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Seventy-fourth year

8561st meeting

Tuesday, 25 June 2019, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Djani
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Mr. Matjila
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018) and 2449 (2018) (S/2019/508)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018) and 2449 (2018) (S/2019/508)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Major General Alexey Bakin, Head of the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic and Refugee Migration Monitoring, and Mr. David Lillie, Executive Director of the Syrian American Medical Society.

The representative of France has asked for the floor.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to speak on a point of order. France has not objected to the participation of the Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre as a brifer in this meeting. However, we want to point out that the monthly humanitarian briefings are intended to give the Security Council an opportunity to receive objective information about the situation on the ground based on information collected by impartial humanitarian actors and United Nations agencies, as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs does every month. The participation of civil society helps keep the Council apprised of realities and difficulties that arise. Despite the fact that it has been invited to speak under rule 39, the Russian Reconciliation Centre is neither a humanitarian actor nor a United Nations agency. It is an entity of the Russian Ministry of Defence, which is an active party to the conflict, and the information it presents should be viewed in that light.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Germany has asked for the floor.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): Kuwait, Belgium and Germany, the co-penholders of the humanitarian dossier, are in favour of a balanced approach to the choice of briefers. We expect every brifer to respect today's humanitarian, non-political agenda, and we trust that the Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre will support that agenda in his briefing as well. Since the de-confliction mechanism is on our agenda today, and we would like to understand why it has failed utterly and led to the death of innocent civilians, the Centre may be able to shed some light on that question. We note the presence today in the Chamber of the Executive Director of the Syrian American Medical Society, which should complement the rest of the picture.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, where the Charter of the United Nations was drafted, and whose seventy-fifth anniversary we will mark next year, one of the key areas of disagreement was the question of the scope of the use of the right of veto and whether it should be conditional or unconditional. At the time, the Soviet Union was in favour of an unconditional veto applicable to all issues discussed by the Security Council, including proposals for issues to be discussed. At the time, the delegations of the United States, the United Kingdom, France and other countries objected to the Soviet Union's approach. Their argument ultimately prevailed, and today in the Security Council when a country objects to a proposed subject for discussion, the permanent members do not exercise the veto but vote on it as a procedural issue. At the time of the San Francisco Conference, those delegations' reason for their position was that the unconditional use of the right to veto would be a violation of freedom of speech. Today we were surprised to see the French delegation take the position of the Soviet Union during the drafting of the Charter in San Francisco by casting doubt on the brifer whom we invited to brief us on the situation in Syria.

Since Council members have persistently asked us about the state of affairs on the ground, we have tried to enable them to hear about it first-hand. Through all the years of this conflict, no one has done more to normalize the situation on the ground in Syria than the Russian Reconciliation Centre. I would like to draw your attention, Mr. President, to the fact that our delegation has never questioned any of the briefers proposed by

the delegations that have expressed doubts today, but if that is the game they want to play, we are prepared to go with it in future. Nonetheless, I still suggest that delegations listen to our representative, because he can shed light on many questions that are of interest to them as well.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): If there are no objections to any of the briefers for this meeting, we shall proceed.

It was so decided.

Mr. Lowcock and Major General Bakin are joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Rome and Damascus, respectively.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/508, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018) and 2449 (2018).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: This is the fifth humanitarian briefing on Syria we have provided the Security Council in the past eight weeks. Week after week, we have highlighted the impact of the hostilities in the north-west. I do not want to repeat everything we have so often told the Council. Let me simply quote the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, as she summarized the situation yesterday. She said her Office had

“received reports of hundreds of ongoing civilian casualties and destruction to civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, mainly caused by air strikes by the Government of Syria and its allies, but also, to a lesser extent, ground-based attacks by armed groups”.

We have repeatedly asked the Council to make that stop. It has not stopped, or even slowed. Despite efforts to introduce a ceasefire in the north-west, hostilities continue unabated. Fighting among Syrian Government forces and their allies, armed opposition forces and the Security Council-listed terrorist organization Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continues to impact civilians every day.

Over the weekend of 21 to 23 June, we received reports of air strikes affecting more than 55 communities and artillery shelling affecting more than 21 communities in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo governorates. At least 32 civilians, including women and children, reportedly died, and others were wounded, in air strikes and artillery shelling in southern Idlib. Over the same period, a further seven people, including a child, were reportedly killed and others were injured as a result of air strikes and artillery shelling in northern rural Hama governorate. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced.

One of the areas coming under regular attack is Maarat Al-Numan, in southern Idlib. Humanitarian partners working in the health sector have been warning that they are particularly worried about Maarat National Hospital. It has reportedly been hit before in previous years. At peak times, the hospital treated about 20,000 people a month. It is now operating under emergency conditions. But it remains the main referral hospital in southern Idlib. While operating in a conflict zone and in an area under the control of a Security Council-listed terrorist organization, they keep their life-saving services going with the support of humanitarian organizations.

There is serious reason to worry. On 20 June, an ambulance transporting an injured woman in Maarat Al-Numan was hit, killing the woman and three medical workers. Two paramedics were seriously injured. We must see an end to such attacks on medical workers, transport and facilities. We must see hospitals like Maarat National Hospital protected.

Last week I told the Council (see S/PV.8553) that I would update it today on the conclusions I had reached on the impact of recent events on the de-confliction system in Idlib. I briefed the Council in detail on 17 May (see S/PV.8527) about the de-confliction system and how it works. Let me remind the Council of the purpose of that system. All parties to conflict — States and armed groups — are obliged under international humanitarian law to protect medical facilities and other humanitarian sites in the conduct of hostilities. That means not directing attacks against them and avoiding incidental harm to them.

The de-confliction system aims to help parties to the conflict fulfil those obligations. It provides the parties, including the Russian Federation — and, through it, the Government of Syria — as well as

Turkey, the United States and other members of the international coalition forces with the coordinates of medical facilities and other humanitarian sites to help those parties take precautions to spare them. I have briefed the Council, including in detail on 17 May and again last week on 18 June, on how medical facilities and other civilian objects inside Idlib have been impacted by the conflict. In the light of that, I have written to the Russian Federation to request information as to how the details provided through the de-confliction mechanism are used.

We have also consulted with humanitarian organizations operating inside Idlib that are running medical facilities there. At their request, we will continue to run the de-confliction system in Idlib for the organizations that want to report their coordinates to us. But I want to make clear that this does not mean that it is our judgment that the de-confliction system in Idlib is, in practice, protecting medical facilities. I am not sure that it is. More can be done to strengthen the system. But the critical question is what those receiving information on the location of medical facilities are doing with that information. I will keep the Council informed.

In addition to the north-west, we are also following the humanitarian situation in other parts of the country with concern. In Rukban, along the Syrian-Jordanian border, some 27,000 people remain in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Inadequate basic services are costing lives, as attested by the widely reported death of a young woman and her child while giving birth in the camp on 5 June. Deaths like those are preventable if the proper care can be provided. We continue to call for humanitarian access to Rukban in order to be able to deliver life-saving aid and to assist those who would like to leave the camp. The last request for access to Rukban, sent to the Government of Syria on 9 May, was not approved. Another request is being prepared. In the meantime, the United Nations is working with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent on an operational plan for another convoy immediately, should authorization be given.

We also continue to provide assistance to the more than 14,800 civilians who have left the camp over the past months and are now at transit centres or places of destination. The Syrian Government approved a third United Nations visit to the shelters at transit centres, which occurred on 18 June. Conditions in the shelters remain adequate, and the process for moving on from

the transit centres is relatively swift. Most people have left the transit centres for southern and eastern Homs, and those originally from Palmyra are also starting to receive authorizations to return there. While aid is being delivered by humanitarian organizations to areas that people coming out of Rukban are returning to, we have also requested approval to visit them in the areas where they are currently residing, and while access to the shelters has been a welcome development, the request of 30 May for such visits is still awaiting approval.

In Al-Hol camp, in north-eastern Syria, humanitarian agencies continue to respond to the needs of the nearly 73,000 people in the camp, which continue to be considerable in the areas of health, water, sanitation and hygiene, among others. At the same time, we continue to be concerned about restricted humanitarian access to the annex, where 11,000 foreign nationals are living. In recent weeks, we have received numerous reports of women giving birth alone in their tents at night. No woman or newborn should be left alone without the support of specialized health practitioners, especially during childbirth. While there have been some positive reports of children of foreign nationality being repatriated, thousands more foreign nationals in the camps still face an uncertain future. I call on all Member States to take the measures necessary to ensure that their nationals are repatriated for rehabilitation and reintegration, or prosecution, as appropriate, in line with international law and standards. I also call on the parties on the ground to facilitate the voluntary return or resettlement of internally displaced Syrians at the camp.

I am increasingly concerned about the situation in southern Syria, where, following reports of rising tensions between Government forces and local groups since May, conflict threatens to reignite.

