. In that regard, we note with deep interest the caretaker Government's commitment to social reconciliation and cohesion among all communities; and we look forward to seeing those commitments translated into tangible actions.

Secondly, all hostilities throughout the country must cease in order to stabilize Syria and safeguard its territorial integrity at this critical juncture. In particular, the intensified hostilities in northern Syria, the Golan incursions and Israel's airstrikes across the country are deeply concerning. Even more disturbing is Israel's plan to expand its settlements in the occupied Golan Heights, contrary to its obligations under the Geneva Conventions and resolution 497 (1981). Exploiting Syria's turmoil for territorial gain is unacceptable. All parties must respect relevant agreements, including the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces and last week's Syrian National Army-Syrian Democratic Forces ceasefire agreement.

Thirdly, Syria's deteriorating humanitarian situation should be urgently addressed. Pressing challenges, including winterization needs and large population flows in the wake of the sudden downfall of Al-Assad, call for swift and enhanced international assistance on the ground. For its part, the Republic of Korea has thus far contributed \$26 million this year to mitigate the suffering of Syrians.

Meanwhile, indications of revitalizing economic activity and the resumption of public services require a fresh approach to help this transition. Jobs, clean water, education, healthcare and public safety are all critical for uniting communities, rebuilding the nation and laying the foundation for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees. In that regard, we welcome the early recovery strategy announced by the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs last month and look forward to its effective implementation in order to address the imminent humanitarian crisis and foster long-term resilience.

Fourthly, justice and reconciliation must anchor Syria's new political order. Colombia's experience over the past decade illustrates the complexities of implementing inclusive transitional justice and underscores the absolute necessity of such efforts for enduring peace. In that vein, we keenly note the caretaker Government's amnesty decree for conscripted soldiers, alongside its proclamation that it will prosecute war criminals.

In that connection, ongoing actions to clarify the fate of missing persons are critical. While the liberation of the Saydnaya prison is an extremely painful reminder of the Al-Assad regime's barbaric brutality, more than 100,000 missing persons remain tragically unaccounted for. As the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP) emphasized in its statement last week, all parties on the ground must submit any relevant information to the IIMP to help clarify the fate and whereabouts of the missing Syrians.

Last but not least, transitional authorities must fully cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to ensure accountability for Syria's past use of chemical weapons, a long-standing expectation of the Council. At the same time, substantial quantities of chemical weapons remain unaccounted for, posing grave risks to regional security, particularly amid the current power vacuum. We note with expectation the caretaker Government's expressed willingness to collaborate with the OPCW and urge it to strictly honour its own commitment.

Meanwhile, we note the OPCW Director-General's remark that air strikes targeting facilities not only bear the risk of contamination but also jeopardize the destruction of valuable evidence for investigations related to the use of chemical weapons.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea hopes that this historic positive momentum should be not only preserved, but also fortified so that the Syrian people can reclaim their future. Let us stand united for a dignified, stable and peaceful future for all Syrians, underpinned by basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude to the briefers,

including Ms. al-Kateab and Mr. Jamous, for their valuable contributions. My country greatly appreciated the voice of Special Envoy Pedersen after the fall of Al-Assad regime, as well as his engagement with caretaker authorities in the days that followed.

The transfer of power in Syria carries profound emotional weight for a nation that has endured years of conflict, loss and fractured unity. For many, the idea of change is both a beacon of hope and a source of anxiety. It symbolizes the possibility of healing a war-torn country and rebuilding a future rooted in dignity and justice. Yet it also brings deep fears of continued instability, reprisals and the resurfacing of old wounds.

Today Syrians find themselves at a crossroads, entering uncharted waters, filled with hope that their legitimate aspirations to live a life in peace, freedom and prosperity could be realized at last.

In that regard, I would like to make the following remarks.

