



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8697th meeting

Friday, 20 December 2019, 12.35 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Craft (United States of America)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
Dominican Republic	Mrs. Cedano
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
France	Mrs. Gueguen
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Kuwait	Mr. Aljarallah
Peru	Mr. Popolizio Bardales
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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19-42648 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 12.35 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

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

Members of the Council have before them documents S/2019/961 and S/2019/962, which contain the texts of two draft resolutions. The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolutions.

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

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I would like to briefly introduce draft resolution S/2019/961 on behalf of the co-penholders, Belgium, Germany and Kuwait.

In formulating and proposing this draft resolution, we were motivated by the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. This morning we once again heard about the human suffering in the country (see S/PV.8696) through the personal testimony of a victim of the violence there. There are still more than 11 million people in Syria who are in need of humanitarian aid, of whom at least 4 million depend on the cross-border mechanism that the Council decided on some time ago in adopting resolution 2165 (2014). It was the bleak humanitarian situation that led us to propose the renewal of the cross-border mechanism.

In our discussions and our work on the text, we consulted with everybody and went through many iterations. We heard various requests, such as including five rather than four crossing points, or only two crossing points. The proposal before the Council is based on responding to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. Our understanding is that there are two crossing points that are absolutely essential. There is also a third, to Iraq, which both the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization say they need to get medical equipment into Syria. With regard to the fourth crossing point, which has not been used in the last 18 months, we

decided to revisit the possibility of reopening it in six months if there is a need. We were also willing to reduce the renewal term from 12 to six months, after which, if the Council considered that the situation had improved enough to terminate the mechanism, we would follow its recommendation.

I urge our colleagues to vote in favour of this draft resolution, for the people suffering in Syria, and for the 4 million people who depend on the Council to vote in favour of the text so that their needs can continue to be met.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation will vote against the humanitarian troika's draft resolution S/2019/961, on the cross-border assistance mechanism in Syria.

The draft resolution, which has been renewed year after year, is obsolete and does not take into account the changes that have occurred in Syria since 2014, when resolution 2165 (2014) was first adopted. At the time, the mechanism was established under urgent circumstances, when objectively speaking there were no other ways to deliver humanitarian assistance to areas of the Syrian Arab Republic that were not under Government control.

The Syrian authorities have now restored control over the greater part of their territory, so cross-border assistance to those areas is no longer necessary. The crossing at the border with Jordan has not been used since July 2018. According to United Nations reports the deliveries through the checkpoint at the Iraq border are insignificant and could be made through official checkpoints under Syrian army control or from Syrian territory itself. Incidentally, I would like to point out to my German colleague that according to information in the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian assistance to Syria (S/2019/949), it is 1 million people, not 4 million, who are using the cross-border assistance.

I also want to remind the Council that a key paragraph of resolution 2165 (2014), on United Nations humanitarian agencies' direct access to the area of operations, has not been implemented for the entire existence of the resolution. The militants who still control some parts of Syria do not allow humanitarian personnel to enter, preferring to control the process of the delivery and distribution of assistance independently. As a result, a significant part of it is not being used as it was intended. I will say it again. The mechanism was created as a temporary emergency instrument.

Given the dire situation at the time, it enabled the informed delivery of humanitarian assistance at a time when according to international law — article 70 of Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions and General Assembly resolution 46/182 — humanitarian assistance was to be provided with the consent of the official authorities of the recipient country.

Considering the current situation in Syria, it is essential that we revert to the established parameters for humanitarian assistance. The second preambular paragraph of the draft resolution proposed by the co-penholders contain a reference to the firm commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. In that case it is important to also consider the views of Damascus, the recipient country, as set out in a letter dated 10 December from Mr. Faisal Mekdad, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, addressed to Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock — and here it is — which clearly outlines the Syrian Government's position that keeping the mechanism in its current form is unacceptable. We cannot all disregard the position of the recipient country.