The humanitarian response continues to face access challenges across the country. During the period covered by the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2019/508), access was limited in Raqqa city and east of the Euphrates river in Deir-ez-Zor, including in the Hajin enclave, mostly due to widespread explosive-hazard contamination, and some areas in the south of the country, as well as in eastern Ghouta, were not sustainably accessible, owing to administrative restrictions. We have seen a few positive developments in access from Damascus, with a recent mission to Al-Hol in the north-east, and recent approvals to deploy to areas of Dara'a in the south and Abu Thohur and

Sinjar in south-east Idlib. But I continue to call on all parties to allow safe, sustained and unimpeded access to all locations in need at all times throughout Syria.

Week after week, month after month, year after year, the Council has been briefed on the humanitarian suffering in Syria. We have repeatedly pleaded for the protection of civilians in order to ensure humanitarian access and the parties' full compliance with their obligation to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We have come back to the Council again and again to tell members about the latest horror facing civilians and the failure of the parties to implement their basic obligations. I repeat our call again today. Ease the suffering. Save lives. End the fighting. Obey the law.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Bakin.

Mr. Bakin (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring is focusing its main efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic on the non-military resolution of the conflict and on providing comprehensive assistance to Syrian citizens to return home and rebuild peaceful lives. Through joint efforts with the Syrian Government we have been able to achieve considerable improvement in the situation in those areas of work. The statistics for Syrian citizens returning home speaks for themselves. Since the beginning of 2019 alone more than 220,000 Syrian citizens have returned home, more than 30,000 of them internally displaced persons and more than 190,000 refugees from abroad. The majority of Syrians are returning from neighbouring States. Between 1,000 and 2,000 people are returning from Jordan and Lebanon every day, which testifies to the effectiveness of all the measures that have been taken.

However, along with the positive results there are also problems. Despite the establishment of the cessation of hostilities regime, the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone is complicated. Militias from some uncontrolled terrorist groups are currently refusing to observe the ceasefire regime in the Idlib zone and are actively obstructing Russia and Turkey's joint efforts to stabilize the situation in north-western Syria. The tensions in the zone have been spiralling once again since April. Militias from the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorist organization have united various terrorist groups under their leadership and have ramped up their attacks on Government positions and shelling of

towns and villages. In April we recorded 169 violations of the ceasefire regime by illegal armed groups, with 41 Syrian soldiers killed and 74 wounded, while eight civilians died and 20 received injuries of varying degrees of seriousness.

In May, 338 cases of shelling by militias were recorded, with 36 Syrian soldiers killed and 118 wounded, along with 24 civilians killed and 32 wounded. In particular, on 5 May five children and one woman were killed as a result of shelling by the Jaysh Al-Izza group with a multiple launch rocket system from the town of Al-Suqaylabiyah. On 15 May, a mortar shell fired by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists killed eight civilians, including two children, in the village of Al-Nayrab in Aleppo governorate. At the same time, between the end of April and the beginning of May, a significant number of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militias and groups allied to them concentrated near the cities of Hama and Aleppo. Radical groups attempted to enter the predominantly Christian cities of Al-Suqaylabiyah and Muhradah in Hama governorate. During the attack on the Government positions the terrorists used unmanned aerial vehicles, tanks, pickup trucks fitted with heavy-calibre machine guns, and suicide-bombing vehicles.

There has been no decrease in the terrorist activity in the Idlib de-escalation zone in June. There have been 302 cases of shelling and armed provocations by militias, and Syrian soldiers and civilians have continued to die. On 17 June, 11 civilians were killed and 15 injured by mortar fire from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in the village of Kudeh, in Aleppo governorate. In response to the ongoing provocations by terrorists, the Government forces have been forced to take defensive action. According to objective information, illegal armed groups allied to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham have been resisting the Syrian armed forces in all areas where there has been fighting, as well as members of the Caucasus Emirate, Haras Al-Din and the Turkistan Islamic Party. All those entities have been recognized as terrorist organizations by the Security Council. The jihadists have also repeatedly used multiple rocket launch systems to fire on Russia's Khmeimim air base, posing a genuine threat to the lives of Russian troops. The Russian Aerospace Forces have been forced to retaliate with precision strikes on firing positions, ammunition stockpiles and clusters of terrorists, but their fire has been directed only at known targets outside residential areas.

The situation as a whole is under control thanks entirely to Russia and Turkey's joint coordinated actions, in accordance with the memorandum signed in Sochi on 17 September 2018 on the stabilization of the situation in the Idlib de-escalation area. In the quest for ways to resolve the problem of Idlib, we and the Turks have been working actively to come up with new measures and mutually acceptable solutions for stabilizing the situation. At Russia's request, in May and June the Syrian Army twice established a ceasefire regime under the framework of those actions. However, a number of radical groups in the Idlib de-escalation area have continued to violate the ceasefire regime every time, firing on the Turkish armed forces' observer posts as well as on the Government forces' positions and on towns. We continue to see terrorists preparing to stage provocative actions in order to blame Government forces for allegedly using chemical weapons against them.

We who are working here on the ground are constantly seeing a one-sided interpretation of events in the Idlib de-escalation area from a number of countries that blame Syria and Russia for escalating tensions while at the same time turning a blind eye to the atrocities of jihadists and their terrorist activity in the area. We categorically deny all the allegations about the indiscriminate nature of strikes by Government forces on targets in Idlib. We are sorry to have to say that anti-Syrian non-governmental organizations are deliberately disseminating this kind of false and unverified information, misleading the global community and thereby shielding Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists. Meanwhile, the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militias and other groups, whose activities are not properly comprehended by the international community, continue to execute captured Syrian soldiers and local civilians just as the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant did in Palmyra and Raqqa. In the past two years, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham fighters in the Idlib de-escalation zone have abducted at least 5,000 people, whose fate is unknown. Hundreds have been executed without trial or evidence.

In view of the desperate humanitarian situation in the area, the Syrian Government, working with the Russian Reconciliation Centre and the support of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, has been taking the necessary measures to enable the civilian population to make a decent, safe and voluntary departure from the Idlib de-escalation area. Specifically, the Abu

Al-Duhur crossing point in Aleppo governorate was established on 4 March 2018. It can accommodate 1,100 people and 50 vehicles a day, although the movement of refugees through it has currently been suspended due to the serious threat of shelling by terrorists. An additional crossing point was set up at Suran on 27 May of this year that can admit 1,000 people and 50 vehicles a day. Since the crossing-point operation began, a total of more than 44,000 people have left the Idlib de-escalation zone, including more than 14,000 women and 20,000 children.

According to our information, between 40,000 and 80,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are ready to leave the de-escalation area right now. The required number of places have been prepared for them to be received in IDP centres in Hama, Homs and Deir ez-Zor governorates. The Syrian Government is ready to use all existing capacities to ensure the conditions necessary to enable the civilian population to return from the Idlib de-escalation area. Some 15,000 Syrians who have left the Rukban refugee camp, as well as the United Nations representatives who have been given the opportunity to speak with Syrian citizens returning to Homs and Hama governorates, have been able to see for themselves that the Syrian Government has created appropriate living conditions for its citizens.

In general, the cooperation between the guarantor countries is enabling us to effectively counter international terrorist organizations on Syrian territory and keep the situation in the north-west under control. We would like to point to our Turkish colleagues' active efforts to support the ceasefire regime in the Idlib demilitarized zone.

I want to underscore that the actions of the Russian Reconciliation Centre are strictly within the framework of the implementation of the Russian-Turkish memorandum to stabilize the situation in the Idlib de-escalation area and the agreements reached during the ongoing consultations with Turkey and Iran in the Astana format. All of the efforts of the Astana guarantors are aimed at implementing resolution 2254 (2015) in the interests of restoring normal life in Syria. However, I want to draw the Council's attention to the fact that any agreements on a cessation of hostilities cannot extend to the fight against terrorist organizations, wherever they are. We believe that the only way to rebuild Syria is through the definitive elimination of terrorism, including in the de-escalation zone, and through the return of IDPs and refugees to

their homes and the post-conflict reconstruction of the country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Bakin for his statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lillie.

Mr. Lillie: I would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to brief it on the humanitarian situation in north-western Syria. I would especially like to thank the representatives of Kuwait, Germany and Belgium for their willingness to accommodate me here today.

We have just heard from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock about the grave humanitarian situation in north-western Syria. My organization, the Syrian American Medical Society, is currently conducting medical-relief operations in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo governorates. We operate 35 medical facilities ranging from large hospitals to mobile clinics, and employ about 2,000 staff in the field. Those courageous doctors, nurses, midwives and support staff work tirelessly to provide life-saving care for those in need. Since the start of the conflict, my organization has provided 14 million medical services. Over the years we have helped people of many different faiths and political affiliations. In our work, we seek to maintain humanitarian principles and to help all Syrians in need.