First, a prosperous future depends on a credible and inclusive political transition, an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, which should take place in line with the key principles of resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, I would like to emphasize that women must be able to participate fully, safely and meaningfully in all processes. In that process, Syria must abide by all relevant Council resolutions. We stress all parties' obligations related to the fight against terrorism. In particular, we would like to underscore the importance of preventing the Islamic State and other groups from re-establishing their capabilities and denying them safe haven in Syria. The caretaker authorities must also respect Syria's other international obligations, including the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Secondly, years of hostilities across all of Syria have exacerbated humanitarian needs. We join others in urging for additional international support for the efforts of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to surge humanitarian aid to support civilians in need across Syria. We expect the caretaker authorities to hold true to their commitments of ensuring full humanitarian access and the continuity of essential services. All efforts should be accompanied by preventing further displacement and disruption of humanitarian access.

Thirdly, we call upon all States to ensure that all those responsible for the crimes committed are held accountable. It is equally important that evidence of atrocities is preserved and documented. We call on all parties to cooperate fully with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, which we hope will be operational as soon as possible, as well as with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. Survivors, victims and their loved ones deserve justice, truth and reparations. Accounting for the missing and ensuring that families receive the clarity and recognition they desperately need should be a priority.

The sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of Syria are imperative. We echo the Secretary-General's concern about the recent extensive violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. There is no way around the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, including the principles regarding the area of separation, which must be fully respected and implemented. Slovenia fully supports the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the implementation of its mandate.

The people of Syria deserve justice, peace and stability, but they also deserve much more. After more than 50 years of the rule of the Al-Assad family, they deserve the peace of mind that history will not repeat itself. The change that this transition brings should shift Syria away — not only from the violent conflict, but also from the decades of repression and atrocities. Actions by the de facto authorities showing full respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law would be an indispensable first step in that direction.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Emergency Relief Coordinator Fletcher, Ms. al-Kateab and Mr. Jamous for their updates today.

After nearly 14 years of brutal conflict, which culminated in the collapse of the Al-Assad regime, the Syrian people can finally hope again. Malta extends its heartfelt support to Syrians all over the world as they celebrate this remarkable development.

Over the past two years, Malta has called on all parties, including representatives of the former regime, to engage in the Constitutional Committee. We implored the need for inclusive reform, elections, transitional processes and genuine accountability in shaping a new Syria. Regrettably, the Al-Assad regime declined and, instead, imposed years of anguish on the Syrian people. Political prisoners languished in secret detention and torture facilities. Humanitarian aid was subverted and withheld. Millions were displaced and made refugees.

In our first statement to the Council on this issue (see S/PV.9248), we reflected on the acute humanitarian needs across Syria: the economic crises, major food insecurity and the lack of medical staff, drugs and safe facilities. We addressed the cholera outbreak and the importance of the humanitarian cross-border mechanism. We bore witness to the extension of the Council's mandate to allow cross-border aid into Syria, the eventual veto (see S/PV.9371) and the transition to a direct agreement between Damascus and the United Nations. Regrettably, the humanitarian needs remain as significant now as they were when we first took our seat on the Council. With humanitarian access now at its highest point in comparison to any other time during the conflict, greater resourcing and attention to early recovery, resilience and livelihoods programmes are vital. In that regard, we also take note of the commitments made by the interim Government to enable and protect United Nations and humanitarian staff and operations. Across the country, land must be cleared for planting. Farmers must have access to irrigation systems, tools and seeds to prepare for next year's harvest. After so much destruction, our collective focus must now be to rebuild.

Malta stresses in the strongest terms the importance of an orderly, peaceful and inclusive political transition. While there has been cause for great optimism, significant concerns remain regarding reprisal attacks and a backslide into autocratic and radical governance.

First, the rights of women and all minorities, including religious minorities, must be ensured. That is the foundation upon which Syria can rebuild and emerge from the rubble.

Secondly, continued progress towards a stable interim Government is key. From there, re-engagement with resolution 2254 (2015) presents a credible road map for a new, inclusive political horizon. It provides a path whereby all Syrian stakeholders, including

civil society, can engage to positively transform Syrian society and unlock the political support of the international community for rebuilding efforts.