From the beginning, the humanitarian troika's draft proposal has assumed its automatic renewal every year without providing for its review or adaptation. It contained, and still contains, provisions that have nothing to do with the humanitarian component. In our view, that approach is dictated by purely political motives. We indicated our overall concerns about the text in the first stage of the consultations. When we saw that we could not work with the document as it was presented to us, we proposed our own version of the resolution. Our draft resolution (S/2019/962) focuses exclusively on the humanitarian aspects while reducing the unused paragraphs on the passage of humanitarian assistance. I especially want to emphasize something that we have said repeatedly, which is that our document does extend the cross-border mechanism. In the past we did not support it but we did not block it either, in acknowledgement of the humanitarian needs of the Syrian population. This year we are willing to support it. It provides for access to humanitarian assistance in north-western Syria, where such aid is still essential. For our part, we have made an effort to meet our colleagues' concerns.

In response, we received a second and then a third draft from the humanitarian troika, which still include provisions that are divorced from reality. This approach

is dishonest. We are obliged to repeat this yet again since our arguments were clearly not heard by our colleagues during the preparatory stage for today's vote. However, we have the impression that our arguments have been deliberately disregarded. For the sake of humanitarian goals, we agree to extending the cross-border assistance mechanism to the areas where it is needed. The six-month extension will enable all of us to consider what we can and should do to ensure the effective use of this humanitarian assistance. And that should not become a justification for those of our colleagues who are willing to block the provision of humanitarian assistance for the sake of the mechanism's mandated timeline.

For the reasons I have cited, we cannot support the humanitarian troika's draft resolution, and we therefore call on all who are genuinely interested in preserving humanitarian assistance in Syria rather than pursuing political aims to support our draft.

The President: I shall now put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2019/961 and submitted by Belgium, Germany and Kuwait.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Peru, Poland, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

China, Russian Federation

The President: The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour and two against. The draft resolution has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council.

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

Mr. Aljarallah (Kuwait) (spoke in Arabic): We regret that the Security Council was unable to adopt draft resolution S/2019/961, presented by the humanitarian troika, which was exclusively humanitarian in nature, in order to renew the mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian assistance across Syria's borders. We hope that negotiations can continue on the renewal of the mechanism, because there is no alternative to it and 4 million people depend on it.

In conclusion, given that this is the last meeting that the State of Kuwait will be participating in for its term on the Security Council, we would like to express our appreciation to all the members of the Council for their collaboration with us for the last two years in our efforts to ensure that we are shouldering our responsibility to help maintain international peace and security. We also wish every success to the five incoming members — Estonia, Niger, Tunisia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Viet Nam — elected to a two-year term of office on the Council.

Mrs. Cedano (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Dominican Republic voted in favour of draft resolution S/2019/961, presented by the humanitarian co-penholders for the 12-month renewal of the cross-border mechanism in the Syrian Arab Republic, on which millions of Syrians depend for their survival. We were very sorry that the draft resolution was not adopted. Exactly the same thing happened exactly three months ago (see S/PV.8623), when a draft resolution (S/2019/756) that sought to protect the civilian population of Idlib from attacks and suffering was not adopted either. We recognize the unstinting efforts of Belgium, Germany and Kuwait to achieve unity in the Council on a draft resolution that is essential to the lives of millions of civilians. We share that aspiration and worked actively for it. However, we believe that the Council can still put the needs of the people who hope for our assistance at the centre of our decisions, so we reiterate our willingness to continue to seek a way out of this regrettable situation.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): France deeply regrets the fact that the draft resolution set out by the humanitarian co-penholders and supported by 13 of the 15 members of the Security Council was not adopted because Russia, followed by China, decided to exercise its veto and to jeopardize the delivery of international humanitarian aid to Syria and the survival of millions of people. It is irresponsible and sinister.

Cross-border humanitarian assistance is of vital importance for the four million Syrian people who depend on it. Must we recall that today there is no alternative to cross-border humanitarian assistance to deliver vital assistance every day to the hundreds of thousands of people in need in the regions concerned, particularly Idlib, because the Syrian regime continues to weaponize humanitarian assistance for political purposes and to prevent all those who suffer and are in need from having equal assistance.

France calls on all members of the Security Council to demonstrate unity and responsibility to pursue dialogue to renew this vital mechanism, as requested by the Secretary-General, humanitarian agencies and the countries of the region. A renewal for only six months would make no sense in terms of planning humanitarian operations, which need predictability and stability in order to be prepared and conducted in an effective and long-lasting manner.

