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New York

President: Ms. Gatt. (Malta)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
France	Mr. De Rivière
Guyana	Ms. Persaud
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone	Mr. Yajah
Slovenia	Ms. Jurečko
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America.	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and Ms. Helen Hayford, Global Protection Manager, Malteser International.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: This past month the grim spectre of regional conflict loomed over Syria once again. The Council will have heard the Secretary-General's condemnation, and my own, of the strikes on Iranian diplomatic premises in Damascus on 1 April, an attack widely attributed to Israel. The Council will also have heard the Secretary-General's condemnation of Iran's strikes on Israel on 13 April. Since then there have been reports of further attacks on 19 April — also widely attributed to Israel — in Iran, Iraq and Syria, where the Syrian Government said that an air defence site was hit by an Israeli missile. There have also been reports of attacks on United States bases in north-eastern Syria, attributed to Iraqi armed groups that some claim are linked to Iran.

I remain extremely alarmed at this dangerous and escalatory spiral. I have long warned that Syria is being treated by many as a sort of free-for-all space for settling scores. I am not only deeply worried about the regional spillover effects, and the grave dangers of miscalculation and escalation, but also about the conflict in Syria itself, which continues to blight the lives of the long-suffering Syrian people. Indeed, any temptation to ignore or merely contain the Syrian conflict itself would be a mistake. This is not a frozen conflict, and nor are

its effects felt only in Syria. In fact, there are no signs of calm in any of Syria's theatres — only unresolved conflicts, simmering violence and sharp flare-ups of hostilities, any of which could be the kindling for a new conflagration.

During this month, pro-Government missile and drone strikes were reported again in the north-west, and the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham launched multiple cross-line attacks. In the north-east, there were reports of Turkish drone strikes and of exchanges of fire between armed opposition groups and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), alongside a growing insurgency by some tribal elements against the SDF. In the south-west, security incidents remain at elevated levels, with reports of open clashes between former armed opposition groups and Syrian Government forces and of incidents related to criminal activities on the border. Moreover, terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have continued with sustained intensity across the Syrian desert and the north-east in particular. We need regional de-escalation, starting with an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. All players must exercise maximum restraint and respect international law. We must work for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria too, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). All actors must comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians, including when dealing with Security Council-listed terrorist groups.

The humanitarian situation is as bleak as ever, and Mr. Rajasingham will of course elaborate more on that. But let me stress the need for access by all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line. I also want to appeal to donors, traditional and non-traditional, to give generously to the humanitarian response, including for early recovery. And let me stress that the effects of sanctions on ordinary Syrians must be mitigated and prevented, particularly in view of concerns that overcompliance continues to affect humanitarian operations.

The economic situation remains perilous. The World Food Programme says that the cost of a food basket has doubled within a year, while the cost of living has increased by 104 per cent. The Syrian pound has reached around 15,000 per United States dollar on the parallel market, although in early 2020 the rate was 1,000, and on the eve of the conflict in 2011 it was 50. My colleagues on the ground continue to witness, including recently in Homs, an economic situation that is now

even worse than it was at the height of the conflict. Many have lost the most vital ingredient of life — hope. The same is true for millions displaced outside Syria.

The unending suffering borne by Syrians has knock-on effects for the most vulnerable. Many interlocutors tell my Office about increasing gender-based violence and negative coping mechanisms, such as early marriage or women being forced into prostitution. Meanwhile, according to many reports, the smuggling and use of narcotics in Syria is dramatically increasing — a trend that we have seen fuel conflict elsewhere.

The detainee crisis remains as acute as ever. Children, women and men — of all ages and across all parts of Syria — remain subjected to unlawful arbitrary detention, forced conscription and forced separation from their families. Reports continue of detainees being deprived of food and medical treatment and subjected to torture and sexual violence across all areas of Syria. Such practices must stop. Children, the elderly and the sick should be released immediately. The authorities in Government areas, and those in de facto control of other areas too, must grant specialized independent humanitarian organizations access to all detention facilities and prisons and ensure that there is communication with families.

All of that shows us why we must move forward on the safe, calm and neutral environment that is necessary for a political process to unfold and for safe, dignified and voluntary returns to take place. My best efforts and those of others to see those realities addressed through concrete measures on both sides have not yet produced the changes needed. Instead, more and more people want to leave Syria — and neighbouring States too — risking their lives on perilous routes. That is why stakeholders must focus on what refugees tell us that they need: movement on both protection and livelihood concerns.

In joining efforts in that regard, we must remember the disproportionate burden that neighbouring States continue to carry and the risks that Syrian refugees can sometimes face amid conditions of political, economic and social stress. We must promote protection and dignity for Syrian refugees, wherever they are, while working to put in place conditions for their safe, dignified, and voluntary return.

A mix of de-escalation, containment and humanitarian assistance — brokered through partial arrangements and piecemeal formats — is what we are

seeing in practice. Without that, the situation would be even worse. But such approaches cannot bring stability in Syria, just as they do not elsewhere in the region. All trend lines are steadily moving in an alarming direction.

Syrians need to see a political path out of this conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Renewing the Constitutional Committee could be a piece of that path. But, despite intense efforts, we still are not seeing its meetings resume, due to issues unrelated to Syria. Let me stress: I remain open to any alternative venue to Geneva that attracts the consensus of both the Syrian parties and the host, and I will remain engaged in that regard. In the meantime, I continue to appeal for sessions to resume in Geneva as a bridging option and for the parties to prepare on substance, including constitutional proposals.

Step-for-step confidence-building measures could also show Syrians the kind of compromise needed to move forward. I remind all parties that there are concrete ideas on the table. The invitation to a deepened and concrete dialogue remains, and I remain willing to listen to and facilitate any alternative ideas for confidence-building measures.

De-escalating violence and resuming the Constitutional Committee and confidence-building measures are all entry points, but they cannot themselves resolve the conflict. I am all too aware that these efforts and, frankly, other initiatives on Syria, too, are neither delivering on the ground nor sufficient for the gravity of the situation. Instead, each month we see trends moving further in the wrong direction. A fatal combination of a lack of political will and centrifugal forces seems to be pulling Syria apart — its territory, its society and its structures. Syrians on all sides — almost uniformly — express their grave alarm at what that means for their country, and rightly so. I will continue my dialogue with them, including next week with the Women Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room in Brussels.

A new, comprehensive approach needs to be explored — one that addresses the full range of issues: the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and the need for Syria's sovereignty to be restored, especially in a context of six foreign armies and regional score-settling within Syrian territory. I and my team are keen for engagement in that regard, and we appreciate that a number of parties wish to engage with us in the search for a way forward. This month,

I welcomed the opportunity for in-depth discussions with Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan and other senior officials in Ankara.

A new and comprehensive approach will need to fully engage all critical stakeholders. That includes the Syrian parties and the international actors in the Astana format, the Arab contact group, the Western quad and the Council. Leaving out any key players will lead to blockage.

There are, of course, major regional and global obstacles to convening all of those stakeholders now. And this will not be the immediate goal of any new and comprehensive approach. Rather, we can and must begin with preparatory discussions with each stakeholder on all their concerns and demands — in terms of both halting negative trends and defining the shape of, and path to, a long-term settlement. We must prepare for work across a range of interlinked and phased tracks and prepare for a time when it would be possible to put those ideas into diplomatic action.

The time will — indeed must — come when diplomacy can reassert itself, and we can help bring that day closer and be ready for it. Syrians and the international community at large must be able to see a vision of what a realistic, sustainable and inclusive peace could look like and a path to achieve it in order to realize the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). This is, indeed, a daunting task, but it is one that we must attempt. The depth of the crisis in Syria calls for nothing less.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: Events in recent weeks, as Mr. Pedersen highlighted just now, have provided a stark warning of how real the threat is of an expansion of conflict in the region. That would have devastating, unthinkable implications for the people of Syria.