Thirdly, the continued presence and operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), especially at this time of grave instability, cannot be underestimated. We remain strongly supportive of UNDOF and full compliance with the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces. The illegal seizure of Syrian territory is unacceptable and risks reigniting the flames of conflict. Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity must be respected.

Fourthly, justice and accountability are the basis of any lasting peace. The scenes we witnessed last week from Saydnaya prison are horrifying. We must tread carefully and work systematically to reunite families with detained loved ones, when possible. We must equally continue to establish the fate of the missing and those who will never return. In that regard, 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 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic are more critical than ever.

From the very start of our term, we pledged to be guided by the needs of the Syrian people. At this historic juncture, we stand by Syrians at home and throughout the world as they reclaim their country, sovereignty and dignity. We remain committed to healing wounds and bridging divides in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings. I also thank Mr. Jamous and Ms. al-Kateab for their very powerful briefings on the next steps needed for Syria.

This is a moment of hope and a new chapter for the Syrian people. They suffered enormously under the Al-Assad regime's cruel grip. It is a moment to mourn and seek accountability for those who have been lost and a chance to ensure that the nation handed down to future generations is one built on democracy, stability and peaceful co-existence.

I will focus on three points addressing the transition period, humanitarian support and accountability.

First, with regard to the transition period, we cannot underestimate the challenge ahead. The United Kingdom, alongside the United Nations and our Arab, United States and European Union partners, has been clear that the Syrian people have our full support as they proceed with the momentous task of building their future. We call on the new interim authorities to support an inclusive political dialogue on Syria's future governance, protect the rights of all individuals, respect international humanitarian law and develop a process of equitable justice and accountability. We will judge them by their actions. The world is watching. Of course, the fall of Al-Assad does not mean that security in Syria will automatically improve. We must remain seized of the threat of a Da'esh resurgence. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting Syria's fight against terrorism. Respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity is crucial for the peace and security of the region. We call on all parties to cease hostilities in Syria.

Secondly, concerning humanitarian support, this is an opportunity to end the suffering that Syrians have endured for far too long. We welcome the positive engagement that the Emergency Relief Coordinator has had in Syria with the new interim authorities. We have seen millions of Syrians displaced from their homes, without proper access to food, medicine, basic services or an education for their children. For those returning home and seeking to rebuild their lives, the international community must stand together to support their immediate needs. In the past week, the United Kingdom announced an additional \$78 million aid package to support the most vulnerable Syrians, including Syrian refugees across the region.

Thirdly, with regard to accountability, we stand with the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who were arbitrarily detained, tortured and murdered at the hands of the regime. We also remember the men, women and children of Ghouta, Douma and Khan Shaykhun — victims of Al-Assad's horrific use of chemical weapons. We, the international community, must continue to pursue accountability for those atrocities, including the preservation of records, alongside the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The United Kingdom has provided an additional \$150,000 to the Syria missions of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to help to rid Syria of its chemical-weapons stockpile once and for all.

As we look to 2025 and beyond, we call on the international community to come together and support Syria as it seeks the future it has waited for, the future it has fought for and the future it deserves.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings and recommendations. I also thank Bader Jamous and Waad al-Kateab for their powerful statements and relentless efforts to advance peace and security in Syria for the Syrian people.

At long last, the Al-Assad regime has fallen, and the Syrian people are seeing their first glimpse of freedom in decades and are experiencing their first glimmer of hope. That includes thousands of political prisoners who have spent years and years locked away by the regime — Syrians like Qasem Sobhi Al-Qabalani, who shared his story with the BBC last week. Qasem was arrested by the regime in 2016 and eventually sent to Saydnaya, to the prison which has been described as a human slaughterhouse. There he was subjected to unthinkable horrors, including torture. And after so much abuse, it was nearly impossible for him to imagine his release. But now Qasem is free and feels like he has been granted a new lease on life.