With respect to the border crossings, I recall the crucial importance of Al-Yarubiyah, providing a route for 40 per cent of the medicine required for humanitarian operations in the north-east. The Iraqi authorities are also in favour of keeping it open. We are aware there are political and military issues at the present stage of the conflict in Syria, but politicizing and exploiting humanitarian aid must end. We must not hold the Syrian people hostage and let us get back to work.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Poland voted in favour of the draft resolution contained in document S/2019/961 and we regret that we were unable to reach a consensus. We voted in favour to express our strong support for the renewal of the mechanism, which enables humanitarian supplies to cross into Syria, provides aid to those in urgent need and supports basic service delivery. Without it, it would be impossible to ensure lifesaving assistance for millions and reach those in need. I would like to thank the Belgium, Germany and Kuwait co-penholders for their tireless efforts during the negotiations.

Mr. Popolizio Bardales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru shares the assessment and concern of the United Nations regarding the serious humanitarian crisis across much of Syrian territory, and we therefore support all initiatives that contribute to protecting its people. We thank the delegations of Germany, Belgium and Kuwait, in their capacity as co-penholders for humanitarian issues in Syria, for their tireless efforts to reach a compromise that would be acceptable to all members of the Security Council regarding the content of the draft resolution (S/2019/961) that was submitted for consideration this afternoon.

We also welcome the transparency and openness that they brought to this complex negotiating process, in which we constructively participated with the purpose of preserving a system on which the lives of millions of people depend. Peru's actions on this item and other

items on the agenda of the Security Council have been aimed principally at protecting civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law. Our approach, which is reflected in the content and provisions of the draft resolution, underpinned our vote in favour of it.

Consequently, Peru deeply regrets that we were unable to adopt the draft resolution presented by the co-penholders, which we view as balanced, timely and essential. We reiterate the need for the Council, and its permanent members in particular, to recover their sense of unity on this very sensitive issue, which is vital to meeting the heavy responsibilities entrusted to us.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China always attaches great importance to the humanitarian situation in Syria, supports the international community in increasing humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and supports the active work of Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other international humanitarian agencies. China has also provided Syria with food, medicine, education, training, public services and other assistance through multilateral and bilateral channels and is committed to improving the humanitarian situation there and reducing the suffering of the Syrian people.

Regarding the establishment of a Syrian cross-border humanitarian relief mechanism, China has had consistent reservations. We have always advocated the need for any operation to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries concerned. The Syrian Government has the primary responsibility for improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and we should prioritize the provision of humanitarian assistance from within Syria. Cross-border humanitarian relief is a special relief mechanism adopted in specific circumstances. It should be evaluated in a timely manner in light of the developments on the ground. This mechanism must ultimately be adjusted.

In the meantime, cross-border humanitarian operations should also strictly follow international law and the United Nations guiding principles on humanitarian relief, based on Security Council resolutions. It is essential to strengthen overall supervision and ensure fairness, neutrality, credibility and increased transparency. Relevant relief operations must be coordinated with the Syrian Government so as to effectively prevent relief supplies from falling into the hands of terrorist organizations or being diverted for other purposes.

China has been making active efforts to promote consensus on the issue of cross-border humanitarian relief in Syria among all parties. We regret that the parties failed to reach agreement on the extension. As a result of the aforementioned reasons, China was compelled to vote against draft resolution S/2019/961.

Regarding the differences among parties on Syrian humanitarian issue, they should be addressed fundamentally through the Syrian political process. We urge the parties to continuously strengthen mutual trust and cooperation in order to jointly create conditions favourable to the comprehensive political settlement of the Syrian issue.

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

I am sitting here in a state of shock. The consequences of the Russian Federation's and China's vetoes of draft resolution S/2019/961 will be disastrous. This decision is reckless, irresponsible and cruel. Right now in Syria, 4 million people depend on the United Nations cross-border assistance mechanism for medicine, shelter and food. There is no justification imaginable for any member of the Security Council leaving vulnerable Syrian civilians with fewer means of securing vital aid.