As we have informed the Council repeatedly, humanitarian needs in Syria are already at a record level and continue to accumulate by the day. At the same time, our ability to help alleviate them grows ever more constrained by serious shortfalls in resources. In the past month, civilians have been killed and injured in a range of attacks across the country. In multiple incidents, children were among those killed. Nor have humanitarian workers been spared. On 26 March a member of a World Health Organization team providing water and sanitation assistance in Deir ez-Zor was killed when an air strike hit his building.

Earlier this month, we marked the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. For Syria, it was an important reminder that an estimated one third of communities across the country are affected by explosive remnants of war. Agricultural land is particularly impacted, with significant consequences for food production and livelihoods.

We continue to receive regular reports of civilians being killed or injured by explosive ordnance in communities across Syria. Indeed, last year, there were more civilian casualties from landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices reported in Syria than in any other country. Again, tragically, children are too often the victims.

Landmines and explosive remnants of war also make the work of humanitarian organizations much more difficult. In more than half of all subdistricts across Syria, the presence of unexploded ordnance is considered a major impediment to the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance.

As we have stressed repeatedly, all parties to the conflict must respect international humanitarian law. That includes taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian personnel and their assets, in the course of military operations. The years of conflict have also rendered the people of Syria particularly vulnerable to climate shocks, which remain a persistent threat. In the past month, heavy flooding at several displacement sites in Idlib and northern Aleppo affected more than 15,000 people in the space of two days. As the summer months approach, the risk of drought, cholera and other health risks will increase. Heatwaves will further stretch already limited water and sanitation services, which in turn will increase the risks to sexual and reproductive health and protection for women and adolescent girls, who tend to be exposed to higher levels of gender-based violence owing to a lack of privacy at and around sanitation facilities and to the need to venture farther to obtain water.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners continue to provide critical assistance to millions of people across Syria. But as we have warned repeatedly, our ability to deliver is being steadily eroded by alarming reductions in funding. We have already had to make extremely difficult decisions on prioritizing life-saving assistance for the most vulnerable, targeting 10.8 million people out of a total of 16.7 million in need. This year we are appealing for \$4 billion in funding,

a significant reduction from 2023 levels despite an increase in needs. Unfortunately, many of those people are likely to go without vital assistance if the current levels of underfunding persist. Hundreds of medical facilities and mobile health teams are at risk of closure in the coming months, affecting access to life-saving care for millions, including urgently needed maternal, sexual, and reproductive care for 4.1 million women and girls of reproductive age.

In the next two months, more than 1.8 million people will not get the safe water they need to avoid increased risks to their health this summer. Millions who are dealing with moderate levels of food insecurity risk going without any assistance at all, threatening further increases in the numbers of those who are severely food-insecure. Many of the 500,000 children with acute malnutrition could miss out on life-saving treatment this year. And without more resources, the efforts to survey and clear landmines and other explosive ordnance will not meet the scale of the challenge I described earlier. Funding for assistance to Palestinian refugees affected by the Syria crisis has also fallen dramatically in the past year. That has affected the ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide emergency cash, food and other support to the more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria.

The growing constraints on resources only underscore the importance of delivering assistance in Syria through all available means, including cross-line and cross-border. The cross-border operation from Türkiye continues to enable vital aid to enter north-west Syria, in addition to the provision of health, nutrition, protection, education and other critical services, and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Ambassador Yıldız, the incoming representative of Türkiye. But as in other areas of the country, the level of United Nations assistance in north-west Syria has had to be scaled back significantly in the face of funding shortfalls, with food assistance particularly affected. Our humanitarian partners are targeting 625,000 severely food-insecure people with the resources we have available, but some 3 million others assessed as moderately food insecure are unfortunately having to go without any assistance in that area. We welcome the continued authorization of those cross-border deliveries into north-west Syria, and we are currently engaging with the Government of Syria on the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings beyond 13 May. We

also continue to engage relevant actors on expanding the delivery of cross-line assistance throughout Syria, including into the north-west, and we urge all parties to facilitate that access.

Our calls for Syria are not new, but they do bear repeating. We need respect for international humanitarian law, including regarding the protection of civilians and unhindered humanitarian access, both cross-line and cross-border. We urgently need the resources to allow us to continue providing critical assistance to the millions who desperately need it. And finally, we yet again join Mr. Pedersen in calling on all parties to renew their commitment to a political solution to end the conflict — without which we cannot end this humanitarian crisis — and to allow the people of Syria the opportunities they so desperately want.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Hayford.

Ms. Hayford: We would like to thank the delegation of Malta for facilitating our contribution to today's discussion, and to express our sincere appreciation to the previous speakers for their comprehensive briefings.

Malteser International is the worldwide relief agency of the Sovereign Order of Malta. The Order, established in Jerusalem almost 1,000 years ago, enjoys sui generis status as an international sovereign entity, and we utilize our global commitment by providing humanitarian aid in more than 120 countries. Malteser International delivers medical support and relief services in areas of the world experiencing natural disaster, war and related conflict. At the moment we are conducting operations in 34 countries and have been serving the Syrian people for more than a decade. We are reminded of resolution 2254 (2015) and its call to all the parties engaged in the Syrian conflict to immediately allow humanitarian agencies rapid, safe and unhindered access throughout Syria by the most direct routes and enable assistance to reach all people in need.

While many aid agencies and humanitarian bodies have provided an incredible range of services to the Syrian people over the past decade, today more people than at any point in the war — three out of every four — need humanitarian aid, as Secretary-General António Guterres has said. More than half of the population is suffering from hunger. Entire

communities are struggling to survive as humanitarian funding has dropped to an all-time low, and roughly half of the pre-war population remains displaced within or outside Syria. As a sovereign international entity without a population or territory of its own and loyal only to its mission of service to the poor and sick, the Sovereign Order of Malta has a special closeness to people in need. In a manner of speaking, our citizens are the displaced and the dispossessed, those who are left behind and who are forgotten, and we daily form a part of their lives. We speak on their behalf, and we would like to share some of their stories with the Council.

Abu Ammar, a 64-year-old Syrian, was displaced by bombing six years ago. He and his children lost almost everything, and the earthquake on 6 February 2023 took what was left. "On that day I thought I would die", he told us. "But my children and I were able to emerge from under the rubble after holding on for many hours. Today, a year after the earthquake, we are in a camp where we lack the most basic necessities of life. Every day brings back memories of the tragedy and what we lost".

Hala's harrowing experience of giving birth amid air strikes and natural disasters highlights the resilience of Syrian women in the face of adversity. "I faced the fear of losing my child twice", she told us. "First during the earthquake when our house's roof collapsed on top of us. By the grace of God, we survived. And then again during the bombing, just as I was about to give birth. My child and I, against all odds, emerged unharmed once again". However, Hala and her young family continue to live a precarious existence alongside thousands of others, amid acute danger, financial constraints and growing shortages of food and water.

Areej, who is 15 years old, was born with a growth disorder and needs regular medication. Her family has been living in a tent since the earthquake forced them to flee in blind terror at night into the pouring rain. But Areej still has hope.

"I dream of completing my education, which I had to stop last year because my family could not afford to pay for school and could not afford to pay for medicine at the same time. My dream is to see children live safely away from war, away from earthquakes."

But Areej is sure that she and many other children have to face the consequences of wars and earthquakes, and that will have a lasting impact.

The Order of Malta is working to help the lives of Abu Ammar, Hala, Areej and thousands like them. We are committed to delivering essential health care; emergency water, sanitation and hygiene services; and livelihood opportunities, working closely with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to ensure that we foster local capacity and civil society actions to really make what we do sustainable. We are also committed to protecting what Pope Francis, in a recent declaration, referred to as the

"infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter."

Up until now, the Sovereign Order of Malta's efforts have directly benefited more than a quarter of a million Syrians, with 33,000 patients receiving treatment in our supported health-care facilities. We have a holistic view of health, and therefore we also facilitated more than 50,000 mental health and psychosocial support sessions. But faced with the persistent level of need, our efforts really remain a mere drop in the ocean.