The current situation in north-west Syria continues to deteriorate. The systematic attacks on health care have been particularly severe. As the Under-Secretary-General said, there have been more than 30 health-care-related attacks since the end of April. Just days ago, as was mentioned, three ambulance workers were killed after their ambulance was directly targeted in an air strike. Those attacks have greatly reduced the capacity of the health system at a time when it is already overwhelmed by a large civilian population with significant health needs. Syrian American Medical Society facilities alone have received more than 2,200 injured civilians. At the same time, the suspension of routine services such as vaccinations has greatly increased the risk of outbreaks of disease, including measles and meningitis. If there is one word that captures the current experience of civilians in Idlib, it is suffering — tremendous human suffering.

We cannot discuss attacks on health care without highlighting the use of the de-confliction mechanism. My organization was among those that de-conflicted many of their facilities in April 2018 by working closely

with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to build trust and consensus that NGOs and their field staff would supply all needed information, while OCHA would ensure that the mechanism would be properly implemented.

It is important to discuss the context here. For years, NGOs were encouraged to share their coordinates in order to reduce the risk of targeting by parties to the conflict. There was resistance from field staff, who argued that they themselves would be held responsible by the local population in the event that the facility was targeted. It was only after last year's brutal offensive in eastern Ghouta, which saw 13 health facilities systematically targeted in a 48-hour period — a time when we lost four colleagues — that the doctors finally agreed to share the coordinates. After that assault, they felt that their facilities would inevitably be targeted, regardless of whether or not they shared their coordinates. Yet only days after those coordinates were shared, a hospital in Arbin was targeted by a bunker buster, which landed directly on a patient in the emergency room. In the current offensive in the north-west, nine different de-conflicted facilities have been targeted — nine. In addition, one third of the facilities targeted by air strikes were constructed before the war, meaning that their location was already public knowledge. That begs the question: where is the accountability? Have we lost our capacity for outrage?

Since April 2018, when many organizations deconflicted their facilities, not a single investigation has been completed. Rather than seeking answers and accountability, some members of the Council have instead sought to delay, distract and discredit the mechanism. Yet all that achieves is to further damage the credibility of this institution, and it only exacerbates the suffering of the Syrian people. We have now reached a point where doctors and humanitarian workers on the ground no longer trust the mechanism. They have fulfilled their part of the agreement, at great risk to themselves. Can the Council not meet them halfway? We should not leave them to feel alone or abandoned. There are steps that can be taken to improve both the process and the current mechanism. Council members should consider granting investigators of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism access to the

data or authorizing a fact-finding mission to investigate the attacks.

I would also like to briefly discuss the humanitarian response on the ground. The response of donors to the recent offensive is significantly below what is needed. There have been at least 330,000 newly displaced individuals, with only 110,000 having been received at internally displaced persons camps. Yet the Humanitarian Task Force allocated enough funds for only 5,000 new units of shelter. Be assured that the civilian population feels completely abandoned by the international community. How can one blame them? Doctors cannot help patients when they do not have essential supplies, such as anaesthetics and surgical kits. People in remote areas cannot be reached when there are not enough funds for mobile clinics. The international community must not only come together to seek peace in Syria and prevent the continued violation of international humanitarian law by all parties, but also use their financial resources to help alleviate the suffering of all Syrians.

On the topic of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and extremism in north-western Syria, it is an extremely significant issue that the Council must consider. The kidnapping and torture, for ransom, of humanitarian workers by armed groups are an outrage that must be addressed, as is the targeting of civilian populations in the city of Aleppo by armed groups. But let me be clear: the way to combat terrorism is not through the bombardment of civilian areas and the targeting of civilian infrastructure. The subsequent human suffering is what fuels terrorism. Have we not learned that over the years? The best way to combat terrorism is by supporting the civilian population, who long to live in peace and freedom, not under groups such as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. The best way to provide that support is through humanitarian and stabilization activities.

Not long ago I remember speaking to a doctor from Idlib just after several donors suspended their aid to the north-west due to fears of diversion. He made an impassioned case for continuing to support humanitarian workers. He said that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham told people that they were alone and the world had abandoned them but Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham was there to help them. As humanitarian workers, we say that that is not true. We tell people that we are there to help them and that our donors from around the world are ready to support them. We impose no ideology and no conditions. We are present to help and support people. That example

perfectly illustrates the importance of supporting humanitarian workers. They are the beacons of hope in a very dark conflict. We must all work together to support and protect them and ensure that they have adequate financial resources to carry out their work.

I again thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to appear before the Security Council today. I hope that, together, we can work towards a peaceful future in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Lillie for his briefing.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less so that the Security Council can make the best possible use of its time, in particular in open meetings.

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

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): If you, Mr. President, were to put out the hourglass again, we would see more clearly that we are speaking within the five minutes.

I will deliver this statement on behalf of the three co-penholders: Kuwait, Germany and Belgium. I would like to thank the briefers for the information that they provided today on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We extend our gratitude and deep respect to all humanitarian and medical workers throughout Syria, especially those in the very challenging environment in and around Idlib.

As the Secretary-General said last week, the situation in Idlib is especially dangerous and, yet again, civilians are paying a horrific price. The Council has met on numerous occasions, most recently last week (see S/PV.8553), to address that situation. We have heard repeatedly the clear assessment of the United Nations that any large-scale military offensive would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe for Syria and the region. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs again today drew the Council's attention to the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in north-western Syria as a result of the continued air strikes and shelling and the reported use of barrels bombs. We call for the protection of the 3 million civilians living in the region and we condemn the loss of innocent civilian lives. The 350,000 internally displaced persons who were left with no other choice than fleeing the violence

face a particularly dire situation. Those people are among the most vulnerable, many of them having been displaced several times or facing family separation in fleeing the violence.

The attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and health-care facilities, over the past few weeks are deeply alarming, especially those on health-care facilities whose coordinates were communicated under the deconfliction mechanism. We recall resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2427 (2018), which condemn attacks on hospitals and schools, respectively.

While we strongly condemn the attacks perpetrated by Security Council-designated terrorist groups, notably Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, we remind all parties that counter-terrorism efforts cannot absolve the obligations of all parties under international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and respect for the principles of distinction and proportionality. We reiterate our call for the sustained implementation of the ceasefire arrangements of the Russia-Turkey memorandum of understanding of September 2018. We also reiterate our call for a nation-wide cessation of hostilities in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018). We call for a surge in diplomacy among the key players to urgently stabilize and de-escalate the situation.

While the United Nations has been requesting access for months, still no agreement has been reached on a third desperately needed convoy to the Rukban camp. That is unacceptable. The United Nations and its partners must be able to provide assistance to those remaining in the camp. Inhabitants should be able to make an informed choice as to whether or not to leave the camp in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner. For those who are willing to leave the camp, key protection standards must be in place. That includes regular and continued access throughout the transition from the camp to their final destinations.

The situation in the Al-Hol camp also remains deeply concerning. It is overcrowded and the humanitarian agencies and partners working there face challenging conditions. Improved access is needed for the population of more than 70,000 persons, 90 per cent of whom are women and children, who face particular protection concerns. We support all efforts to provide adequate protection to all vulnerable groups, including children who are suspected of being associated with armed groups. Such children must be treated first and foremost as victims.

Since the conflict began nine years ago, Syria and its people have witnessed some of the most serious crimes under international law. No lasting peace is possible without justice and accountability. We stand firm in our commitment to fighting impunity. In that context, we renew our support for the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism.

Millions of refugees remain abroad. Regarding the return of refugees, our position remains unchanged. All returns must be safe, voluntary and dignified. Tens of thousands of Syrians remain detained, missing or unaccounted for. The Council recently adopted resolution 2474 (2019), the first resolution of the Security Council on missing persons in armed conflict. The resolution is particularly relevant to the situation in Syria today. The families of those detained or missing deserve to know the fate of their loved ones. We call for urgent and tangible progress on this issue.

Humanitarian access continues to be a challenge. We want to remind all the parties to the conflict of paragraph 1 of resolution 2449 (2018), which “calls upon all parties to ensure principled, sustained and improved humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2019”. Parties must live up to their obligations in that regard.

Finally, we reiterate our full support for Special Envoy Pedersen, whom we will hear from in a few days, in his efforts to reach an inclusive and credible political solution in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Mr. David Lillie for their briefings. We also thank Major General Bakin, the Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre, for his briefing on the latest situation in Syria. I would like to note that the information provided by the Russian specialist is reflected in the bulletins of the Russian Ministry of Defence on the de-escalation zones, which we distribute on a regular basis to Security Council members.

Given the briefing by Major General Bakin, we will not speak in detail today, especially because we discussed the humanitarian situation in Syria just last week (see S/PV.8553). However, we have been obliged to conclude that the information conveyed from the high forum that is the Security Council sometimes contradicts operational reports coming directly from the de-escalation zones, which testifies to attempts to politicize the Syrian humanitarian dossier.