Following today's decision, we must not lose sight of why the Syrian people need this cross-border mechanism in the first place. The foundation and undeniable fact of this matter is that Bashar Al-Assad has chosen to starve his own people for years in order to force them to submit to his rule. Every day, Damascus fails to meet any Government's basic responsibilities to promote and protect the peace, prosperity and health of its very own citizens. The regime's choices and the regime's choices alone are why the United Nations, humanitarian partners and the Security Council have had to act in 2014 and in every year since to authorize the United Nations to utilize four crossing points in Syria for aid delivery to millions and millions in need.

The Security Council's cross-border mechanism is truly one of the most important issues that the Council oversees every year because of its immediate and direct impact. We can see with our very own eyes that the mechanism saves untold Syrian lives every year. And every year since the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014), we have put aside our political differences and voted, even with a few Russian abstentions, to renew this life-saving mechanism.

The renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) has been a testament to our shared values and our collective commitment to millions of Syrians who rely on the life-sustaining humanitarian aid delivered by the United Nations. In providing for the sick and the hungry, we have all overcome our political differences to show the world that we are capable of doing the right thing. Unfortunately, for the fourteenth time, the Russian Federation has abandoned that commitment. We need to be clear about the direct consequence of that decision. The lives of millions of innocent Syrian civilians now hang in the balance, at the height of winter. Russia's and China's votes demonstrate a willingness to turn a blind eye to the brutal conditions that the Al-Assad regime continues to subject to its own people and signal that, while professing to support resolution 2254 (2015), Russia and China are openly facilitating the regime's pursuit of a military victory.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

I shall now put to vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2019/962, submitted by the Russian Federation.

A vote was taken by a show of hands.

In favour:

China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Russian Federation, South Africa

Against:

Dominican Republic, France, Peru, Poland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Abstaining:

Belgium, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait

The President: The draft resolution received five votes in favour, six against and four abstentions. The draft resolution has not been adopted, having failed to obtain the required number of votes.

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

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): We fully align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Germany on behalf of the three co-penholders before the vote. Allow me to provide a few additional remarks.

I would like to begin by thanking those members that voted in favour of our draft resolution (S/2019/961). If the quality of the Security Council's work is to be measured by the number of lives saved, then no other resolution is as important as the cross-border resolution. As we all know, it is thanks to that mandate that 4 million people receive humanitarian assistance, and that assistance accounts for 41 per cent of total assistance provided to Syria. As co-penholder of the Syrian humanitarian dossier, we conducted an inclusive and transparent drafting process for over a month. We arrived at a compromise text that is balanced, clean and strictly humanitarian and reflects the various points of view expressed in the Council.

Furthermore, the draft resolution on the renewal of cross-border assistance, as proposed by the co-penholders, accurately reflects the situation on the ground in Syria. It responds to a humanitarian situation that has not changed and remains devastating for millions of Syrians. No Syrian actor is at present in a position to provide humanitarian assistance to all the outlying regions in the country where the needs are greatest.

Today is a sad day for the Council and for the Syrian people. As co-penholder, we shall continue to pursue a solution that allows for the continuation of this important mechanism. Millions of people depend on it, but we cannot compromise on the essentials.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I echo the statement made by the representative of Belgium. Today is a sad, sorry and truly dreadful day for the people of Syria. It is a day that I hope the Council will never repeat. I would like to say once again to the Minister of Kuwait how much we appreciate the effort that his delegation put into this effort, and I am sorry that he should have to be here to see the outcome.

The United Kingdom cast two votes today. We voted for the first draft resolution (S/2019/961) because United Nations cross-border assistance remains critical to the 4 million people who depend on it for the life-saving aid that is as critical today as it has been every year since 2014, when the resolution was first allowed to be adopted, as it has been each year until now.

The Russian Federation and China gave no credible explanation for their vetoes or for the cynical attempt to score political points by presenting a second draft resolution (S/2019/962) that halved the number of crossings and halved the length of time. There is no

justification for that. Indeed, the Secretary-General has said that we are seeing further deterioration of an already extremely difficult humanitarian situation for people throughout Syria, where over 11 million people remain in need of assistance. No one therefore can pretend that things are improving on the ground.