All of Syria has a chance for a new beginning. This is a historic opportunity for the long-suffering people of Syria to build a better life. After more than a decade of conflict and corruption, their needs are extensive. And the United States is committed to mobilizing global support. Last week, Secretary Blinken, together with our partners in the Aqaba joint contact group, announced a set of principles that will help guide international efforts to support the Syrian people as they write their next chapter. And let me be clear: it is theirs to write. It would be a waste of this historic opportunity if one tyrant were toppled only to see a new one rise up in his place. Therefore, we fully support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015) that will lead to credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance for the benefit of all Syrians, as we heard stated by Mr. Pedersen earlier today. Together with our partners, we will engage with Syrian groups to support an independent and sovereign Syria that respects human rights, including the rights of minorities and women, and that upholds international humanitarian law. The United States and our partners

also agreed that Syrian State institutions should deliver essential services to Syria's people.

In recent days, we have seen the emotional scenes of missing and disappeared family members being reunited with their loved ones. Determining the fate of missing Syrians and foreign nationals is of vital importance because, while Qasem and thousands of others are now free, many families are still in the dark. That includes the loved ones of United States citizen Austin Tice, who was taken captive more than 12 years ago. We will not rest until Austin is home, and we are pressing all parties in Syria to help make that happen.

The United States appreciates the work of civil society groups and that of 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 Independent International Commission of Inquiry, which continue to document regime violations and abuses. As the mission of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic has never been more crucial, we encourage the Secretary-General to appoint a head of the Institution as soon as possible. Our support and funding of that work must continue.

The regime may have fallen, but the dire humanitarian needs of millions of Syrians remain, as we heard from all of our speakers today. In addition to ensuring unhindered access from neighbouring countries and throughout Syria, we call for additional financial support for United Nations agencies and aid organizations. That includes additional contributions to the Syria Recovery Trust Fund. I have often spoken about the Syrians forced to flee the violence and destruction of the regime. Now many refugees are eager to return home and help rebuild their country. Many displaced Syrians in host countries still require protection and basic services. Indeed, some Syrian refugees and asylum seekers may be even more vulnerable. Therefore, all States must uphold their obligations to refugees.

Just as Syria's leaders should no longer pose a threat to their own people, Syria should have peaceful relations with its neighbours. The United States will continue to support Syria's neighbours, including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Türkiye and Israel, should any new threats arise from Syria during this period of transition. Preventing those threats requires that Syria cooperate with efforts

to secure and destroy its remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, consistent with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). We seek assurances of Syria's commitment to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in that regard.

Finally, there is a strong international consensus that Syria must not be used as a base for terrorists, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). That requires securing detention facilities and displaced persons camps in north-east Syria, which hold nearly 9,000 ISIS fighters, and that means continuing to repatriate detained and displaced foreign nationals. As the United States maintains its mission against ISIS, there should be no doubt: we will fully defend and protect United States personnel and United States military positions in north-east Syria.

For so long, it might have seemed that Al-Assad's violent, repressive tactics would pay off and that his grip on power was unshakable, especially since Russia did everything in its power to prop up Al-Assad's brutal regime. And unlike what we heard the Russian Permanent Representative say about supporting the Syrian people, Russia actually targeted Syrian civilians, Russia obstructed cross-border humanitarian assistance and now, Russia is offering safe haven to Syria's deposed dictator. But Russia's and Al-Assad's campaign of cruelty ultimately failed. The regime has fallen. And Syria has a chance for a new beginning.

Going forward, we must demonstrate the Council's unity in support of the Syrian people. For even as we are clear-eyed about the challenges ahead, we are determined to stand with the Syrian people. We are determined to stand with the Syrian people as they write what we hope will be a peaceful and prosperous next chapter.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Mr. Pedersen, the Special Envoy, and Mr. Fletcher, the Under-Secretary-General, for their insightful briefings. We listened carefully to the statements made by other briefers.

Regarding the recent developments in Syria, I would like to make the following key points.