In general, it is time to stop applying double standards with regard to what is happening in Syria. Mr. Lillie said today that the people of Idlib feel abandoned. They have not been abandoned. They are being held hostage by the terrorists of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. We are constantly hearing about suffering in the Rukban camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), but very little is said about the Al-Hol camp, where the humanitarian situation is critical. We have already asked why the Council has not considered the situation in which the so-called coalition wiped Baghouz and Hajin off the face of the Earth. In the first quarter of 2019 alone, as a result of mass coalition air strikes on the town of Baghouz Al-Fawqani in Deir ez-Zor governorate, more than 1,200 people died and civilian infrastructure was destroyed, including hospitals and schools. All of that is public information. And once again, of course, we could also mention Raqqa, which was literally razed to the ground.

We have repeatedly heard and continue to hear calls from Council members on the need to adhere to the Sochi memorandum of 17 September 2018. We certainly have not abandoned it, as the Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre confirmed today. The memorandum is being implemented, and it asserts in black and white the importance of combating terrorist activities. I will say it once again. All military action is aimed exclusively at eliminating hotbeds of terrorism. We want to stress once again that the Syrian armed forces and the Russian Aerospace Forces only attack terrorist targets confirmed by intelligence. In that regard, we once again urge the Secretariat and the United Nations specialized agencies, including the World Health Organization, not to rush to release unverified information. Data should be taken from reliable, non-politicized sources, and should always be double-checked, including as to whether infrastructure that has allegedly been attacked has been through the de-confliction process. Unfortunately, we still have serious doubts about the reliability of those sources and their verification methodology.

We continue to be concerned about the situation on the eastern bank of the Euphrates in the Al-Tanf area, which is illegally occupied by the United States. We would like to point out once again that under the Geneva Conventions, the occupying Power is responsible for the population of an occupied territory. Needless to say, the Council should pay particular attention to the situation

in the Al-Hol IDP camp in Hasakah governorate, which is not under the control of the Syrian authorities.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore that Russia's position remains unchanged. We will continue to make every effort to restore peace to Syria both in our national capacity and as a permanent member of the Security Council and a member of the Astana troika, which has done more than any other format to de-escalate and eliminate the terrorist threat, expand humanitarian assistance and advance the political process.

Speaking of the political process, we are pleased to note the level of cooperation that has recently been established between the Syrian authorities and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Pedersen. We hope that the dialogue between the United Nations and Damascus will help to launch a sustainable political process that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, with the assistance of the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the decisions of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. We call on all interested parties to unite their efforts to stabilize the situation in Syria and work together to eliminate terrorism, undertake post-conflict reconstruction and help refugees and IDPs return home. Strengthening efforts in those areas will help to give Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts significant momentum.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for yet another deeply sobering briefing.

One hundred and thirty-nine days have now passed since the last United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian assistance convoy arrived in Rukban in early February, that is, 139 days in which no heed has been paid to the call of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to ease the suffering. Since February, the Al-Assad regime has failed to approve multiple requests from the United Nations to make a third humanitarian aid delivery to Rukban, where reports of dwindling food supplies are growing increasingly dire. It is unacceptable for the regime to withhold humanitarian aid deliveries as a means of forcing civilians to flee the encampment and furthering its claims that the humanitarian conditions in Syria are stabilizing. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's briefing today demonstrates that nothing could be further from the truth.

The United States renews its call to the Al-Assad regime to approve the United Nations request for a third convoy to Rukban immediately. It must also allow unfettered regular humanitarian assistance to Rukban as long as there are displaced people in the encampment. Furthermore, the United States calls on the Russian Federation to secure the Al-Assad regime's compliance with the requests of the United Nations for a third convoy, as well as to lift the Russian and Syrian military blockade of commercial access to the Rukban camp.

The United States supports the United Nations efforts to facilitate voluntary, safe, dignified and informed departures from Rukban in combination with additional aid delivered to the camp. We stand ready to provide security assurances for United Nations humanitarian convoys to Rukban. Any accusation that the United States is responsible for blocking humanitarian aid deliveries to Rukban is absolutely false. Although thousands of civilians have already left Rukban for relocation centres in Homs owing to the dire humanitarian conditions, the United States does not consider returns voluntary if people are leaving the camp because they are not receiving the food, water, medicine and shelter that they need to survive. We strongly encourage the Al-Assad regime to allow the United Nations unfettered access to Rukban residents from the time they depart Rukban until they reach their home or destination of their choice.

The Security Council must support the continued authorization of cross-border aid deliveries under resolution 2449 (2018). The United States calls on every Council member, and our regional partners, to ensure that the United Nations can freely implement cross-border aid deliveries through all agreed border crossings, including from Jordan, and in accordance with resolution 2449 (2018). There is no substitute for the United Nations cross-border operations, which are the most transparent, effective and essential way to deliver humanitarian assistance to those who need it most — people like the 3 million civilians in Idlib who, according to Mr. Lowcock, are completely reliant on United Nations cross-border aid deliveries under resolution 2449 (2018).

Turning to the situation in Idlib, the United States is alarmed at yet another deliberate escalation of air strikes in north-west Syria by Syrian forces over the past week, despite repeated calls by Council members, as well as the Secretary-General and other senior United

Nations officials, for an immediate de-escalation. The United States remains gravely concerned about the possibility that without an immediate and full return by all parties to the 2018 Sochi agreement ceasefire line and the restoration of the de-escalation agreements, the humanitarian conditions in Idlib and north-west Syria could soon be beyond the ability of the United Nations to mount a humanitarian response. The United States takes the Under-Secretary-General's remarks on the status of the de-confliction mechanism very seriously. Any attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure as such, including schools and medical facilities, are off limits, regardless of whether they are part of the United Nations de-confliction mechanism.

This should not even need to be said, let alone repeated meeting after meeting. When it comes to north-west Syria, it is clear who has control of the airspace and is therefore responsible for the attacks on the de-conflicted sites. The United States therefore urges Russia to assure the United Nations and the Council that it will abide by all of its commitments to the de-confliction mechanism and ensure that Syrian forces also act in full compliance with the de-confliction arrangements.

The Russian Federation can — and must — do better to restore peace and bring about a political solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, the Russian Federation and the track record of the Russian Reconciliation Centre for Syria on de-escalation and reconciliation speaks for itself — another Russian-brokered agreement made, another Russian-brokered agreement tossed aside for military and political expediency.

The situation in Idlib is escalating. Thousands were killed last year during the regime and Russian joint offensive in eastern Ghouta — a former Astana-protected de-escalation zone — and the situation in south-west Syria is deteriorating despite a Russian-brokered reconciliation agreement there with local communities. The United States is concerned that, despite the regime's recapture — with Russian assistance by brute military force — of areas such as eastern Ghouta and south-west Syria, the United Nations and humanitarian actors continue to struggle for access to those locations. Meanwhile, civilians' access to electricity and safe drinking water in those areas remains intermittent.

Eastern Ghouta and south-west Syria have become black holes of information due to residents' fear of

sharing information and ending up in the custody of the regime. However, the United States is aware of reports that the Al-Assad regime is deploying a vast network of intelligence checkpoints where regime forces regularly arrest civilians and force them into conscription, in violation of the Russian-brokered reconciliation agreements.

The United States is also concerned about increasing indications that the regime plans to take full control of the region and about growing frustration among communities in Dara'a and Quneitra, as regime intelligence forces expand their control across the area and establish checkpoints into Dara'a. Reports of assassinations, kidnappings, poor provision of essential services and forced conscription all call into question Russia's role as a trustworthy broker between the Syrian people and the regime forces for improved security and living conditions in the south.

Finally, the United States would like to thank David Lillie, Executive Director of the Syrian American Medical Society, for being with us today and for his important and troubling briefing to the Council. The Syrian American Medical Society's network of medical professionals and health facilities are real lifelines to millions of people in north-west Syria. We on the Council must protect them, civil society and civilian populations from any further attacks by the Al-Assad regime and its allies.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank our briefers, beginning with Mark Lowcock for his very useful briefing. I commend his teams for their outstanding work in responding to the humanitarian emergency in Syria. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of the Syrian American Medical Society for his very enlightening briefing. It is clear — we are indeed witnessing another humanitarian disaster in north-west Syria. We also took note of the information conveyed by the Russian Reconciliation Centre for Syria. Now more than ever, we must focus our efforts on three priorities, namely, the preservation of the ceasefire in Idlib, respect for international humanitarian law and the quest for a lasting political solution.

First, preserving the ceasefire in Idlib is an absolute imperative. Given that another tragedy is unfolding in the north-west of the country, we must do everything in our power to prevent Idlib from becoming another Aleppo — the lives of more than 3 million civilians,

including 1 million children, are at stake. We strongly condemn the strikes that have indiscriminately targeted the city of Idlib and its population in recent days. The risk of escalation is at its peak, as illustrated by the regime's attacks on Turkish patrols this month.