I listened very carefully to what the Russian representative said, and I heard him say that his delegation was motivated “exclusively by the humanitarian aspects”. Even by known standards, that statement is breathtaking in its hypocrisy. The veto of the first draft resolution and the presentation of the second are not acts that address humanitarian concerns. They do not meet the formal written request of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to the Council. They do not help the millions of ordinary citizens in Syria whose lives are now in jeopardy, and they certainly do not help the United Nations or the cause of multilateralism. Now the responsibility lies with the Syrian and Russian authorities. It is they who will now be responsible for the people whose lives hang in the balance. I hope that the Russian taxpayers are feeling generous.

The United Kingdom voted against the Russian text because we will not negotiate with a gun held to our heads over a cynical offer that would save fewer lives than we know is needed and that the United Nations has very clearly set out as necessary. But it is important even at this juncture to look ahead, given how many lives remain at stake. The United Kingdom therefore hopes that the Council can pass through this sorry episode and return to discussions ready to identify a productive and effective way through that meets OCHA’s needs before 10 January 2020, when the current mandate expires.

I have previously said in this Chamber that Russia should not play dice with people’s lives. Four million lives are at stake, and we need to keep that critical fact before us as we try and sort out this dreadful mess.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): To be brief, I can only echo what was said earlier by my Belgium and United Kingdom colleagues. This is a very sad day for the Syrian people and the Security Council. China and Russia bear an enormous responsibility. We are going into the holiday season now, and 4 million people in Syria do not know if in the next year, after 10 January 2020, they will still receive food, be able to feed their babies or get medicine.

We went very far and received a lot of criticism. There were questions as to why we did not put five or four and why were we ready to do six plus six, and so on. We were criticized a lot by many around the table, but we were ready to compromise. We tried to get everybody on board. My Russian colleague put something on the table and said, “take it or leave it”. Is that Russian diplomacy — not being ready to negotiate, not giving anything and just saying “do it or not”? With respect to his remark that it is not 4 million but only 1 million people who are suffering — what kind of cynicism is that?

My Chinese colleague said very clearly that China supports the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). OCHA asked for this. It asked for more than what we offered. How can he be against that? I again ask the representatives of Russia and China to not let the people down. We are ready to work hard to see to it that after 10 January 2020 there will still be a possibility for those suffering people to survive.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Our decision to vote against draft resolution S/2019/962 was based on a strong feeling that the unconstructive methods of proceeding with such an important document are not in line with the highest standards that the Security Council should embody. The draft submitted by the representative of Russia did not meet the conditions necessary to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): My delegation is taking the floor following the voting on draft resolutions S/2019/961 and S/2019/962, on the cross-border mechanism.

Indonesia voted in favour of draft resolution S/2019/961, submitted by the co-penholders, since the text is the result of in-depth efforts to find middle ground for divergent positions among Security Council members. The draft reflects compromise and ways to address concerns that were raised. In that regard, we thank the co-penholders for facilitating the process. We also appreciate the efforts of Russia in submitting draft resolution S/2019/962, on the renewal of the mechanism, in the spirit of improving humanitarian assistance to Syria. However, my delegation believes that the draft was not exhaustively discussed by all Council members and does not fully address the needs of the 4 million people in need.

My delegation deeply regrets that we have been unable to agree on a solution today. As I mentioned in my statements yesterday (see S/PV.8694) and this morning (see S/PV.8696), civilian lives are at stake and we are responsible for addressing this urgent issue immediately. It is fair to say that we are all equally unhappy. However, this is not about the happiness of Council members. This is mainly about the lives of 4 million people in need of lifesaving humanitarian assistance. I cannot offer a magic formula to resolve this deadlock because we do not need one. What we need as Council members is a simple formula that is based on genuine dialogue, with pure humanitarian goals that avoid the politicization of the issue. What we need is a resolution that guarantees access for humanitarian assistance — a simple resolution, a piece of paper that contains a mandate for us to work for humankind.

Indonesia stands ready to actively support the continuation of our common goal to save Syrian lives. They are innocent, apolitical and in need of our genuine help. This is not the end. We must continue to work for the sake of the Syrian people. There should never be an end to saving lives. I call upon all colleagues, members of the Council, to continue to work on this noble endeavour. The Syrian people need us all.