First, the Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its unwavering support for Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The future of Syria must be decided solely by its people, free from external interference or imposition. An inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations and grounded in the framework of resolution 2254 (2015), is essential. That includes drafting a new constitution through a representative constitutional committee and establishing an inclusive and representative Government that reflects the aspirations of all Syrian people. In that context, Iran commends the constructive efforts and active engagement of Special Envoy Pedersen in advancing that critical objective.

Second, maintaining Syria's governmental institutions is vital for stability and the foundation of an inclusive political solution. Institutional collapse risks further fragmentation, humanitarian suffering and exploitation by extremists. Lessons from past conflicts underline the importance of institutional continuity for basic services, the rule of law and trust-building. The international community must support Syria's institutional resilience, while respecting its sovereignty and the will of its people.

Third, the safety of all Syrian citizens must be ensured, and the rights of minorities and foreign nationals must be protected. Religious and cultural sites and places must be safeguarded, and the inviolability of diplomatic premises and personnel must be upheld in accordance with international law.

Fourth, Iran strongly condemns Israel's continued violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Israeli occupying regime has exploited the current situation in Syria to pursue its political agenda and further destroy Syria's infrastructure. The Security Council must take decisive action to address the aggression and put an end to the Israeli occupation of Syrian territory, which constitutes a blatant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the Council's own resolutions, in particular resolution 350 (1974). Iran reaffirms its unwavering support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the full implementation of its mandate.

Fifth, the Syrian people face immense economic and humanitarian hardships that demand urgent action. Rebuilding critical infrastructure, restoring services and ensuring the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons are essential to fostering national

unity and recovery. Immediate aid must be prioritized, and the unilateral sanctions on Syria must be lifted. The continuation of those inhumane and illegal measures is unjustifiable, as they disproportionately harm the most vulnerable, worsen economic hardship and violate the fundamental rights of the Syrian people. Iran commends the tireless efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its humanitarian partners in their work towards alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people.

Sixth, Syria remains a pivotal country in the region and must recover its vital role in promoting peace and stability, free from terrorism, posing no threat to its neighbours or the broader region. The Syrian people deserve peace, dignity and the chance to rebuild their nation, free from external interference. The international community must collectively support Syria's unity, sovereignty and reconstruction, ensuring that the rights and aspirations of all Syrians are upheld.

Seventh, Iran has consistently played a pivotal and constructive role in promoting regional peace and security, paying a heavy price in both material and human costs in the fight against terrorism in Syria and the wider region. That undeniable reality cannot be overlooked. For years, Iran has provided legitimate support to Syria in its fight against terrorism, acting on the formal and lawful request of the Syrian Government at the time. Without Iran and Hizbullah's decisive efforts and sacrifices, Syria would have fallen entirely under the control of Da'esh and its affiliated terrorist groups, with their influence potentially extending into Lebanon. Those efforts also played a critical role in bringing an end to Da'esh's control in both Iraq and Syria.

Finally, Iran and Syria share deep historical and friendly relations, which continue to grow based on mutual interests and international legal principles. Iran remains steadfast in its constructive role, working with the United Nations, regional partners and the Syrian people to achieve lasting peace and stability in Syria and the wider region.

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

Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting to discuss the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. We express our appreciation for the efforts made by the Security Council and the Secretary-General in following up on

the situation in Syria, supporting the Syrian people and addressing the Syrian crisis, which has prolonged the suffering of its people over the years. Those efforts are based on our humanitarian and regional responsibility to support efforts to achieve stability and peace in Syria and the region. We thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings, and we also listened with interest to the briefings of Ms. al-Kateab and Mr. Jamous.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Iraq has consistently advocated for and encouraged political dialogue among all the Syrian parties as the only way to resolve the crisis. We firmly believe that sustainable political solutions must be based on the will of the Syrian people and must be Syrian-led, without any foreign interference. Iraq is also aware that the Syrian people have the right to self-determination and choose their leaders through a democratic process that reflects their aspirations and guarantees their rights and freedoms and respect for their will. Iraq affirms that the stability of Syria is an integral part of the stability of our region, and we therefore call on the international community to strengthen its efforts to support the Syrian people and help them to overcome their suffering, whether by providing humanitarian assistance or contributing to reconstruction. Any solution to address the repercussions of regime change must be based on serious and constructive dialogue among all Syrian parties, ensuring that political, economic and humanitarian issues are addressed, removed from any foreign interference.