We call on the signatories to the ceasefire agreement to honour their commitments and ensure an effective ceasefire in the north-west, the end of hostilities and a nationwide ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Russia in particular must exert all the necessary pressure on the regime to return to the front lines agreed in Sochi. Discussions between Turkey and Russia must also continue to allow for an immediate de-escalation of the situation. Iran must also play its part. We hope that upcoming deadlines set by the international community will enable substantial and lasting progress to be made on the situation in Idlib. In addition, I reiterate that, in the event that chemical weapons are used again, France will be extremely firm and stands ready to act.

Secondly, respect for international humanitarian law is binding on everyone and not negotiable. I would like to recall two absolute priorities in that regard. The first is the need to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel. The fact that health infrastructure, in particular facilities that have been de-conflicted and schools, remain the targets of attacks in the north-west of the country is unacceptable. We strongly condemn the regime's attack on an ambulance on 20 June in Maarat Al-Numan. Attacks on hospitals and health workers, which are part of the regime's military strategy to forcibly reclaim areas beyond its control, constitute war crimes. I echo the remarks made by my German colleague: those crimes will not go unpunished. Furthermore, we take note of the letter from the United Nations to the Russian Federation and await Russia's response. We must understand what that will mean for the United Nations de-confliction system.

In addition to the protection of civilians, the other absolute priority is ensuring immediate, safe, secure, comprehensive, sustainable and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syria. I recall that humanitarian aid must reach those who need it most. In that context, the whole-of-Syria humanitarian architecture — put in place by the United Nations to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable Syrians through the most effective channels — must be maintained. It is also urgent that a new aid convoy be immediately deployed to the Rukban camp. That is

vital. We also call on those with the means to do so to exert the necessary pressure on the regime to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas under its control, in particular the territories it reclaimed in 2018 in the south-west of the country and in eastern Ghouta. The fact that only 60 per cent of the requests for access made to the Syrian regime during April and May were approved is unacceptable. Lastly, I would mention the Al-Hol camp, where it is essential for the United Nations to have sustainable access that is as direct and effective as possible so as to provide assistance to the 73,000 people living there.

The third priority, which is inextricably linked to the other two, is the launching of a sustainable political process under the auspices of the United Nations. We will spare no effort to support the Special Envoy in the implementation of a political solution based on all the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522,annex). It is essential that the Council do the same during our consultations with Geir Pedersen on Thursday. In that regard, I refer to the key issues of the constitutional committee and elections. In line with resolution 2254 (2015), we must now reflect on the conditions that will ensure that election results are not determined in advance, as in the past; that the elections will be free and fair; that all Syrians, including refugees, can speak freely in the process and that the United Nations will be involved in overseeing the process. The Special Envoy has our full support to move forward in that regard.

Only the establishment of a credible political process will make it possible for refugees to return to Syria, which must take place in safe and dignified conditions and under the auspices of the United Nations. Those conditions are clearly not being met now. In any case, it is essential that the United Nations be given free access to Syrian territory to monitor refugee returns in a transparent manner. Council members know our positions on issues related to reconstruction, the lifting of sanctions and normalization. Our positions, which are also those of the European Union, remain unchanged.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his useful information, as well as the other briefers.

Peru is deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. We deplore in particular the extreme vulnerability of civilians in the north-west

of the country. Such vulnerability is exacerbated by the extensive control exercised by terrorist groups over the area and the devastating consequences of the escalating violence. We reiterate our firm condemnation of terrorist activities of all kinds. But we underscore the need for any counter-terrorism response to uphold the humanitarian principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution.

In the same vein, we deplore and decry the extensive damage suffered by civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical centres, often as a result of aerial attacks that fail to distinguish between combatants and civilians. Faced with that grim scenario, we urge the Syrian Government and all relevant stakeholders in this conflict to prevent further deterioration, which in concrete terms means preserving the ceasefire agreed by Turkey and Russia last September.

We commend the laudable efforts being undertaken by the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to provide sustained assistance to the more than 70,000 internally displaced persons living in Al-Hol camp in circumstances of great logistical complexity, and where the risk of the spread of diseases is growing as temperatures rise markedly. We note that almost half of the displaced persons are of Iraqi origin, for which reason we urge the authorities of Iraq to spare no effort to facilitate their return, which, we underscore, must take place under internationally accepted parameters and with the support and assistance of the United Nations.

Turning to the situation in Rukban, Peru urges the Syrian authorities and countries with influence in the area to facilitate the delivery of United Nations humanitarian aid. The failure to grant the requisite permits is unjustified and should be roundly condemned by the entire international community. Building on that point, we underscore that efforts must continue to facilitate the movement of those displaced persons who wish to leave the camp in Rukban, the majority of whom lack the economic resources to turn that wish into reality. We therefore lend our backing to the operational plan that the United Nations has been developing to support such persons, together with other actions aimed at guaranteeing their safe return. We wish to draw attention equally to the importance of the continued mobilization of the international community to support humanitarian de-mining and the clearance of improvised explosive devices in Syria, which continue to wreak havoc among the population and hamper the delivery of aid and assistance.

I conclude by recalling the urgent need to make progress in achieving a political solution on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), which is all the more pressing in the current fragile circumstances, characterized as they are by an upswing in violence, the upshot of which is likely to bode ill for regional and global stability.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): At the outset I should like to thank the briefers.

I think Mr. David Lillie was right to challenge us. Humanitarian workers deserve our praise, thanks, admiration and, above all, Security Council efforts to protect them. I am sorry that those efforts have been found wanting. I will come back to that in a minute.

I support what was said by the representatives of France and Germany before the debate began. We believe that it is important for the Council to hear from all sides of a conflict, so we did not on this occasion object to the invitation issued under rule 39 to the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring in the Syrian Arab Republic and to General Bakin. We are very strong supporters of freedom of speech, but we prefer it to be truthful speech. We believe that truth is indeed the first casualty of war. That is a very good saying. I do not like being told that we cannot trust information from the United Nations or that we cannot trust the assessment of the Security Council, but that instead we are to trust Russian uniformed personnel even though Russia is a party to the conflict. It is obvious that there is also a conflict of interest. I wanted to explain all that before I go on to the substance of my remarks.

Our agreement to hear briefers from one side of a conflict, in particular military briefers in a humanitarian context, should not be taken for granted in future for the reasons I have set out. However, today I would like to focus in particular on the hospitals, on the issues that Mr. Mark Lowcock raised and on deconfliction. I also really want to try to get to the bottom of this. I said last time (see S/PV.8535) that I will keep asking questions until I get answers. I hope that the General will be able to help the Council get answers to the questions it has concerning the attacks on the hospitals, because these are very serious matters on which we just do not seem to be able to make any progress. If I may, I would therefore like to ask him some questions.

First, I would like to know why 30 hospitals have been attacked? Also, why was an ambulance a direct

target? Given what we have heard from David Lillie and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and what we know of international humanitarian law, why, in the General's view, do the attacks on the terrorists eclipse the needs of civilians? To us they do not seem proportionate and they do not appear to be preserving the principles of international humanitarian law. If the General believes that the hospitals are legitimate military targets, we would like to see some of the information that underpins that belief. In particular, we would like to know where are the warnings that, under the Geneva Conventions, need to be given before a hospital can be treated as a military target. I would also like to know how the General or how Russia sees the deconfliction mechanism working for the reasons the Under-Secretary-General set out.

I have three more questions, if I may. The first is about the ceasefire. Why is it so difficult to obtain a ceasefire when both we and the General support the Turkish efforts in Idlib? What needs to change on the ground in order to achieve a ceasefire? What is happening to investigate and hold accountable the people responsible for the attacks on hospitals? Finally, may we have the names and designations of the Russian and Syrian units involved in the attacks on the hospitals?

I also have points to make on Rukban. In that respect, I share the concern of my colleagues about the deteriorating situation and humanitarian access. We, too, support the need for a third aid convoy to be allowed in as a matter of urgency. We support unfettered access for aid across Syria. With respect to Al-Hol, we continue to support the United Nations efforts to scale up its response and to provide aid to humanitarian organizations operating at camps for internally displaced persons, including Al-Hol.

A number of speakers have raised the political situation and, as some have noted, Mr. Pedersen will brief us later this month. What was said by the representative of France, including his statement on the use of chemical weapons, represents the United Kingdom's view. I hope that I will be able to get some answers.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Major General Alexey Bakin, Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre;

and Mr. David Lillie, Executive Director of the Syrian American Medical Society for their concise briefings on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

It is undeniable that the intensification of clashes over the past several weeks, particularly in Idlib governorate, is contributing to the worsening of an already very worrying humanitarian situation. This eight-year conflict has resulted in thousands of deaths and the destruction of hospital and school infrastructure, thereby depriving many people, mainly children, of access to basic social services.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that more than 250 people have died and that 350,000 others have left Idlib governorate to seek refuge in border areas of Turkey since 29 April. The Al-Hol camp has seen its population increase from 10,000 in 2018 to 73,000 at present. With regard to the Rukban camp, it has yet to receive any further humanitarian convoys since the most recent one arrived in February, which helped meet the needs of more than 40,000 displaced persons.