Mr. Van Shalkwyk (South Africa): South Africa is extremely disappointed that the mandate of the Syrian cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism could not be renewed today. During the course of the negotiations, South Africa's position was and remains that we must ensure the renewal of that lifesaving humanitarian assistance programme. South Africa voted in favour of both draft resolutions (S/2019/961 and S/2019/962) in an effort to accomplish that goal, as lifesaving assistance to the people of Syria remains critical.

Today's unfortunate outcome, or rather non-outcome, is an indictment of our failure to carry out our responsibility as the Security Council. It once again underscores the need for us to evaluate the decision-making processes of the Council, particularly the need for concurring votes of the permanent members. We urge all parties to continue efforts and consultations to ensure that the cross-border assistance mandate is renewed before 10 January 2020.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): In my earlier remarks, I set out China's position on draft resolution S/2019/961, concerning the Syrian

humanitarian issue. I would like to underscore that China firmly rejects the groundless accusations levelled against it by the United States of America and other countries. As is well known, China has always been constructive and responsible in dialogue and consultations. We have been calling on the parties concerned to take proactive steps to build consensus. Our concerns are entirely justified and legitimate. Like the positions of any other country, our position is indisputable. Our independent voting decisions are made on the basis of our principled positions and are not subject to accusations by any party.

The current situation in Syria is exactly the result of erroneous action by certain countries. Therefore, it is they who really should be reflecting on their own actions and who should be called on to answer all the questions before us. If they are genuinely concerned about the Syrian people and the humanitarian situation in Syria, why did they not vote in favour of the draft resolution submitted by Russia? They have had every opportunity to demonstrate and fulfil their commitment to the Syrian people. That shows once again that they are hypocritical in expressing their care or attention. They are practicing typical double standards, which is a concrete example of politicizing humanitarian issues.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are deeply disappointed with the vote on draft resolution S/2019/962 on the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism. My British colleague mentioned breathtaking hypocrisy, and I concur with her. However, we have a different view as to who was hypocritical in this situation. My German colleague, as is now customary, attempted to lecture us about diplomacy today and reproached us for an unwillingness to compromise. We have already made a significant compromise on the draft resolution but for some reason that was not appreciated. We are asked to make compromise after compromise, over and over again, and essentially to return to the same co-penholders' text for draft resolution S/2019/961, which was unacceptable to us in the first place. We were frank about that right from the start, although for some reason the co-penholders still did not believe it.

One could say that what we really observed today were the double standards of the self-styled humanitarian stewards of the welfare of the Syrian people. We were willing to extend the mechanism and, as many put it, to give our swift approval in the interests of delivering assistance to Syrians in areas

where that assistance was indeed essential. Meanwhile, those colleagues of ours who constantly accuse Russia of obstructing those efforts and speak of the lofty standards and principles of humanism, have themselves killed the mechanism, using arguments that can neither be justified nor withstand criticism.

Let me ask the Council a rhetorical question. Who won today? Nobody. Who lost? Those same Syrian people about whom those who blocked our draft resolution today assured us today of their unceasing concern. We have already talked about the reasons for our proposal to reduce the mandate for the cross-border mechanism's time frame and reduce the number of crossing points. But the most important thing, which I want to emphasize, is that we were willing to extend the mechanism. No one should try to cover that up. Will the Syrian people whom the humanitarian assistance is intended for understand the point of our disagreements? What difference does six months or 12 months mean to them? We will not accept the reproaches we have heard today. What are we being reproached for? Is it because they did not accept our draft resolution extending the cross-border mechanism? They have deprived the Syrians of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism. Do not attempt to shift blame for that on us.

What will they tell the press when they leave the Chamber today — that Russia killed the cross-border mechanism? Or will they trumpet this story in their media outlets? But how will they explain the fact that they voted against the Russian draft resolution, which provides for the extension of the provision of humanitarian assistance to people in need in Syria through the cross-border mechanism? Unfortunately, it is clear to us that some of our partners pursue not humanitarian but other goals while endlessly politicizing the humanitarian arena, again and again. Russia will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and continue to work to rebuild their country, which has been destroyed largely as a result of foreign intervention.