Sustained humanitarian support is essential, but humanitarian actors also need to be able to do their work as conflict escalates once again. The Syria International Non-Governmental Organization Regional Forum notes that over 16,000 conflict-related incidents were reported by NGOs in the past nine months alone, an increase of 33 per cent. The increasing frequency of attacks, including air strikes in densely populated areas, threatens the lives of civilians and humanitarian workers. The innocent are being punished time and again to the point that, for some, human dignity is really nothing more than a word.

We would like to call strongly for a reaffirmation of the commitment by all Powers and forces operating in Syria to uphold international humanitarian law while ensuring the protection of civilians. Urgent action is needed to de-escalate violence, facilitate humanitarian access and protect vulnerable populations, particularly women, children and persons with disabilities.

In the face of mounting challenges, we call on the international community to increase its efforts to support humanitarian organizations on the ground and provide adequate funding to meet the growing needs of affected populations. Donors must fulfil their commitments to support early-recovery and resilience-building programming, recognizing the

importance of addressing medium- to long-term needs alongside emergency assistance. Localization efforts should be prioritized, with increased support for local organizations to really implement effective and relevant projects.

We are encouraged by signs that the world is beginning to pay attention to Syria once again. The nation's recent readmission to the League of Arab States should, hopefully, be a positive auger, as nations in the region commit themselves to policies aimed at alleviating suffering, while helping damaged persons to rebuild their lives. Socioeconomic support must be directed towards those who need it most. That might be part of a coherent policy approach by the international community to foster local agricultural development and the rebuilding of infrastructure in order to improve people's lives, rebuild trust and give hope to a more positive future.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria demands our unwavering attention and collective action. We must stand in solidarity with people in need and work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Let us heed the voices of those affected by the crisis and redouble our efforts to alleviate their suffering and restore hope for a better future. There are glimmers of light in Syria; let us hope that they will not be extinguished again.

The President: I thank Ms. Hayford for her briefing.

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

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, the Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, and Ms. Hayford from Malteser International for their briefings. They all have highlighted the enormous and long-lasting suffering of the Syrian population, which must come to an end, and I would like to thank them for their efforts to rebuild a perspective of hope. I would also like to welcome the representatives of the region, including, once again, the representative of Türkiye.

Switzerland is deeply concerned by the spiral of violence under way in the Middle East, a region on the "precipice of disaster", as the Secretary-General rightly notes. We have repeatedly made our position clear regarding recent attacks. Here today, I would like to stress the imperative that the regionalization of the

conflict in the Middle East and its current extension into Syria be contained. It is urgent that efforts be made towards de-escalation.

Allow me to make a few remarks on political questions.

Thirteen years of conflict have already ravaged Syria. In order to prevent any further escalation, we call on all those involved militarily in Syria or who exert influence on the parties to the conflict to commit to a ceasefire throughout Syrian territory in accordance with, and as demanded in, resolution 2254 (2024). We recall that civilian populations and infrastructure must be protected under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law, in every circumstance. In that regard, Switzerland supports all the efforts the Special Envoy, in coordination with Syria and the countries of the region, to resume a credible and viable political process, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2024).

Inside and outside the country, the appeal of Syrian civil society must also be heeded. Many Syrians, particularly young women, citizens, refugees and local political representatives, are demanding their right to full, equal and meaningful participation in decisions that affect their future. That same civil society has also played a key role, which we welcome, in the creation of the new independent institution for missing persons based in Geneva. Switzerland stresses that the cooperation of all actors with this humanitarian institution will be crucial in finally granting the relatives of detained and missing persons a right to know, regardless of their affiliation, thereby paving the way towards reconciliation and a lasting political solution in Syria.

Faced with the commission of atrocity crimes since 2011, the fight against impunity, facilitated in particular by the impartial and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, is a sine qua non condition for achieving lasting peace.

I now come to the humanitarian part of my statement.

The resumption of the political process is also an essential condition for reversing the spiral of humanitarian and economic decline in Syria. The international community has a responsibility to ensure that the conflict and the humanitarian situation in Syria are not forgotten.

An unprecedented 16.7 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian aid. The country is facing a protracted, multidimensional crisis in which economic, social and natural factors combine with those linked to the conflict to affect women and girls disproportionately. Eighty per cent of the 2 million displaced people still living in camps in north-west Syria are women and children.

Women's and girls' access to humanitarian aid, including food aid, in a safe and sustainable manner, remains far too often limited, as the response to the earthquake in February 2023 revealed. In addition, the risks and cases of abuse, violence and exploitation against women and girls remain particularly high in Syria, while the number of places of refuge — including safe spaces for women and girls — is insufficient. In that context, it is vital to continue to support those involved in protection activities.

Humanitarian aid must continue to adopt a gender-sensitive approach in order to alleviate the suffering and preserve the dignity of civilian populations. At the same time, early-recovery projects remain essential to strengthening people's resilience and reducing their dependence on humanitarian aid.

Given the scale of the needs, it is crucial that the Council follow these developments closely. Humanitarian actors need greater predictability for planning their activities, especially with dwindling resources. There must be no time limits on humanitarian access. In that respect, we welcome the fact that the authorizations granted so far for the various cross-border crossing points have been extended. We urge that they continue to be used as long as necessary, with no time limits. All forms of aid, including cross-border and cross-line, are crucial. And we would like to remind everyone that authorizing and facilitating the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid is an obligation under international humanitarian law.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Director Rajasingham and Ms. Hayford for their briefings. I would also like to welcome the new Permanent Representative of Türkiye to this meeting.

We share Mr. Pedersen's frustrations with the stalled effort to achieve a Syrian-focused and Syrian-led solution to the conflict by convening the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. We commend his perseverance and creativity in working to bring the parties together,

despite obstructionism by the Syrian regime and by Russia. All Council members should support his efforts by calling on the Syrian regime to finally engage in the political process in good faith.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, the briefing by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs once again brought into stark relief the complex challenges that United Nations aid agencies face in delivering humanitarian assistance to the 16.7 million people in Syria, with 10.8 million of the most vulnerable requiring immediate, life-saving aid. Those staggering numbers confirm once again what the humanitarian assistance community and the Syrian people have been saying for years — not enough aid is getting to those who need it. The 90-day arrangement with the Syrian regime for United Nations access through the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings expires in a few weeks. Those two crossings have provided important capacity and enabled faster, more efficient aid deliveries to communities in need, in addition to the vital crossing at Bab Al-Hawa. The six-month arrangement for that crossing expires in July. We have made it clear that extending these arrangements at the last minute, in increments of mere months, is no way to address the daunting scale and persistence of humanitarian needs in Syria. We once again call for access that is guaranteed as long as the needs persist.

On detentions and missing persons, we welcome the recent funding of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic under the United Nations regular budget for the rest of this year, which will help it become operational. It is critical to ensure that it has staffing and resources adequate to launching support for the families who have long deserved answers about their missing loved ones. That is a humanitarian imperative and a necessary component in building a sustainable peace in Syria.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our deep concern about the fact that the Syrian regime has allowed Iranian-aligned militia groups to operate on its territory while Iran continues to provide those militias with advanced weapon systems, intelligence support, financial aid and training. Iran's militant proxies and partners seek only to advance their own destabilizing agenda, and it is clear that the Syrian people increasingly resent their presence. In order to prevent further escalation in Syria and its neighbours, the United States will continue to work with its diplomatic partners to resolve all the tensions in the region. The Syrian people have suffered for far

too long, and their increasingly dire plight demands a robust response from the international community. We must recommit to providing the necessary funding, political will and collective action to help Syrians who are in desperate need.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Director of Coordination Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Ms. Hayford for their briefings.