In that context, Iraq stresses the importance of the following.

First, it is important to respect the will of the Syrian people and their right to free self-determination, without any external interference, while guaranteeing their right to choose their future leaders through free and fair elections, as the situation in Syria after the change of regime requires a comprehensive and balanced approach to achieve peace and stability in the country, after many years of conflict. We call for support for the Syrian people in their entirety, by adopting an inclusive approach that includes all segments and components of Syrian society, without discrimination or exclusion, promoting peaceful coexistence among them, guaranteeing their equal rights through a representative system that respects

human rights and women's rights, and working to end the state of political and social division, thereby helping to build a stable and prosperous State.

Secondly, we must support a comprehensive and just political path, based on international resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015), to ensure a peaceful political transition that achieves the aspirations of the Syrian people, and we call for a clear road map for a peaceful political process, ensuring the active participation of all Syrian forces and strengthening the building of Syrian State institutions.

Thirdly, we must preserve the unity of Syria, its land and people, territorial integrity and independence and reject any attempts to divide or dominate Syria, violate its sovereignty or form areas of influence subject to regional or international Powers, which would lead to further destabilization in the region. We must also ensure that Syria remains united and sovereign and removed from regional and international interference, given that the stability of Syria is a fundamental pillar in the stability of the entire region. Furthermore, we call on all Syrian stakeholders to overcome their differences and work together to build a political system that reflects the aspirations of the Syrian people in their entirety.

Fourthly, we must address the humanitarian situation and improve the humanitarian conditions of the Syrian people by providing the necessary humanitarian aid, supporting their reconstruction, ending the isolation of Syria and ensuring the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes in safety and dignity. It is also important that we create a safe and stable environment that contributes to their return.

Fifthly, we stress the importance of international and regional cooperation to combat terrorism, which continues to pose a threat to security in Syria and the region. Syria must not turn into a haven or crossing point for terrorist organizations. We are deeply concerned about the escalating threat of terrorist groups in Syria and the region, as they take advantage of the lack of security and stability to expand their influence, which poses a direct threat to neighbouring countries.

Sixthly, we must support the mission of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and we call on all parties concerned to cooperate with him for the success of efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive and sustainable peace, in accordance with resolution

2254 (2015). We must also strengthen the United Nations presence on the ground.

The Republic of Iraq strongly condemns and firmly denounces the decision by the Israeli entity to expand its settlement policy in the occupied Syrian Golan, which represents a flagrant violation of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. We reiterate our unchanged position in support of the rights of the Syrian Arab Republic to restore its full sovereignty across all of its territory. We emphasize that the Golan is an occupied Syrian territory and that any attempts to change its legal status demographic makeup are unacceptable and illegal.

Iraq calls on the international community to take a firm stance to condemn the Israeli entity's continued violations, and to work seriously to protect the unity and sovereignty of Syrian territory and achieve security and stability in the region. We call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and take the necessary measures to put an end to those violations, which are benefiting from the current situation in Syria. We stress the importance of complying with the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and ensuring the continued presence of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, given its vital role in maintaining stability and preventing escalation in the region.

In conclusion, Iraq remains ready to continue working with all the parties to achieve peace and stability in Syria, preserve the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and ensure a secure and dignified future for its people. We call for concerted international efforts to support Syria and its people at this stage, bearing in mind the political, humanitarian and security challenges. We also stress that we are ready to cooperate with all actors to achieve that noble aim. We call on all Syrian stakeholders to overcome their differences and to work together to build a political system that reflects the aspirations of the Syrian people within all segments of society.