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

Today the United States of America voted against draft resolution S/2019/962, authored by the Russian Federation, because it mocks our values and principles. It defies the recommendations of the Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and international non-governmental

organizations, and, most importantly, from the start it has been a disingenuous attempt to prevent a life-saving cross-border mechanism from functioning for Syrian civilians. Russia's goal today was simple. It wanted to score political points. It was interested only in creating a public spectacle and tarnishing the credibility of the Security Council. For Russia, this was not about saving Syrian lives. In truth, its text was never meant to be a good-faith compromise. From the start, Russia took a cynical, take-it-or-leave-it approach with regard to its draft resolution. It failed today because failure is the outcome Russia wanted on the issue of life-saving humanitarian aid to Syria. Let the record clearly reflect that fact. Russia proposed a draft resolution destined to fail because it would rather see Syrian civilians starve than disappoint Bashar Al-Assad.

The United States asked for five crossing points to be authorized for 12 months. That position was informed by our values, whereby we have an obligation to the least fortunate of our brothers and sisters. We wanted more United Nations aid going to more Syrians through the most direct access routes available. OCHA also supported the addition of a fifth crossing point at Tel Abyad on the same humanitarian basis and assessment of need. We fought hard to keep four of the crossing points open with a view to ensuring greater United Nations access for delivering much-needed aid. Reluctantly, for the sake of maintaining a reasonable amount of aid flows, we were willing to compromise to authorize three crossing points for 12 months, but that compromise was not enough for the Russian Federation or for China.

The Russian Federation and China's vetoes of the co-penholders' draft resolution (S/2019/961) show that their engagement on that matter was never serious. For them, it was never about saving lives or the United Nations mechanism. To the members of the Council who argue that the humanitarian situation in Syria has changed and that the cross-border mandate should reflect that change, I ask them today — will millions of Syrians be fed by shutting off access to their only source of food? Will sick women, men and children be healed by shutting off access to their only source of medicine? Those questions answer themselves.

What is not clear is how the Council's mandate to maintain peace and security will be advanced by today's vetoes. The Russians owe the Council, the people of Syria and the international community that explanation. We know that no credible answer will come

from those who have chosen to deny aid to millions of Syrians in need. The outcome of today's vote is bitterly disappointing, but I now want to speak directly to the Syrian people. The United States remains committed to them. We are committed to defending the voiceless, feeding the hungry and ensuring that the displaced and the orphaned receive the humanitarian aid that they must have to survive. We are the largest humanitarian donor in the world, providing \$10.5 billion to the Syrian people, and we will continue to support them. We are proud of our principled stance on assisting every Syrian in need. We will continue to shine a light on those who choose not to help. Going forward, we will do everything in our power to support principled humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, I want to be absolutely clear. Yes, today is a very sad day. However, today's vote is not the end of this conversation. We will continue to press for a solution for the Syrian people. We will never cease to defend those who find themselves without food or medicine. And today we hold on to an unwavering hope that a solution will be found for the Syrian people, who need us today more than ever.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Falouh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation once again regrets the insistence of certain members of the Security Council, notably the humanitarian co-penholders, on adopting the unconstructive approach reflected in their draft resolution S/2019/961, the content of which is a departure from the stated humanitarian purposes.

Regrettably, they continue to take an unbalanced approach to drafting and submitting such draft resolutions, based on the brinkmanship deployed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) every time it comes to renewing the resolution on the cross-border mechanism. OCHA officials manipulate data and statistics, ignoring the flaws and negative aspects of those processes that until this very today continue to lead to assistance falling into the hands of armed terrorist groups and to not reaching those who need it. That is the current situation in Idlib and in its surrounding area, controlled by the terrorist Al-Nusra Front group. The survival of the Al-Nusra Front actually depends on the support of

the Turkish regime, which commits aggression, and on controlling the humanitarian assistance delivered from the Turkish territory.

The behaviour of the co-penholders is a dangerous and unprecedented departure from reality. They have bent to the will and pressure of the Turkish regime. In the first version of draft resolution S/2019/961, they attempted to add a new border crossing, which would have been used, of course, to support the objectives of the military aggression of the Turkish regime against my country.