It has not been possible for the situation in Syria to improve for several years now. As we all know, our Western colleagues have their own sly version of the reasons for that. Unable to accept the fact that the Syrian State has emerged victorious from the battle with Western-funded terrorists, they are doing everything they can to prevent Syria from getting fully back on its feet. The illegal foreign military presence in the north and south of the country continues, including the United States occupation of the eastern side of the Euphrates River and the area around Al-Tanf. They have taken pains to ensure that there is no justice in the enclave in Idlib, where the militias of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is internationally acknowledged to be a terrorist group, have a firm foothold and are feeling just fine.

And yet in the West's capitals we are seeing complete indifference to the fate of Syrians living in the areas that are controlled by Syria's legitimate Government. More than 16.7 million people are in need of assistance, a record for the entire period of the crisis. The number of people going hungry has tripled in the past five years. The price of food and essential goods continues to rise. There is an acute shortage of medicines, despite the fact that, as I recall, Syria once had its own thriving pharmaceutical manufacturing industry.

Amid the indifference of Western donors, the international humanitarian response remains paltry. This year the United Nations response plan is only 0.2 per cent funded, meaning that only \$8 million of the \$4 billion that was requested has been mobilized. The result is that not only are there no new early-recovery projects — which the country's future depends on to a large degree — but existing activities are also being cut back. A clear example of that is the fact that the World Food Programme used to feed 3 million Syrians in need every month, but now it has to cut back to only 1 million. Despite all of Damascus's efforts to expand

the humanitarian assistance, including by authorizing the use of three checkpoints not controlled by the Government in the north of the country, the situation is going from bad to worse. The Al-Rai crossing point is not actually functioning in practice. There is no cross-line delivery, and the United Nations efforts to restore it have been fruitless. All the pseudo-humanitarians in the West are pretending it is normal that it is Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists who are deciding what assistance they will allow to be delivered to refugees in Idlib. Needless to say, their aim is to enrich themselves.

One of the key factors undermining humanitarian activities in Syria remains the suffocating pressure of sanctions from Western countries, primarily the United States. The effects of the illegal and inhumane unilateral coercive measures are not limited to the economic front but have a much broader socioeconomic impact as well. Moreover, the sanctions have a corrosive impact on Syria's ability to combat terrorism. That must not be ignored. Yet our American colleagues do not care about any of this. What is more, the United States Congress is currently considering a new sanctions bill, the aptly named Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act. Covering the period until the end of 2032, it is supposed to replace the Caesar Act, which expires this year. The bill calls for the use of a secondary sanctions mechanism to supervise and punish entities operating in Syria, including those of the United Nations. That is a blatant case of putting pressure on international actors who are trying to create the satisfactory basic socioeconomic conditions for long-term development in long-suffering Syria. That banditry may align well with the so-called rules-based order, but it certainly does not square with international law.

We have long demanded the publication of the special United Nations report on the corrosive effect of sanctions on the work of specialized agencies. In the current circumstances, it is all the more necessary. We would like to once again draw the attention of the Resident Coordinator in Syria and OCHA — since the Office is a key component of the United Nations country team in Syria — to the unacceptable delays in the publication of the report, which was promised over a year ago and possibly more than that. Today we would like to hear from the Secretariat and get a clear deadline for its publication.

The low level of donor funding, coupled with the continuing sanctions pressure and the plundering of Syria's natural resources, has not stopped our Western

colleagues from posing as do-gooders and holding pseudo-humanitarian forums that do nothing to improve the situation in or around Syria. Their main goal is to demonstrate their contempt for the Syrian authorities and mobilize resources to contain the flow of refugees and prevent them from flooding into Europe again. That is all.

The Security Council should, in addition to focusing on the illegal foreign military presence in northern Syria, also focus on another problem — Israel's regular missile and bomb strikes on various sites in Syria, which are very dangerous and are taking place against the background of the military operation by West Jerusalem in the Gaza Strip that is unprecedented in terms of casualties. The most egregious such incident occurred when, on 1 April, the Israeli armed forces launched an air strike on the building of the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, killing and injuring its staff and completely destroying the diplomatic facility, pushing the world to the brink of a dangerous escalation of the regional conflict. We condemn in the strongest terms that attack. We believe that any attack on diplomatic and consular facilities is utterly unacceptable. Their inviolability is guaranteed by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963. It is extremely disappointing that the United States and its allies have not found the courage to condemn that crime. Apparently, such a condemnation does not align with the infamous "rules-based order" promoted by Washington.

At the same time, it is disconcerting that this is by no means Israel's first attack on the densely populated city of Damascus, which poses a high risk of civilian casualties. Since the beginning of the escalation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone, the number of Israeli attacks on Syrian civilian infrastructure has multiplied. In the past few months alone, Israeli aircraft have attacked not only the international airport in Syria's capital, but also the Aleppo airport. Those are the main entry points for humanitarian assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic. They also struck areas in Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kamal, where the Syrian military continues its dogged struggle against terrorist fighters, the same fighters our American colleagues, contrary to their pronouncements, are sponsoring and protecting, just as they are sponsoring the illegal actions of West Jerusalem.

We demand that the Israeli authorities abstain from the nefarious conduct of military actions on the territory

of Syria and its neighbouring States, which engenders extremely dangerous risks and consequences for the entire region, which has already been destabilized through the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip and beyond for more than six months now.

Russia has consistently and invariably maintained that there is no alternative to promoting a Syrian settlement process with United Nations support and in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015). At the same time, we understand that the actions of the United States and its allies that I have mentioned are creating an extremely unfavourable context for intra-Syrian reconciliation. Therefore, we are convinced that the modalities of international mediation should be based on respect for the principles of sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrians themselves, without foreign pressure, must come to an agreement on all outstanding issues regarding the future governance of their country.

That also applies to selecting a venue for the resumption of the sole platform for direct intra-Syrian dialogue, the Constitutional Committee. Any attempts to impose on the Syrians an ill-conceived formulas and frameworks that they have not agreed to are counterproductive and will only lead us into a blind alley. We believe the Special Envoy should continue to seek another location that would be acceptable to the delegations for the next meetings of the Constitutional Committee, instead of Switzerland, which lost its neutral status when it joined the anti-Syrian and anti-Russian unilateral sanctions. That would be consistent with the direct mandate provided for in resolution 2254 (2015) — to support the promotion of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. We hope Mr. Pedersen will have some good news for us.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): It is my privilege deliver this statement today on behalf of the African members of the Security Council plus one (A3+), namely, Guyana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and my own country, Algeria.

We express our gratitude to Mr. Geir Pedersen, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham and Ms. Helen Hayford for their briefings.

The situation in Syria remains of grave concern to the A3+. We deeply regret that the situation continues to escalate with several incidents reported the past few weeks, particularly in the north. We believe

that the situation could deteriorate further without the concerted effort of the relevant parties and the international community.

A resumption of hostilities will only perpetuate insecurity and plunge Syria into violence again. That must be avoided at all costs, as it will severely undermine the gains already made. The A3+ is also concerned about the violations for Syria's sovereignty and condemns such violations, which also undermine regional peace and security. We call for full respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The A3+ further calls on all parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid a regional conflagration.

We express our firm belief that the solution to the Syrian crisis is political. It must also be a solution that ensures Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), and must be based on an inclusive and Syrian-led political process. We therefore call for an early resumption of the Constitutional Committee and appeal to the parties to support the Special Envoy's efforts to implement confidence-building measures.

The A3+ calls upon the international community and key stakeholders to play a more constructive role in Syria and to help its people with renewed vigour to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity. As we engage in negotiations on the Declaration on Future Generations, it is important to bear in mind that the decisions we take today will shape future generations in Syria.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, children in Syria are experiencing the worst effects of an unparalleled and complex emergency, with 6.3 million of them needing protection services. One million additional Syrian children are now at risk of dropping out of school. More than half a million are likely to go unvaccinated, and more than half a million more urgently require life-saving treatment for acute malnutrition. Are we going to leave them behind?