In that context, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its call on all parties to comply with the provisions of the 17 September 2018 memorandum on the stabilization of the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Indeed, respect for the ceasefire, which the memorandum establishes, should enable the warring parties to create the necessary conditions for safe, rapid, unhindered and sustainable access to humanitarian aid for the affected populations. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the cross-border deliveries of humanitarian aid, in accordance with resolution 2449 (2018). Such deliveries allowed for the provision of aid to approximately 915,000 people per month from February to March.

My country notes with regret that, in addition to the disastrous humanitarian consequences, the military escalation in the north-western part of Syria is dangerously compromising the tireless efforts of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Geir Pedersen to revive the political process. Côte d'Ivoire therefore calls on all Syrian parties, as well as regional and international actors, to support his efforts to find a political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

In conclusion, my country reaffirms its conviction that achieving peace in Syria will be possible if the protagonists commit to dialogue as a means of settling their differences so as to end the conflict and the suffering of the Syrian people.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Major General Bakin, Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre, for their briefings. I also thank the Russian representative for providing first-hand information on the situation on the ground, especially the Idlib de-escalation zone. We also listened very carefully to the statement delivered by Mr. Lillie.

China is concerned about the humanitarian situation on the ground, and we support the efforts of the United Nations and relevant parties to improve it. To date, the humanitarian situation in Idlib has attracted the attention of international community and the Council has met many times on this matter. We hope that our discussions will help Council members broaden communication and deepen their understanding of all aspects of the situation on the ground.

China supports the efforts of Russia and Turkey in continuing to implement the memorandum promoting the de-escalation of the conflict in Idlib. We call on the international community to adopt common criteria, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and provisions of international law, to counter the activities of terrorist groups. In the current situation, all parties should seek comprehensive and long-term solutions to counter terrorism and address the humanitarian issues in the north-western part of Syria. The United Nations and other parties should scale up humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north-western part of the country.

China is concerned about humanitarian problems in other parts of Syria and IDP camps. We are in favour of solutions tailored to the situation on the ground. We note that approximately 1,000 displaced persons in the Al-Hol camp have returned to their homes. We support the proper resettlement of those people who are currently living in the camps. The international community should enhance dialogue and communication on the issue of Rukban camp and coordinate action to help more Syrians to return to their homes and end their displacement as soon as possible.

Humanitarian operations in Syria should fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and strictly follow the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principles governing United Nations humanitarian relief and provisions of international law. Communication and coordination with the Syrian Government should be strengthened.

In areas where the security situation is relatively stable, the international community should support the Syrian Government in demining, rebuilding infrastructure, restoring health care, education and social services, launching industrial projects, promoting development and improving people's livelihoods so that an increasing number of Syrians can emerge from the shadow of war and gradually return to a stable and orderly life. China is concerned about the negative impact of economic sanctions on the lives of the Syrian people.

In order to meaningfully alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria, we must continue to advance the political process. China supports the United Nations in playing its role as the main channel for good offices and supports Special Envoy Pedersen in pushing the parties in Syria to seek solutions that accommodate the concerns of all parties, in accordance with the principle of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process and resolution 2254 (2015). We hope that the parties in Syria will narrow their differences and move forward the political process through dialogue and negotiations.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): First of all, I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for updating the Council on the current humanitarian situation in Syria. We also thank the representatives of the Russian Reconciliation Centre in Syria and the Syrian American Medical Society.

There is no denying that the continuing escalation of violence in north-west Syria has brought about serious humanitarian consequences. My delegation is deeply troubled by reports of an increase in the number of civilian deaths and displaced persons, as well as the damage to civilian infrastructure. Exactly one week ago, the Council specifically discussed the situation in north-western Syria. I recall that Under-Secretary-General Lowcock stated at that same meeting that "we are facing a humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes" (*S/PV.8553, p.3*). The report of the Secretary-General also specifies that "We are faced with a horrendous disaster in the making" (*S/2019/508, para.42*). That is indeed frightening. Do we really think that we can afford another humanitarian catastrophe? In addition, the situation in Rukban and Al-Hol camps, where humanitarian conditions remain dire, also demand the Council's special attention.

My delegation wishes to highlight three pertinent points.

First and foremost, it is urgent for all parties to cease hostilities and prioritize the safety and security of civilians. We once again urge all sides to respect and implement the September 2018 memorandum between Russia and Turkey. We share the view of Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, who spoke earlier, on the deconfliction mechanism. There is a need for all parties concerned to strengthen the system so as to avoid further incidents, which would lead to further casualties. Any mechanism is only as good as the people who are supposed to implement it. Medical facilities should never be the object of any attack.

Moreover, I would like to stress that peace is not an alternative; peace is the objective. Saving people's lives is not an option; it should be and is the main goal. A permanent ceasefire in north-west Syria is not a backup plan; it must be the purpose.

Secondly, my delegation urges all parties to allow safe, unimpeded and sustained access for United Nations humanitarian operations to all requested areas and populations, in all parts of Syria. With more than 350,000 people being displaced and many forced to live in the open, it is critical to ensure immediate humanitarian assistance. Many of them have also experienced displacement multiple times. In Al-Hol camp, where more than 73,000 people are living in difficult situations, tensions remain high. In Rukban, the United Nations still requires access to deliver a critical needs-based humanitarian response.

Third is the importance of a safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees to their home areas in Syria, in accordance with international law. In addition, we believe that the United Nations should be able to monitor their overall movement until they are able to return to their areas of origin.

The conflict and the humanitarian suffering in Syria are undeniably the result of the absence of political solutions. Humanitarian assistance is like a bandage over an open wound. We need to heal the wound; a bandage alone is insufficient to do so, especially if the wound is larger than a Band-Aid.

We share the Secretary-General's concern that the escalation in north-west Syria is undermining Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to revive the political process. We cannot let that continue. I still believe that there is a window of opportunity with regard to the Syrian political process. And there is a glimmer of hope. Hope and opportunity are important for us to move forward.

However, the current escalation in north-western Syria is indeed threatening the ongoing political process.

In conclusion, in my very humble view, the biggest tragedy would be to become immune to the suffering of civilians or to fail to cope with it and take action. But I sincerely believe that the Council can still be united in alleviating the adversity of the Syrian people. I still have faith in the Council.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. David Lillie, Executive Director of the Syrian American Medical Society; and Major General Bakin, of the Russian Reconciliation Centre, for their briefings on the situation in Syria. I am also looking forward to hearing from our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Syria.

At the outset, South Africa would like to pay tribute to the humanitarian workers who have lost their lives in this devastating war. These men and women put the lives of those they chose to help before their own and paid the ultimate price. We thank them and honour their sacrifice. In that regard, we must do all we can to end the conflict in Syria so as to ensure that these courageous men and women did not lose their lives in vain.

South Africa believes that the only sustainable solution to the Syrian question remains the achievement of a political solution through an inclusive Syrian-owned and Syrian-led dialogue. The efforts of all stakeholders in that regard are undermined by the continued escalation of violence in some parts of Syria. In that connection, we call on all parties to fully implement all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2254 (2015), on the political road map, and 2449 (2018), on cross-border humanitarian access. We also call for the full implementation of the September 2018 ceasefire memorandum and the recent ceasefire brokered between Russia and Turkey. South Africa calls on all parties to adhere to the provisions contained in the ceasefire agreements.

As stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/508), the humanitarian situation remains dire, particularly in the light of the increasing violence in north-western Syria, which has led thousands of civilians to flee the area. The situation in various camps throughout Syria is also of concern. The upcoming summer season is expected to lead to additional

challenges to the already strained humanitarian assistance response. We therefore call on all parties to ensure that the required humanitarian assistance is being provided to all those who require it, wherever they may be.

In that regard, while we welcome the efforts of the United Nations and the Syrian Government in assisting those who are able to leave Rukban camp; many more are unable to do so at this time due to various challenges, including lack of resources. While people remain at Rukban, it is essential that they be provided with the assistance they require. We call on the relevant parties to ensure that the required permissions for additional aid convoys are granted.

With regard to the Syrian Golan, South Africa would like to reiterate its position that this territory remains illegally occupied, and calls on Israel to adhere to the Council's various resolutions and to withdraw from all occupied territories. The annexation of territory seized through the use of force is in violation of international law and must be condemned. In order to ensure long-term peace and security in the Middle East, it is vital that international law be respected and upheld.

In conclusion, South Africa remains committed to protecting the fundamental interests of all Syrian people, maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and preserving the basic norms governing international relations.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting. We thank Mr. Lowcock, Major General Bakin and Mr. Lillie for their valuable briefings.

