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New York

President: Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
France	Mr. De Rivière
Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
Russian Federation	Mr. Chumakov
Sierra Leone	Mr. Sowa
Slovenia	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield/Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 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; and Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Before I start my briefing, let me take this opportunity to thank my dear colleague, Martin Griffiths, sitting here beside me, because he just told me that this will be his last briefing on the Syrian Arab Republic, and I would like to express my profound thanks for his cooperation and tireless efforts to support the Syrian people and to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. We will miss him. I know the Syrian people will miss him, but hopefully we will be able to continue to work in the same spirit that he has shown is possible.

The Syrian people remain trapped in a profound crisis, which is becoming more entrenched with time, with no clear political path to implement resolution 2254 (2015) emerging and threatening prolonged division and despair. That is not just tragic, it is dangerous. In the absence of a comprehensive political process, all kinds of negative trends are festering, presenting terrible risks for Syrians and the broader international community.

For example, take the security situation. A dizzying array of local and international actors and listed terrorist groups remain engaged in conflict, inside and over Syrian territory, across multiple theatres. There have been further reports of Israeli airstrikes inside Syria, as well as rocket and drone attacks from Syrian

territory towards the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan and Israel. Across the entire north of the country, front lines remain active, with clashes and exchanges of shelling involving pro-government forces, Security Council-listed terrorist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, armed opposition groups and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). And reports continue of pro-government drone strikes in the north-west and Turkish drone strikes in the north-east.

Security tensions are not just between areas of control, but also within them. Let me mention just four examples.

There have been protests in Idlib triggering a violent crackdown by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and resulting in several casualties and reports of scores of arbitrary detentions and serious ill-treatment of detainees. There are ongoing insurgent activities by some tribal elements against SDF in the north-east. There have been incidents of Kurdish National Council offices being burned down in north-east Syria. And there have been tensions in the south-west, with Government forces reportedly deploying reinforcements around Suwayda', after local militias detained Syrian Government officers who were then released following the release of a local student detainee and with reports also of arrests of individuals supporting the Suwayda' protests or criticizing the economic situation. Let me remind Council members that those are only four examples of many more that could have been mentioned.

Meanwhile, emerging in the background is the constant threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, whose attacks in Syria have increased in the past month — particularly in the north-east. If those dynamics simply continue, we will inevitably see even more civilian suffering. And we could also see major escalations and further instability radiating across the region. Instead of that, we urgently need de-escalation across all theatres of the Syrian conflict. Obviously, regional de-escalation efforts starting with a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza are also absolutely essential.

All actors must comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including when combating Security Council-listed terrorist groups.

Moreover, the longer current dynamics continue, the deeper the concerns grow as to what it means for a territory to be divided for a generation or more in

such unstable conditions. We are already seeing a second generation of children deprived of continued access to education or subject to entirely different curricula — threatening children's futures, the unity of Syria and fuelling the potential for radicalism all at the same time.

In the coming months, we are likely to see parliamentary elections in Government-controlled areas conducted pursuant to the current Constitution and also local elections for de facto authorities in areas in the north-east outside Government control. Those processes are no substitute for an inclusive political process which leads to a new, agreed, Syrian constitution and the kind of subsequent elections that resolution 2254 (2015) envisages. In the absence of such a political process, we face the grave risk that Syrians will simply drift further apart, further eroding Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity.

Syrians themselves are sounding the alarm bell on the risks of that entrenched division and the absence of a genuine political process. In Brussels this month, I met with diverse participants in the Civil Society Support Room, who delivered a clear message on the dangers of the current stage in the conflict, the urgent and extraordinary efforts that are required and the need for a genuine political process that ensures security and peace, lays the foundations for Syria's recovery, provides for stability and brings an end to the bloodshed, societal fragmentation and divisions. Women's Advisory Board representatives appealed for entry points to implement resolution 2254 (2015) and for early-recovery assistance, urging all to seek the advice of Syrian women on priorities and needs, particularly as gender-based violence is increasing.

In Gaziantep this month, Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi heard civil society representatives stress the need for a comprehensive political solution and an array of urgent concerns on protection, particularly for women; mounting fears of forced deportations; the lack of education opportunities; the devastating impact of drugs and the urgent need to address housing, land and property violations.

The critical economic situation is compounding civilian suffering and perpetuating the risk of instability. There is no sign of Syria's catastrophic economic situation improving. Indeed, to give just one example, the World Food Programme now says the

cost of living has increased by 104 per cent over the past year.

Martin Griffiths will obviously say more on the immense humanitarian suffering but let me use this opportunity also to thank the European Union for hosting the recent Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region. And let me welcome the pledges made there for the Syria response and for the region. But let me also emphasize the importance of the urgent early disbursement of pledges, including for early recovery. That will be absolutely vital.

Maintaining humanitarian access is also critical — both cross-border and cross-line — as Martin Griffiths will tell us, and any adverse effects of sanctions on ordinary Syrians must be mitigated and avoided, in particular by sanctioning States ensuring their active engagement to counter overcompliance.

Let me also highlight the terrible plight of Syrian refugees, which, as we see with recent events and volatile political debates, needs a solution more desperately than ever. As High Commissioner Grandi said in Brussels, we must recognize the scale and seriousness of the predicament of host countries and support them, while also reiterating the need for practical ways forward to protect Syrians and appeal for all to stop, rather than inflame, anti-refugee rhetoric and actions. The United Nations position remains clear and consistent, defined by international protection standards: resorting to artificial formulas, such as defining certain areas of Syria safe for returns, will not address the problem. We must support refugees who do choose to return. But for most, the truth is there are obstacles to safe, dignified and voluntary refugee return. One set of obstacles relates to protection, including security and legal impediments; and another set relates to material and economic concerns, which require work on livelihoods and accelerated mobilization of resources for livelihoods. We need more decisive work resulting in real confidence-building measures on both sets of concerns. That is both essential and possible.