The current situation is likely to further worsen, with hundreds of facilities and mobile medical teams currently under threat of immediate closure due to funding shortages, thereby placing 14.9 million people at risk of interrupted access to health and nutrition services. This catastrophic situation will have intergenerational repercussions. We must act swiftly and urgently in order to avoid a greater humanitarian catastrophe.

In that regard, the A3+ emphasizes the importance of the cross-border mechanism in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syrians. We look forward to the Government's expeditious renewal of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings. We also stress the need to make full use of all existing mechanisms, including the cross-line mechanism, in order to reach those in need in hard-to-reach areas.

While acknowledging the generous contributions of donors to the humanitarian response in Syria, the A3+ wishes to underscore that humanitarian activity alone will not be sufficient to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. With almost 17 million people in need, over half of whom are women, Syria cannot rely solely on humanitarian assistance, but must also benefit from the provision of other necessary services to promote economic recovery.

Syria's economy today, after 13 years of deep crisis and the impact of unilateral sanctions, is struggling to get back on track and to meet the needs of its population. The A3+ believes that, in addition to the humanitarian support being extended to Syria, the international community should also engage with the United Nations and the Syrian Government in investing in early-recovery projects and supporting the resumption of economic activity in the affected areas. Such an investment would help meet the basic needs of the population in a sustainable manner, create conditions conducive to the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees abroad and internally displaced persons and reduce the dependence of the Syrian population on external support.

Finally, there can be no robust peace without development, and there is no prospect for development without peace. The A3+ calls for the Syrians to overcome their differences and to engage in a constructive Syrian-led and -owned political process, with support from the international community, that ensures Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings. I listened carefully to the statement delivered by Ms. Helen Hayford.

China has been a firm supporter of a political solution to the Syrian issue. The international community should continue to promote a Syrian-led and -owned political process. We welcome Special Envoy Pedersen's extensive engagement with all parties, in accordance

with resolution 2254 (2015). We look to the League of Arab States and relevant countries of the region to strengthen communication and cooperation with the Syrian Government and to play a constructive role in promoting a political solution. We firmly support the Syrian Government in taking the necessary measures to combat terrorism. We call on the international community to observe international law and Security Council resolutions, reject double standards and combat all terrorism in Syria, with zero tolerance.

Israel has continued its air strikes on Syrian territory. China finds that to be a cause for deep concern, as such acts constitute a grave violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and will further push the regional situation to the verge of spiralling out of control. The spillover effect of the current Gaza conflict continues as we speak. All parties must exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could exacerbate tensions. Major Powers outside the region should play a constructive role in promoting the de-escalation of the regional situation.

The current humanitarian situation in Syria is dire. The international community should increase its commitment to providing assistance to Syria and ensure that the early-recovery projects throughout Syria receive adequate and non-earmarked funding support. Cross-line humanitarian relief operations have been stalled for some six months. Parties with actual control in north-west Syria must show sincerity and work to facilitate positive progress in cross-line relief operations. Unilateral sanctions and the plundering of resources have long impeded Syria's efforts towards economic recovery, social development and the improvement of people's well-being. We urge the countries concerned to immediately cease their unlawful unilateral acts. Foreign forces must immediately put an end to their illegal military presence in Syria.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Mr. Rajasingham, Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Ms. Hayford for their valuable briefings.

The 13-year conflict in Syria, already one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, has recently seen a significant increase in violence and hostilities. More than 16 million people depend on humanitarian aid as their lifeline. Millions of children are in dire situations and are unable to go to school.

In addition to this ongoing humanitarian nightmare, corruption and mismanagement are rampant, hundreds of thousands of people have gone missing and, tragically, many people have now become involved in terrorism and criminal activities, including illicit drug trafficking, in order to survive.

Funding for the humanitarian response plan in Syria is at its lowest level, despite the plan's massive need of \$4 billion for 2024. Frankly speaking, the international community is beginning to feel aid fatigue in the face of a protracted Syrian crisis with no political solution in sight.

Those who wish the status quo to continue should recognize that it is not in the interest of a peaceful and stable future in Syria. Japan has called sincerely on the Syrian Government to first advance the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015); secondly, to create an environment conducive to the return of refugees; and thirdly, to cooperate fully with the international community. For its part, Japan has provided various kinds of early-recovery and resilience assistance with medium- to long-term aspects, including continued support for the rehabilitation of hospitals, schools and basic infrastructure to help Syrians to become more self-reliant. We encourage all Member States not merely to speak about the critical need for aid in Syria but to commit to actual pledges. In that vein, seeing the Syrian Government take positive steps, including in the political process, will be crucial to encouraging the international community to further strengthen its support to Syria. Advancing the work of the Constitutional Committee would be regarded as an important gesture, and the Committee should be reconvened without further delay.

We believe that the fundamental problem with this ongoing crisis is a lack of trust between the Syrian Government and other major stakeholders. The Security Council must continue to support the Special Envoy's step-for-step approach as a confidence-building measure. Direct engagement and dialogue among the parties concerned are also essential. While results may not be achieved overnight, we should act before the crisis leads to an irreversible outburst.

Finally, diplomatic efforts at the regional level, including through the Arab contact group, will also remain critical, and Japan continues to work closely with the United Nations and Arab countries. Advancing the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) is the only way to ensure a sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I also thank United Nations Special Envoy Pedersen, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Director Rajasingham and Ms. Hayford for their briefings today. In response, I would like to make three points.

First, with a record 16.7 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance, effective and sustainable access is a priority. Cross-border aid is a lifeline for more than 4 million of those people. We therefore reiterate our call for the Al-Assad regime to extend its consent for cross-border aid access at Bab Al-Salam, Bab Al-Rai and Bab Al-Hawa, without conditions or arbitrary time limits and for as long as the humanitarian needs demand it. Cross-line assistance is important, but it cannot match the scale of the cross-border operation.

Secondly, women and girls have a critical role to play in Syria's future. It is important to keep that at the front and centre of the Security Council's approach to achieving peace and stability in Syria. That includes supporting the efforts of Syrian women's civil society organizations and human rights defenders, as well as the participation of women in the political process. That is particularly important given the conflict's disproportionate impact on women, including the challenge of conflict-related sexual violence. The United Kingdom's five-year \$67 million programme Building Local Resilience in Syria is enabling the delivery of three groundbreaking programmes supporting women in the labour market and tackling gender-based violence.

Thirdly, we remain steadfast in our support for host countries in managing refugee communities and ensuring that refugees' rights are protected. Those refugees are being prevented from returning home by the actions of the Al-Assad regime. As the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has stated, Syria is not yet an environment that allows for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns.

Finally, at a fragile moment in the region, we urge the regime to ensure that Syria does not contribute further to regional instability and instead to refocus its efforts on meaningful engagement towards a political settlement that can guarantee the long-term stability that Syrians deserve, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We urge all members of the Constitutional Committee to agree on a location and convene the ninth meeting of the Committee as soon as possible to advance that effort.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I too thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Director Rajasingham and Ms. Hayford for today's briefings. My delegation would

like to take this opportunity to commend the Special Envoy for his tireless efforts and reiterate its support for his work to enable Syria to begin a new chapter.

On 1 April, after our previous meeting on this topic in March (see S/PV.9583), we witnessed new involvement on the part of Syria in the conflict in the broader region. Subsequent attacks have continued to involve Syria in many aspects, even if they have not occurred directly on Syrian territory. That clearly demonstrates how Syria could be drawn into a broader conflict in the region. However, I should also point out that Syria still has its own unique conflict dynamics within its territory, and that the overall dynamics in Syria can therefore be understood in two ways. While they can first of all be affected by external spillover, we should also focus on the fact that the Syrian issue still has its own internal drivers and conflict elements, which have been relatively overshadowed by the other ongoing catastrophes in the region.

As the Special Envoy underlined, there are clashes taking place in Syria's north-west, north-east and south. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has also continued its terrorist attacks across the Syrian desert and the north-east. The ongoing conflict, with all of its volatile internal and external factors, means that any possible clash or any chance of miscalculation could push the situation in Syria itself beyond anyone's control. Conversely, that scenario would add more fuel to the existing fires in the region.