Once again, we commend all humanitarian actors who continue to provide essential and urgent assistance in conditions of insecurity, including in areas highly contaminated by explosive remnants and landmines.

The degree of vulnerability in the Syrian Arab Republic is worrisome. Most of Syria's population is already living in extreme poverty, with limited capacity to endure further attacks and with acute humanitarian needs. But the statistics, reports and figures do not manage to reflect one iota of the suffering that these people must feel as they leave everything behind in order to save their lives and those of their loved ones.

We have already directly explained on several occasions my country's position on the appalling

humanitarian situation in Syria. The solution to this long-standing conflict is not military, but political. Humanitarian action cannot replace the primary responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic and the entire international community to protect the civilian population from indiscriminate attacks, in accordance with international humanitarian law. It is precisely now, when for the first time in a long time there seems to be a window of opportunity to advance the political process, that the Council must assume its role and seize this opportunity to redouble efforts to support this process and defend it tooth and nail.

Understanding that the situation in Idlib directly influences the stability of the political process, we reiterate the need for the full implementation of the Russian-Turkish memorandum of September 2018 and for all parties to the conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and the obligation to protection of civilians. We insist that attacks on civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, as well as other civilian spaces, cease immediately. Such attacks fundamentally disrupt the provision of basic services such as education and health care, especially for women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities and young people.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight a few points that, from our perspective, could contribute to alleviating the suffering of so many millions of people through flexible, comprehensive and needs-based humanitarian assistance. In order to be able to assess and respond to the growing needs of the affected population, all parties exercising control on the ground must facilitate safe, sustained and unhindered access to the United Nations and its partners to all of Syria. The parties must adhere to the rules of international humanitarian law and refrain from attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure. That includes counter-terrorist offensives.

The lives of the 72,000 people living in Al-Hol camp, the vast majority of whom are women and children, remain at risk. Uncertainty with respect to the future and lack of information about their relatives have triggered rising tensions. It is therefore vital that sustained humanitarian access be maintained and that solutions be considered with respect to the thousands of foreign citizens who are living in the annex to the camp.

The situation of those people remaining in Rukban camp and awaiting humanitarian assistance continues

to be a source of concern for us, especially since we heard that permission for the entry of a new convoy had been denied. We therefore urge the authorities to continue to work with the United Nations and its partners in the quest for joint solutions in order to help those persons wishing to leave the camp and deliver humanitarian assistance to those who remain.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank the briefers for their presentations. I wish in particular to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for the efforts made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the ground.

The military escalation in north-west Syria continues even as we speak. Reported airstrikes and shelling have damaged 26 health-care facilities and almost 40 schools in the area. Attacks on densely populated areas, homes, medical facilities and settlements for internally displaced persons are unacceptable and must stop. All parties must, as their first priority, protect civilians in Idlib.

Any military operation, even if carried out against United Nations-listed terrorist entities, should be fully in line with international humanitarian and human rights law, in order to preserve from harm the thousands of civilians trapped in the middle of the fighting. The protection of civilians and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance are not a choice but a legal obligation of all sides to the conflict. Those that do not comply should be held accountable.

Let me once again underline the significance of ensuring that the de-escalation zone in Idlib, as agreed in the memorandum of understanding between Russia and Turkey, is effectively restored and fully respected. The recent escalation has already resulted in another displacement of more than 350,000 persons.

In addition, I want to stress our concern about the dismal state of health-care facilities in Syria. Most of them are not functional, and those still operating are too poorly equipped to be able to provide care to patients with injuries or further support to persons with disabilities. In our opinion, the international community, especially the Security Council, should vigorously advocate for the health and protection of civilians, especially women, children and persons with disabilities, as stated in resolution 2475 (2019).

Let me turn to the issue of humanitarian access in Syria, especially in Al-Hol camp, where children

constitute the majority of the population, as well as Rukban camp, where the situation is increasingly dire owing to the limited movement of goods and the fact that there is practically no external access.

As recalled during today's briefing, the second and most recent humanitarian convoy to Rukban delivered life-saving aid to the inhabitants of the camp at the beginning of February. As we approach the end of June, no progress has been made in terms of the third convoy. We urge the Syrian authorities to swiftly mobilize the next inter-agency convoy to Rukban, where approximately 28,000 people remain in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, let me once again stress the crucial importance of the effective and credible re-implementation of the Idlib de-escalation zone as a *sine qua non* for averting a humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and of making much-needed progress in the political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Sipaco Ribala (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Equatorial Guinea welcomes the holding of this meeting and reiterates its thanks to Mr. Mark Lowcock, Major General Alexey Bakin and Mr. David Lillie for the very useful information they have provided us.

As has been described in detail, the situation in Syria, particularly in the north-western part of the country, is reaching alarming proportions. Over the past two months, we have lost count of the number of people, mostly women and children, who have been killed in the current escalation of violence. There can be no doubt that we are facing a genuine humanitarian tragedy with clear regional repercussions. Against that backdrop, it would make sense to ask ourselves if the conflict might morph into a large-scale regional war or if, on the contrary, the Syrian Government will succeed in containing the jihadist threat and the rise of other armed groups. Objectively speaking, it is impossible to predict how the situation will play out.

No one wants to pay the bloody price of an open war, including Syria's immediate neighbours. The parties must therefore spare no effort to rein in the increasing number of attacks against the population, defenceless civilians, civilian infrastructure and health-care centres.

The disastrous humanitarian situation is evident, as can be seen in the camps for refugees and displaced persons, including Al-Hol camp, where 73,000 people live in appalling conditions, and Rukban camp, which, because of the failure to deploy the third humanitarian convoy, some 14,000 people have been compelled to abandon owing to the horrendous humanitarian conditions there. We must not underestimate the seriousness of the situation in the two camps or substantially downplay the real magnitude of the humanitarian disaster they are currently facing.

Here we reiterate that in line with resolution 2449 (2018) and other relevant resolutions, cross-border assistance must remain a key component of humanitarian action, and the parties must not stint on efforts to allow humanitarian aid to reach Idlib and other areas of the country cut off by the fighting.

Given the alarming levels of need and vulnerability with adverse humanitarian consequences in north-west Syria, the Government of Equatorial Guinea commends the work done by the humanitarian community, which, despite the many security restrictions, is resolutely committed to responding to the needs of the population affected by delivering emergency humanitarian aid.

I conclude my statement by stressing that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. Peace and stability in Syria require all the parties to compromise and fulfil their obligations to promote an inclusive and peaceful political process.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Syria.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): There is a well-known adage that says, "That which harms you can also help you grow". This saying makes considerably easier my task of criticizing the invitation extended to the Executive Director of the so-called Syrian American Medical Society, particularly in the light of the praise heaped by the United States representative on that Society and its work in Syria. I think the commendation speaks volumes as to the extent to which the society is linked with United States intelligence agencies operating actively in my country and in other countries. That is not an accusation against the society, which every year fails to obtain consultative status in the meetings of non-governmental organizations here in New York. Every year it submits a request and fails to achieve consultative status for

reasons of which States Members of the Organization are aware and there is no need to go into further detail.

As mentioned on its website, the organization is affiliated with the Federal Government of the United States. Indeed, it is affiliated with an agency called the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for which the person present with us here worked in Iraq, Afghanistan and then Syria for eight years before he was transferred to preside over the Syrian American Medical Society. The important thing is that the society works for USAID and the latter introduces itself on its website as an independent agency of the United States Federal Government with a budget of more than \$27 billion. The person present with us here who spoke on behalf of a society called the Syrian American Medical Society is an employee of USAID, which is an agency of the United States Administration, meaning that he is a non-independent federal employee. He should therefore not have been invited to speak before the Council. He is an American, not a Syrian. He has no right to speak about another country, while the Syrian American Medical Society or the American Syrian Medical Society — I do not know what they call it — is not authorized to work in Syria. That means that it is an illegal organization that is illegally active on Syrian territory. There is something important called legal ignorance, which does not authorize anyone to ignore the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, resolutions of the Security Council or the General Assembly or the consensual resolutions of other important international institutions, which I will address now.

First, the Geneva Conventions do not allow the society to be active on the territory of another State without the consent of the State involved. Secondly, the system that established the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 1921 forbids any medical or non-medical society from being active on the occupied territory of another State unless that State approves it. As members know, General Assembly resolution 46/182 stipulates that no one can provide humanitarian assistance without the consent of the authorities of the State concerned. Paragraph 14 of the General Assembly resolution on the pattern of conferences that we adopt by consensus every year stipulates that United Nations halls, buildings and facilities are not allowed to be used against the interests of a State Member of the United Nations.