In more explicit terms, I affirm that the terrorist Turkish regime — an aggressor that has facilitated the entry of foreign terrorist fighters into Syria and continues to direct and support the criminal activities of the terrorist Al-Nusra Front in Idlib — wants the United Nations pay today for the damage incurred by its aggression in north-eastern Syria. That is one of the many examples of the erratic behaviour of sponsors of this draft resolution.

We ask their delegations the following questions. If they claim to be concerned about helping the Syrian people, why have they remained silent and turned a blind eye to the pillaging of the gas and oil wells in Syria? Why are they ignoring their occupation by American forces? Those who wish to help the people of Syria must be honest, show courage and demand that the Syrians be allowed to reclaim the resources that the terrorists and the so-called international coalition have pillaged and destroyed.

My Government rejects draft resolution S/2019/961, submitted by the humanitarian co-penholders, in its entirety, owing to its fundamental flaws in both form and substance. We explained its shortcomings in a letter dated 15 December, addressed by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs to Mr. Mark Lowcock, and in a letter dated yesterday, addressed by the Permanent Mission of my country to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council in response to the sixty-fourth report on the humanitarian issue in Syria (S/2019/949), as well as in the statement we delivered at yesterday's Security Council meeting (see S/PV.8694).

For us, it is important to underscore the fact that the focal point for taking humanitarian action in Syria is the capital, Damascus, in accordance with the fundamental principle underlying respect for national sovereignty. Anything else would simply be an example of a new, pathetic attempt to compromise Syria's

national sovereignty and undermine the political status of the State of Syria.

We call on Member States that are committed to respecting international law and maintaining international peace and security to keep the humanitarian issue sheltered from politicization. We also call on them to support the role and status of the Syrian Government as the main and true partner on humanitarian and development issues. We call on all Member States to reject the political conditions and dictates imposed by certain Governments to hamper efforts to rebuild, recover and return displaced persons. Above all, we call on Council members, especially the co-penholders, to immediately lift the coercive unilateral measures imposed on the people of Syria. Such measures amount to collective punishment, the negative consequences of which belie the claims of those imposing them that they seek to serve the interests and well-being of the people.

My Government thanks all who helped to prevent the adoption of draft resolution S/2019/961, presented by the humanitarian co-penholders, for the sake of safeguarding the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, chief among which is respect for the sovereignty of States and the rules governing humanitarian action.

In conclusion, I remind everyone in this Chamber, without exception, that ending the humanitarian repercussions imposed on my country by terrorism, as well as support for the political process under way, requires a different approach that goes beyond humanitarian assistance, enables the lifting of restrictions imposed on the Syrian Arab Republic and facilitates genuine reconstruction and relief efforts in the economic, industrial, agricultural, investment and service sectors. It is nothing other than unadulterated hypocrisy for certain people to come to the Council and talk about the humanitarian crisis in Syria while their policies of collective punishment, blockade and military occupation run contrary the interests of the Syrian people

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

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I will be brief. I have a practice in this Chamber of stepping in when

I see criticism of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to defend the humanitarian wing of the United Nations, the members of which care far more about the Syrian people than their own Government and are working in extraordinarily difficult circumstances to save lives. I think that it behoves all of us to pay tribute to them for that.

The President: Regardless of the outcomes of the votes today, it is clear that there is a commitment from the Security Council to help the Syrian people and to save lives. The presidency will work closely with the co-penholders to ensure that negotiations continue over the coming days and that we find a solution that we can all support.

As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of December, I would like to express my sincere appreciation of the delegation of the United States to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their teams and the secretariat of the Council for all of the support it has given us.

At the beginning of the month, I said that the theme of our presidency was to look ahead to 2020 and to think about what we should be doing as a Council to make the world a better place. I appreciate my colleagues work to do just that, and we look forward to a new year filled with potential within the Council. But we could not do any of our work without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and representatives of the Secretariat, including the conference service officers, interpreters, verbatim reporters and security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Viet Nam good luck in the month of January. I would like, on behalf of the Council, to express our sincere appreciation to the five outgoing members: Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru and Poland. Over the course of the past two years, they and their teams have become part of the Security Council family. Their presence and positive contributions during their terms on the Security Council are noteworthy, and they will be missed.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.