In addition, the insecurity that results from armed conflicts and terrorist attacks inevitably brings corresponding economic and humanitarian deterioration, making the most vulnerable, such as women and children, even more so. The humanitarian funding for Syria has continued to decrease, while flooding and heatwaves are pushing already fragile communities to the brink. It is therefore vital that we elevate our common efforts to enhance the funding and broaden humanitarian access in Syria. My delegation echoes other members of the Security Council in saying that the cross-border access at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai should be extended, and our efforts should be redoubled to expand cross-line deliveries in Syria.

The deterioration in the economic situation and in social pressures has also become increasingly acute, as the Special Envoy mentioned in his briefing. And that requires more funding and resources as well. It is a vicious circle, and we must find a way out of it. Our endeavours to transcend that vicious circle should start

with the political track in Syria. All stakeholders, both within and outside Syria, should be forward-thinking in their efforts to come up with a political solution and to move ahead with a nationwide ceasefire in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and a comprehensive approach. Advancing our discussion on the pending Constitutional Committee is an example for the future.

Neglecting Syria's unresolved internal issues is not in anyone's interests. Doing so could risk a much larger conflict in Syria that might take us back to the full-scale conflict and terrorist sanctuaries of decades ago. We owe it to the long-suffering Syrian people to step up our efforts in support of a political solution and sustainable peace and security for all.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the valuable information provided by Special Envoy Pedersen, by the Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, and by Ms. Helen Hayford, representing civil society.

Ecuador agrees with Special Envoy Pedersen's concern about the consequences of the escalation of violence in recent months and calls on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to resume the channels of political negotiation. The only possible way forward in Syria is to revive a pluralistic political dialogue, build confidence and act in a concerted manner to counter the exacerbation of the conflict and its destabilizing effects on peace and security in the region.

In keeping with the mandate set out in resolution 2254 (2015), I encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to keep up his efforts to resume the meetings of the Constitutional Committee, the step-for-step negotiation strategy and other mechanisms designed to achieve a lasting political solution to the crisis in Syria. I reaffirm the need to strengthen a committed and cooperative approach to confront terrorism and violent extremism and to dismantle the threats they pose to the civilian population.

The conflict continues to affect the lives and physical and mental integrity of the Syrian population, who are also facing the effects of the floods. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance to survive is increasing, as is the funding gap to meet the most urgent needs. I reiterate our concern for displaced persons, in particular women and girls, as well as at the situation of Syrian refugees in third countries.

It is vital that the Syrian Government provide reliable answers on the fate of more than 100,000

missing persons and take steps to release the unknown numbers of those who have been arbitrarily detained and subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment.

Ecuador hopes that the deliberations of the Council will result in actions that will lead to a political solution to the crisis and pave the way for sustainable peace, socioeconomic recovery and national reconciliation.

Ms. Jurečko (Slovenia): I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, the Director of Coordination at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, and Ms. Helen Hayford for their briefings.

We are gravely concerned about the recent developments, including those involving Israel and Iran, and the escalating spiral of violence in the Middle East, which is again causing numerous civilian casualties. It must stop before it pulls the whole region even further into the conflict. We echo the Secretary-General's call to defuse, to de-escalate and to show maximum restraint. For Syria, the current regional security situation only underscores the immediate urgency of a viable political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We urge all actors to act in good faith, to substantively engage and to collaborate with the Special Envoy towards relaunching the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. Agreeing on the venue to reconvene the Constitutional Committee and making progress on the step-for-step process would be a good starting point.

Special Envoy Pedersen enjoys our full support in leading that process, in coordination with countries in the region interested in working towards a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We also hope that the upcoming meetings of the Arab Contact Group and the summit of the League of Arab States, next month, will bring about new impetus to that end.

Given the continued conduct of hostilities, insecurity and instability, we underline the fact that conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees have not yet been met. We commend Syria's neighbouring countries for hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees for over a decade. The underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and we urge Syria to do its part.

At the same time, we reiterate our dismay at the findings of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which reported that many of the returnees to Syria are subjected to gross

human rights violations and abuses, including arbitrary arrest, torture, ill-treatment, disappearance and sexual and gender-based violence. That is unacceptable and must stop. The human rights of returnees must be fully respected, and perpetrators must be held accountable.

Despite regional concerns, we must not forget the plight of Syrian people. Today nearly 17 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Over the past 13 years, too many Syrians have been displaced from their homes, missed education, struggled with malnutrition and died from preventable diseases.

Instead of seeing hopeful signs of progress, we learn that the number of people in need in Syria has never been higher and is likely to increase further. An urgent response is needed when it comes to access to food, safe water, health, nutritional services and schools. However, the long-lasting and persistent conditions of instability and insecurity also call for a viable strategy for early recovery to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities.

OCHA and other humanitarian actors have repeatedly called for adequate funding to respond to the needs of the country. In that regard, the European Union will host the eighth Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region on 27 May. The aim of the conference is to draw international attention to the need for a political solution to the conflict and to generate pledges of humanitarian support for Syria and in support of Syrian refugees in their host countries in the region.

We would like to use this opportunity to also stress once again the role of humanitarian workers, who must be able to work in safety and security. We recall that all parties must allow and facilitate unimpeded and safe passage of humanitarian aid to and through areas under their control. We stress that humanitarian operations must be more predictable and that all aid modalities — including cross-border aid and cross-line aid — remain necessary to meet the vast humanitarian needs.

Finally, we express our deepest concern at the persistence of serious violations of international law. All parties must respect international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The people of Syria and the region have suffered enough. It is high time to put their aspirations, interests and dreams first — and that is why it is crucial for the Council to send a clear message that progress on the political front is essential in moving towards a much-

needed nationwide ceasefire for the people of Syria and the wider region.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen, Mr. Rajasingham and Ms. Hayford for their briefings.

Given the increase in hostilities in the Middle East since October 2023, our responsibility is to do everything within our power to ease tensions. All actors must exercise restraint. France continues to work with its partners to prevent a regional conflagration.

In Syria, Syrians are the first victims of that increasing tension. The Damascus regime and its allies remain deaf to their demands for greater peace, freedom and dignity. A just and lasting peace in Syria requires a political solution underpinned by implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). France supports Mr. Pedersen's efforts in that direction. Without a credible and inclusive political process, the sanctions we have adopted will not be lifted, and we will not be able to finance reconstruction.

France is also concerned by the resurgence of Da'esh's activities, as well as the boom in Captagon trafficking. We call on President Al-Assad's regime to take significant measures to curb drug trafficking. As for the fight against terrorism, our determination remains unshaken.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. More than 13 million people are food insecure. France and the European Union remain committed to supporting Syrians. A new conference will be held in Brussels on 27 May to mobilize donors. The year 2024 marks a dramatic record, with 16.7 million people in need of aid. Humanitarian access must be not only guaranteed but predictable. We call for the renewal of authorizations for the two crossing points of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, as well as for Bab Al-Hawa, without time limits. It is important for humanitarian actors to be able to gain access to all populations, including through the front lines. It goes without saying that international humanitarian law applies to everyone.

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

Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen, Director Rajasingham and Ms. Hayford for their remarks to the Council this morning.

The political, security, humanitarian, human rights and economic fronts in Syrian affairs continue to stagnate or deteriorate. The frequent and deadly attacks

by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have once again seen civilians targeted across Syria. The persistent use of air strikes and ground-based shelling in densely populated areas continues to kill and maim ordinary Syrians, including children. In response, humanitarian workers and organizations such as Malteser International are working to provide the Syrian people with comfort and solace and show solidarity with them, and Malta commends all their incredible efforts. The people of Syria, especially young boys and girls, have known little justice or peace in their short lives. We were moved by the stories shared by Ms. Hayford this morning. They represent the pain and anguish of millions who feel utterly abandoned by their Governments, the Council and the world. That is evident in the lack of resources for the United Nations humanitarian response plan in Syria. As we speak, programmes for health, water, sanitation and hygiene are being scaled back.