There is another important point to mention. The Executive Director of that organization or society said that it provided 14 million medical services in Idlib. All members know that, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and others, the Al-Nusra Front controls 99 per cent of Idlib. That means that a terrorist group controls 99 per cent of Idlib where the Syrian American Medical Society is active. How could it be that the society is active in places controlled by a terrorist group? Hence, there is cooperation between the terrorist group and the society, meaning that the society provides assistance to a terrorist group in Idlib rather than providing assistance to civilians in Idlib.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): It is dangerous to humanitarian workers on the ground to allege a connection with the Al-Nusra Front when none exists. I want to put that on the record because that could really put lives at risk.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor back to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to conclude his statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): That is the first time that I have seen a representative of a country interrupting the representative of another country while reading his statement to raise a point of order. That does not happen. No one may interrupt an ambassador of another country while delivering a statement. In any case, I recounted facts and information and posed legitimate questions to all members. Consider what I said regarding information and factual events. Members can verify them. They are not accusations, rather they are facts.

My delegation has taken note of the sixty-first report on the implementation of supposedly humanitarian resolutions aimed at supporting the efforts of the Syrian Government and its institutions to improve the lives and well-being of Syrian civilians and to build their capacity to improve the difficult humanitarian conditions that are the result of the civil war imposed on my country. I will not address the report before the Council in detail as it is intended to deal with objectives that are not related to the interests of the Syrian people or their security and well-being. It is simply used to repeat obsolete things that may please certain anti-Syrian Governments. The proof is that most pages of the report focus on the situation in Idlib, guided by the vision of the Office for the Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs and its open sources. It uses vague language and fabricated names that take us back to an era that we thought OCHA had left behind, an era in which it was exploited by certain agendas of States that have influence in the Security Council. Those countries sought to undermine the efforts of the Syrian Government and to find pretexts to accuse it and to make it an enemy rather than to establish a partnership with it and fully cooperate and coordinate with it in advance. Cities such as Raqqa, Hajin, Baghouz, Deir ez-Zor, Tell Rifaat, Palmyra, Afrin and Manbij did not receive any attention from those who draft such reports. They always write short and ambiguous expressions, refusing to use clear language and without attributing responsibility for the war crimes and crimes against humanity to the international coalition, the occupying Turkish forces, the militias and affiliated terrorist groups. They do not address the tragic plight of the civilians, including in areas occupied by the United States, such as Rukban and Al-Hol camps. Because they claim to be neutral and professional, as we hope they truly are, they had to say something about the existence and enormity of those unquestionable crimes.

In light of the information contained in the report, we have the right to ask about hundreds of foreign fighters whom the report claims to have resided in Al-Hol camp and were reportedly transferred to other places. We have extremely important information about that. Thousands of foreign terrorists residing in Al-Hol camp were transferred to other places. We have the right to ask about their destination. What will their fate be? Will they be recycled through Turkish territory back into Syria? We have seen that happen in the north-east of the country and other areas in order to launch attacks on peaceful civilian areas in the north-west of Syria, such as the city of Kesab, or to enter Idlib and its rural areas. On what basis were they released from the camps? Who facilitated and funded this operation? Are we going to see those terrorists in other targeted countries, pursuant to the policies of certain countries under fabricated names such as the Islamic State in North Africa, like Da'esh in our region, Or the Islamic State in the Caucasus and Central Asia? It would seem that investing in terrorism is far more lucrative for certain States Members of the Organization than investing in the Sustainable Development Goals, the environment, conflict containment, the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or humanitarian work.

Ever since the first meeting of the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in my country years ago, we have stressed that a tangible improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria requires dealing with foreign political, military and economic intervention in the affairs of my country. Obviously, discussing the details of these aggressive interventions requires time that the Council is not willing to spend. I do not believe that certain members of the Council are willing to seriously engage in core issues leading to the achievement of the noble objectives of real humanitarian work.

Are the representatives of certain Western States ready to discuss the terrorism that is targeting my country? Some States are investing in this terrorism. They collateralize their investment with tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 States Members of the Organization, providing them with all kinds of support, finance and weapons. Are the representatives of those Western States ready to discuss economic terrorism and the collective punishment that their Governments practice by imposing unilateral coercive sanctions against the Syrian people? These sanctions do not exclude children, the elderly, women or the sick. Are those colleagues willing to discuss the role their Governments are playing in prolonging this crisis, which has lasted for more than eight years? These Governments are hindering the political solution and thereby increasing the suffering of the Syrian people. We all know the answer very well. We realize that those Governments are offering various fake excuses and pretexts to avoid this discussion, which would highlight their serious political, legal and moral failings.

I will refrain from reading certain paragraphs contained in my statement so as not to be accused of attacking the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We have made great progress in spite of the enormous challenges we face and we are confident that, together, we could have achieved much more in the humanitarian field if some of our United Nations partners had been committed to the principles of humanitarian work, notably by respecting the principles of sovereignty, neutrality, non-politicization, full cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government, which is the key party involved in meeting the needs of Syrians.

The Syrian Government, like every other responsible Government in the world, including the Governments of Member States, cannot sit idle while

terrorists control one of its regions and use the citizens of Dara'a as human shields, targeting peaceful civilians in neighbouring cities and towns with indiscriminate missiles and rockets. It is obvious that the Syrian Government must defend its citizens and has the right to respond to terrorists launching missiles. It has the right to fight terrorism, as stressed by international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the anti-terrorism resolutions. Any allegation that the Syrian Government and its allies are deliberately targeting civilians or civilian infrastructure is purely baseless.

In conclusion, I reaffirm that my country's Government will spare no effort to help the Syrian people surpass these difficult times of the history of their country by providing them with the support and services they need to move forward to rehabilitate and rebuild what has been destroyed by terrorism and aggression. I also emphasize that the way to improve the humanitarian situation in my country is clear to everybody. It requires full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the lifting of the illegal, inhumane and unilateral coercive measures against it. The Syrian State must be supported in the humanitarian and development areas, in addition to the measures taken by the Government to fight terrorism and put an end to the illegal presence of United States, British, French and Turkish forces throughout the entire territories of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): To clarify, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stated that, in his experience, there had never been a case where a Council member raised a point of order. In accordance with rule 30 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, it is entirely acceptable for a Council member to raise a point of order. However, the representative of the United Kingdom raised a point of order before I had given her the floor, so it was not possible to fully interpret her statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bakin to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Bakin (*spoke in Russian*): I do not wish to make any additional comments further to my earlier statement.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Lillie to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Lillie: I, too, would like to pay tribute to the humanitarians who have been lost in Syria — nearly 1,200 of them, as the representative of South Africa mentioned in his remarks, which we appreciate.

With regard to the areas of Syria that we have discussed here today, I sometimes wonder why health-care workers stay in Syria. They stay to care for those who have been injured and maimed, and to help bury those who have died. They are unselfish, they are heroic and they are true humanitarians. In fact, one of the most dangerous jobs in Syria is to be a health-care worker. One of the most dangerous places to be in Syria today is at a health facility.

As has been stated here today, since the end of April there have been 30 attacks on health facilities, mobile health clinics and ambulances. The Syrian American Medical Society alone has lost over 50 of its colleagues. This week, my colleagues and fellow non-governmental organizations have been reviewing a duty of care policy — what to do about our colleagues who have been maimed and who have died, and how we care for their families. I have worked in humanitarian assistance for decades in Darfur, South Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan and in many other places, for both governmental and non-governmental organizations, and I have never put so much care into such a policy — we have not had to.

Some of my colleagues would want to condemn or to call out names, but we cannot so long as we stay true to humanitarian standards. And it is not easy. Of the nine de-conflicted facilities attacked since late April, eight were from air strikes. While there are many air forces operating in Syria, the only ones conducting operations in that part of north-western Syria are Russia's and Syria's. It was Russia that, for years, pushed to de-conflict. We were told to provide coordinates and that they would make sure that those coordinates were not targeted.

This organ and its investigative entities must hold accountable those who have attacked civilians and medical facilities or the people suffering in Syria will lose the remaining thread of hope that the international community cares. We owe it to the 1,200 humanitarians who have perished in the conflict and the 2,200 individuals — women, children, civilians — who the Syrian American Medical Society has seen in its medical facilities injured from the conflict since the end of April.

We have heard many good words here today and I can only ask that we put those words into action before more civilian lives are lost.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of the United Kingdom on a point of order.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): That was a very moving conclusion from Mr. Lillie.

I just wanted to say that I would like the record to show that I did not get answers to my questions from someone who ought to have been able to answer them and that, for as long as we do not have answers to those questions, the types of suffering, complications and dilemmas that David Lillie has outlined will continue. We therefore need to continue our efforts to try and get to the bottom of the situation.

I will spare Council colleagues reflections on the irony that the issue of freedom of speech has been raised with regard to what we heard at the beginning and the fact that my questions have not been answered. However, I would like to stress that we will need to come back to the issue. It is so important.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Russian Federation has requested the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would just like to correct my British colleague. All the answers to her questions are contained in Major General Bakin's statement. She simply needs to read and listen to it again thoroughly. It contains exhaustive answers, including with regard to humanitarian matters.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.