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

Mr. Yıldız: (Türkiye): I too am grateful to Special Envoy Pedersen and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Fletcher, for their briefings. I also want to thank Mr. Jamous, Chair of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, and Ms. al-Kateab for their

interventions, and I congratulate them on conveying to the international community the voice of their people during 14 years of hardship.

The Syrian people are at a pivotal moment in their history. As of 8 December, Syria has entered a new era, one that carries the potential to transform more than a decade of conflict and suffering into a future marked by peace, stability and prosperity. After 14 years of unimaginable pain, the Syrian people are closer than ever to realizing their aspiration for a free and inclusive Syria. However, the road ahead is not without its challenges. It will be critical to take the following steps to rebuild a Syria that is united, inclusive and stable — a Syria that can contribute to the stability of our entire region.

The primary responsibility for this transition rests with the Syrian people themselves. Their ownership of that process is paramount and, speaking as a Turkish diplomat who has served in Damascus before, I am very confident about it. A credible and legitimate transition and a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process will require bold, inclusive and determined steps towards national unity. Inclusivity must lie at the heart of Syria's future. A new Syrian Government must reflect the voices of all segments of society. That is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic necessity. Only an inclusive and representative political framework can foster the long-term harmony required to rebuild a united Syria.

Equally, the territorial integrity of Syria must be safeguarded under all circumstances. The fragmentation of Syria would not only jeopardize the country's future but also destabilize an already fragile region. A united Syria must emerge as a place where all its people can coexist peacefully, without fear of sectarian strife or discrimination. Respect for all segments of society and the rejection of sectarianism must remain guiding principles.

For more than a decade, Türkiye has stood by the Syrian people, offering unwavering support to both those within Syria and the millions forced to seek refuge beyond its borders. Türkiye has hosted 4 million Syrians, providing them with safety, education and livelihoods. That is not just a testament to Türkiye's solidarity but also a recognition that Syria's stability is critical for the stability of the region. The international community must now match that commitment. The devastation brought by years of conflict cannot be overcome by Syrians alone. We need swift action in

the political and humanitarian fields. The matter of sanctions needs to be addressed — that is essential for a self-sustained, functioning State.

A comprehensive recovery plan, supported by international assistance and resources, is urgently needed to alleviate suffering, rebuild infrastructure and create conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of millions of displaced Syrians. Türkiye, for its part, has already reactivated its Embassy in Damascus as a step towards fostering a constructive dialogue during this transition.

Stability in Syria cannot be achieved without addressing the persistent threat of terrorism. Syria must not become a haven for terrorist groups that exploit the transition period to further their agendas. In particular, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units (YPG) and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and its affiliates remain a grave threat, not only to Syria's unity and security but also to Türkiye's national security and that of the broader region. Their attacks, including those targeting Arab-majority regions such as Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, highlight the urgency of eradicating those groups to ensure the safety of all Syrians. While the transitional process must be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, it cannot include actors like the PKK/YPG/SDF, whose actions undermine Syria's territorial integrity and stability. Türkiye will continue to take preventive measures to protect its borders and prevent those groups from exploiting the situation on the ground.

Türkiye remains deeply committed to Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and prosperity. Israel's ongoing actions and attacks seriously undermine the efforts to build stability in Syria. Israel's illegal actions and attacks cannot be justified by any legitimate security concern and are unacceptable. The Security Council should therefore act accordingly.

Over the years, we have actively engaged in dialogue with regional and international partners, including through recent meetings in Doha and Aqaba, to ensure that the national reconciliation and the transition process aligns with the principles of inclusivity and stability.

Finally, the international community must not turn a blind eye to the atrocities committed by the Al-Assad regime, exemplified by the horrific images emerging from Saydnaya prison and the Damascus region. Justice and accountability are essential for healing the wounds of the Syrian people and ensuring that such crimes are never repeated. At this critical juncture, let us recommit to standing with the Syrian people in their pursuit of a free, inclusive and united Syria — one that will serve as a pillar of stability for the entire region.

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 12.40 p.m.