Last month we heard that the World Health Organization's referral programmes in the north-west had been suspended. The impact of that suspension is limited not just to the area of health care but to nutrition and education programmes across Syria. Thanks to the great work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and in coordination with Damascus and all the other stakeholders in this conflict, humanitarians largely have the access they require, but not the resources they need. Bridging that humanitarian gap will be critical to providing the people of Syria with the support they require and deserve, and we therefore look forward to the holding of the Brussels conference in May. In this context, we are pleased to see the continued authorization of the border crossing points at Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam, and Al-Rai. That must remain in place as long as the needs persist. We also regard the need for aid via all modalities, including cross-line, as critical to the overall response. Early-recovery, livelihood and resilience programming will sustain communities while they await their long-deserved, just and lasting peace.

However, as we all know, ultimately no humanitarian remedies can solve those problems. The root causes of the 14-year conflict in Syria remain unaddressed. Malta remains deeply disappointed with Damascus for declining the Special Envoy's bridging proposal to reconvene the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. The reconvening of the Committee, alongside genuine engagement with the Special Envoy's step-for-step initiative, could yield meaningful political

progress — which in turn could greatly alleviate the political, security, humanitarian, human rights and economic crises throughout the country.

There are no prospects for a military solution to the Syrian conflict. Only advances consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) can yield the progress needed. Progress on the issue of people who have been arbitrarily detained or forcibly displaced, or who are missing, is more critical than ever. We are especially concerned about reports of continued arbitrary detention, torture and sexual violence in places of detention across various areas of Syria. That desperate practice should and must end. In that context, we welcome the essential investigative work done by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and we look forward to the operationalization of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Today the many parties to this conflict have once again heard what is required to protect the people of Syria — political progress in line with resolution 2254 (2015), a nationwide ceasefire and genuine engagement with the Office of the Special Envoy on his step-for-step initiative. Those actions can reinvigorate the prospects for peace, defuse regional tensions and restore the inherent dignity of the Syrian people and a secure future for them.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today marks the seventy-ninth anniversary of the launch of the San Francisco Conference, at which the founding States of the United Nations, including my country, Syria, drafted the Charter of the United Nations and gave the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, in the hope that our joint action in that area would be swift and effective.

Contrary to our collective desire, the three Western States that are permanent members have forced the Security Council to deviate from its mandate and to remain silent in the face of violations committed by them or their allies against international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter. They have used the Council

as a platform to target a number of Member States, incite opinion against them and promote baseless allegations about them, and we heard those again today from the delegations of the three Western permanent members.

Israel's ongoing barbaric aggression for nearly seven months against Palestinians in Gaza has once again demonstrated those States' spurious positions, hypocritical claims of concern about human rights and lack of the minimum qualifications for contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security. They have sided with the Israeli occupation entity, provided it with political, media and financial support, and opened their arms warehouses to it, encouraging it to persist in its crimes against the Palestinian people and citizens of other countries in the region and in its endeavour to escalate the situation in our region and plunge it into an open regional war.

In the space of a few months, the United States Administration used its veto five times to prevent the Security Council from stopping the genocide being committed by the Israeli occupation and the State of Palestine from being granted its legitimate right to full membership in the United Nations. The United States and its allies have also obstructed the Council's efforts to put an end to the repeated Israeli attacks on Syrian territories and ensure that those attacks do not continue, even blocking the Council from issuing a press statement condemning the Israeli terrorist attack on the Iranian Consulate in Damascus. The representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rajasingham, just referred in his briefing to the killing of one of the humanitarian workers in the Deir ez-Zor region. However, he did not mention that it was the result of an Israeli bombing attack on Syrian territories, similar to the deaths of the more than 140 humanitarian workers in Gaza who have perished at the hands of the occupation authorities, with support, cover, weapons and funding provided by the United States.

The Syrian Government is continuing its efforts to strengthen and develop the mechanisms of various State institutions. In the past few months a series of high-level dialogues have been held with the participation of representatives of various segments of Syrian society, including political, economic, cultural, civil society and youth stakeholders, with a view to ensuring a dialogue-based and participatory approach. A few days ago our Ministry of Information enacted a law that includes a number of provisions aimed at encouraging media activity, guaranteeing media freedom and promoting people's right to the expression of their views.

Preparations are also under way for the holding of constitutional and national elections, with a view to strengthening the role of State institutions and preserving the country's sovereignty, security and stability.

Despite the existing challenges and the new challenges due to the Israeli aggression and the resulting tensions in the region, the Syrian Government continues to do its utmost to improve the humanitarian and living conditions of Syrians, provide them with basic services, and facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Government is also taking other steps which some Western countries continue to deliberately ignore or downplay instead of recognizing and supporting.

The efforts of the Syrian Government and its partners, including the United Nations, are hampered by the challenges of terrorism and the illegal presence of United States and Turkish forces on parts of the Syrian territories and their destabilizing role, plundering, together with their proxies, our national resources, not to mention the unilateral coercive measures that are being imposed by the United States Administration and the European Union, which exacerbate the suffering of Syrians and deprive them of basic services; increase inflation, poverty and unemployment; and hinder development financing and the implementation of early recovery projects.

Syria reaffirms the need to put an end to the illegal foreign presence on Syrian territories and the immediate, complete and unconditional lifting of unilateral coercive measures. We stress the need to review the structure of the United Nations actions in Syria and to limit its mandate and activities to the United Nations offices in Damascus, in full cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government. There is a need to put an end to the anomalous situation imposed by the exceptional circumstances that no longer exist, including by closing the United Nations Office in Gaziantep, which represents a financial and political burden for the United Nations.

My country, Syria, reiterates its position on the so-called Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, which is held without coordination with or the participation of the main party concerned, namely, the Syrian Government. We stress that the Conference is nothing more than a show organized by some States to divert attention from the devastating consequences of their unilateral coercive measures, to announce pledges that go mostly unfulfilled and to repeat discriminatory and politicized positions that run counter to the principles of humanitarian action.

The Syrian Government reaffirms its commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process without any external interference and in a manner that guarantees full respect for its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, which is a fundamental principle enshrined in all relevant United Nations resolutions. Syria looks forward to the convening of the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee and calls on the Special Envoy to continue his efforts in accordance with the constructive proposal that our national team submitted to him.

In conclusion, the Syrians commemorated, on 17 April, the seventy-eighth anniversary of the evacuation of the last French colonial soldier from Syria. From this rostrum, we emphasize that the descendants of those heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice to achieve Syria's independence and preserve its dignity remain determined to protect and defend their homeland in the face of hegemonic and colonialist projects. They are attached to their free national choices and will continue their struggle to liberate their lands from Israeli occupation and all illegal foreign presence, terrorist organizations and militias and to rebuild what has been destroyed by terrorism to ensure a better future for Syria.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Mr. Pedersen, the Special Envoy, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, the Director of the Coordination Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings. We also thank Ms. Helen Hayford for sharing her views.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire. The Syrian people are suffering from profound economic challenges.

According to the latest report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 16.7 million people, nearly 70 per cent of Syria's population, urgently require humanitarian aid.

The current funding level allocated to address the Syrian humanitarian crisis is concerning. The OCHA report highlights that a total of \$4.07 billion is imperative to fully implement the Syria humanitarian response plan. That is required to meet the immediate needs of 10.8 million vulnerable individuals among the assessed 16.7 million in need.

Providing immediate aid is crucial, however, it is not a sustainable solution in the long term. Efforts must focus

on rebuilding critical infrastructure, creating conditions for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons and advancing the political process.

Unfortunately, the United States and its allies have chosen to turn a blind eye to the humanitarian situation on the ground and continue to pursue their political agenda in Syria. They are using sanctions as a means to achieve the objectives they failed to attain through military and diplomatic channels. Also, they have made cynical efforts, such as politicizing humanitarian aid and obstructing the return of refugees and displaced persons. Such unlawful actions can serve only to prolong the crisis and worsen the suffering endured by the Syrian population.

We call for the immediate lifting of unilateral sanctions. The continuation of such inhumane measures violates the basic human rights of the Syrian people, punishes the entire Syrian population and exacerbates the plight of the most vulnerable segments of society.

We extend our appreciation to the Syrian Government for its collaboration with the United Nations and other international entities, providing essential facilities crucial for the delivery of relief and assistance to crisis-affected regions. Any aid mechanism must be implemented in close coordination with the Syrian Government, ensuring the utmost respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We once again strongly condemn the cowardly terrorist attacks carried out by the Israeli regime on 1 April against our diplomatic premises in Damascus. The Israeli regime committed a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Article 2, and of international law and the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. It was an egregious violation of the inviolability of representatives and diplomatic and consular premises.

We also strongly condemn the Israeli terrorist regime's acts of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, which continue with full impunity and without any reaction from the Security Council.

Iran is committed to a political resolution of the crisis. Iran will continue supporting a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process, as well as assisting the people and Government of Syria in restoring the unity and territorial integrity of their country. We continue our support of the efforts being conducted by Mr. Pedersen, the Special Envoy,

for the resumption of the meetings of the Constitutional Committee as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process.

The restoration of Syria's territorial integrity demands relentless efforts to combat all terrorist groups without interruption. In that context, Iran fully supports and assists the Syrian Government in its counter-terrorism efforts. It is imperative, however, that the protection of civilians remains paramount throughout counter-terrorism efforts.

We reiterate our call for the immediate withdrawal of all United States military forces occupying parts of Syrian territory. The continued illegal presence of the United States forces in Syria not only violates the sovereignty and territory of Syria but also is the main source of the instability and insecurity in Syria and only serves to provide space for terrorist groups to solidify their position and perpetrate further atrocities.

Aligned with its Astana format partners, Iran is committed to working towards long-term and sustainable normalization in and around Syria. It is also of the utmost importance to make every possible effort to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees and to facilitate their safe and dignified return to their homeland.

In conclusion, the only viable way to restore peace and security to the region is for the Security Council to compel the rogue regime of Israel to immediately stop the war and genocide in Gaza, establish an immediate and permanent ceasefire and put an end to Israel's destabilizing activities in the region.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): As this is my first statement to the Security Council in my capacity as the Permanent Representative of Türkiye, I would first like to greet the members of the Council and congratulate Malta for steering the work of Council this month. I also thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham, as well as Ms. Hayford, for their briefings.

We cannot lose sight of the precarious situation in Syria in the fourteenth year of the conflict. The security, economic and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict are simultaneously and interconnectedly deteriorating, with no prospect of hope on the horizon. This grim picture has now been further complicated by the dangerous escalation in the region. Syria remains alarmingly exposed to being a battlefield for other hostilities in the Middle East.

It is essential that all relevant parties refrain from steps that could lead to a wider conflict. It is essential to keep Syria out of this perilous conflagration. It is also high time to revitalize the political process for the settlement of the Syrian conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The only path to ending the crisis is through establishing national reconciliation by addressing the root causes of the conflict. We call on the Syrian regime to realistically grasp the seriousness of the conditions surrounding the country and move towards a constructive engagement for a political solution to this conflict, which has devastated a whole generation of Syrians.

The Constitutional Committee is the only platform bringing the Syrian regime and opposition together under United Nations facilitation for a negotiated solution. As such, it should not be blocked over the venue issue, and the ninth round of the Committee should be convened without further delay. We continue to support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts towards that end and his proposal for the venue. No one should fall into the trap of deceptive comfort created by the current situation on the ground as it is simply unsustainable for the country and for the region.

Millions of Syrians remain scattered around the world, including my country, and millions more are displaced within the country. We call them internally displaced persons. Creating the necessary conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians must be a part of any effort to resolve the crisis. All relevant actors must do their part in that regard.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) terrorist organizations continue their efforts to advance a separatist and disruptive agenda in north-east Syria. They constitute the biggest threat to Syria's national territorial integrity and political unity. Those terrorist organizations have established institutions based on a so-called social covenant and are preparing for the so-called elections. Sheltering and supporting those separatist attempts by PKK/YPG and its offshoot, SDF, contravene the Council resolutions related to terrorism in Syria.

As has been repeatedly exposed, including in several United Nations reports, the PKK/YPG and SDF terrorist organizations exploit civilian facilities such as schools, hospitals and water stations and use those facilities as barracks or ammunition depots. They also directly target civilian facilities, such as its shelling of a hospital last week. The oppressive and inhuman practices employed by

these terrorist organizations against the local population in north-east Syria have sparked outrage and show that the PKK and its affiliates do not fit into the fabric of the area. Continued tensions in Deir ez-Zor is a case point. Large-scale violations, torture and maltreatment in the camps and detention centres controlled by these terrorist organizations in north-east Syria are also a matter of public record. We repeat that PKK/YPG and its separatist terrorist agenda has no place in Syria's future.

The number of people in need of humanitarian aid in Syria stands at almost 17 million this year, the highest number since the beginning of the conflict, and the socioeconomic situation continues to further deteriorate. The Organization's ability to deliver life-saving cross-border humanitarian assistance is time-bound, short-term and unpredictable. The ongoing attacks in north-west Syria disrupt humanitarian access and deliveries.

In addition to those negative trends, there is also a serious gap of humanitarian financing. In other words, all major indicators are deeply worrisome. That is the result of 13 years of conflict and of the failure to build a political solution. We therefore urgently need a realignment of positions in order to reach a comprehensive solution in Syria. Ensuring the uninterrupted flow of humanitarian aid and sufficient funding is a critical part of that comprehensive approach.

In that context, we expect the renewal of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings in May, as well as the continued use of Bal Al-Hawa beyond July. Cross-border aid deliveries should continue as long as needed. Given the necessity to coordinate a humanitarian response to a staggering level of needs in accordance with the evolving situation on the ground, it is important to preserve the whole-of-Syria approach. In that respect, an appropriate appointment should be made, without delay, to the critical position of Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis.

My country has a special position and role on this issue, naturally. I also served as a career diplomat in Damascus, and I supervised the Syrian file in the ministry before assuming my current position. I would be happy to participate in any deliberations with the members of the Council — multilaterally or, better, bilaterally — to serve the purposes of resolution 2254 (2015) for a resolution in Syria.

The President: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

I now give him the floor.

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for asking for the floor again. I will be concise.

The representative of Türkiye noted that he worked as a career diplomat in Syria, which means that he knows that Syria has a Government and not a regime, as he claimed. That is why, in response to his use of the word regime which we refuse to use, we demand that the Turkish regime — Erdoğan's regime — stop supporting terrorism in the north-west of Syria, stop targeting Syrian civilian infrastructure and facilities in the north-east of Syria and stop blocking the flow of water from the Allouk water station, depriving more than 1 million Syrians in Al-Hasakah of water and contributing to their suffering. I do not like the word regime and will not use it, because it conflicts with the discourse and work ethics of the United Nations. Certain Western States in the Security Council like to use this word. That is their problem. However, we have a great deal to say about the Turkish role, and we demand respect for the discourse used in the Council.

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

I now give him the floor.

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I will be brief. The conflict in Syria has taken a significant toll on the Turkish people and on Türkiye in general. Türkiye is not the reason for the start of that conflict.

Regarding the allegations made by the representative of Syria, the statements made by the Turkish delegation explained that those allegations are not true. I will not repeat them here. I will not take up the time of the Security Council. What is important here is to move forward on the political process, which is now represented by the Constitutional Committee. I urge the representative of Syria to focus on that, on the way forward.

The meeting rose at noon.