Indeed, there are many specific and concrete ideas for confidence-building measures on the table, ready to be discussed and fleshed out. Alternative ideas can be explored and put on the table too. I am aware of views arguing that this or that step from this or that party has not been sufficiently noted or responded to. I hear that on both sides of the divide. But the fact, in my opinion, is that given the lack of trust, experience tells

us that it will be only via very concrete engagement, coordination and action that a step-for-step process could bring genuine reciprocal and verifiable progress. That would help address the immediate concerns of Syrians and outside stakeholders too, stabilize the situation on the ground, inch us towards a safe, calm and neutral environment, and indeed also help address the concerns of refugees and the displaced.

Another issue involves resuming the Constitutional Committee, which would also bring the Syrian parties back into the same room to address many of the underlying issues that drive the conflict. However, despite my best and ongoing efforts, its meetings have yet to resume. Let me emphasize once again that I remain open to any alternative venue to Geneva that secures the consensus of both Syrian parties and the host. I am continuing to work on that. But 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.

However, as important as they are, those initiatives are door-openers to a political solution but cannot suffice alone. We all agree that there can be no military solution. Many understand that the situation in Syria is dangerous, the current piecemeal approach is not enough to stem the tide and a strategy of containment and alleviation will not stabilize the dangerous and unpredictable situation — just as it has failed to do elsewhere in the region. And for me that is a key message today. Deep and complex conflicts cannot be simply managed or contained in perpetuity — there must be a political horizon for resolving them too. That is why preparing the ground for a new and more comprehensive approach makes sense.

For such an engagement, we need the Syrian parties — the Government and the opposition, of course, and also the voices of broader Syrian civil society. Equally, we also need all key international actors — the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Türkiye, the United States, the Arabs, the Europeans and of course the Security Council. No actor can solve the crisis on its own and none of the existing diplomatic groupings can either. Constructive international diplomacy with the contributions of all is the only way forward. It goes without saying that in the current geopolitical climate that is a major challenge — we will not get all the players together anytime soon. But we may be able to prepare the ground. And that is why I and my team will continue to

seek and welcome the constructive engagement of the Syrian parties and key stakeholders with us on what a comprehensive solution to the crisis could actually look like, across all the areas where key parties have major differences.

What I am asking requires pragmatism, realism, frankness and compromise from and with all parties. It means de-escalating the situation on the ground and in the region, implementing step-for-step confidence-building measures and reconvening the Constitutional Committee. But it also means serious engagement on a comprehensive approach, one that meets the legitimate aspirations of Syrians, restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity and addresses the concerns of key stakeholders, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Yes, I know that will be difficult, but it is not impossible, and it is absolutely necessary. My appeal to everyone here today is to engage and work with us on that way forward.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: It is a source of considerable pride for me to be sitting beside the very distinguished Special Envoy that we have here in Geir Pedersen. His remarks today are very telling, and it is a pleasure to be his colleague and partner.

Since I assumed the role of Emergency Relief Coordinator, almost three years ago, I have spoken to the Council numerous times in these monthly meetings on the humanitarian situation in Syria, and I am grateful to be doing so again today. This will be my last briefing in person, although not my last to the Council, virtually, before my departure at the end of June.

My involvement in the United Nations response to the Syrian crisis goes back almost to the start of the conflict, when I had the good fortune to serve three Special Envoys and became the Deputy Head of the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2012. By the time I was appointed as Emergency Relief Coordinator, the plight, the situation and the circumstances of the Syrian people and their future were embedded into my approach and psyche and my belief about the world. The humanitarian situation that I encountered as I entered the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had been raging for more than a decade. During my time in office in this job, I visited Syria four times — more than

any other crisis — which I think reflects the severity of the crisis and the opportunities, as Mr. Pedersen has pointed out, which are specific, practical and needed.

Of course, as I prepare to step down, three years after joining OCHA, it pains me and all of us that the suffering of the people of Syria grinds on. Indeed, more people need humanitarian assistance now than at any time in the conflict — we believe the current number is about 16.7 million, and it is getting worse every year. It is a protection crisis. Children continue to be killed, women and girls continue to fear for their safety and across Syria, more than 7 million people remain displaced, a figure that tragically has been surpassed only in the Sudan. Millions of others are still refugees in neighbouring countries, and we note and respect hugely the welcome and the support they have been given by their hosts. We are very grateful for that and we know how big a burden it is.

A recurring issue in my briefings over the years has been the importance of sustained access — and Mr. Pedersen referred to that — through all modalities, whether cross-border, cross-line or direct. The cross-border operation from Türkiye has been providing a lifeline to millions of people in need in north-western Syria since 2014. Following the lapse in the Security Council's authorization of the operation that we all lived through in the past year, it has now resumed functioning effectively with the consent of the Government of Syria, for which we are grateful. I welcome the Government's recent decision to extend its permission for the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings for an additional three months until 13 August. I hope that the permission to use Bab Al-Hawa will likewise be extended beyond 13 July, and indeed that consent for the use of all crossings will be provided for as long as the humanitarian needs persist. They should be defined not by months but by needs. As I have repeatedly emphasized, the cross-line deliveries are also a critical tool for reaching people in need throughout Syria. I remember the words of the Secretary-General when we met about the renewal of the cross-border operation. He emphasized the need for all forms of access to be provided for the people of Syria.

Cross-line deliveries to the north-west remain more challenging — a word that we use so often — than they should be. We have gone nearly a year now without such a mission. But I am encouraged by signs that one such mission could go ahead in the coming days, and I hope it will generate some critical momentum for

more regular deliveries, which we know are essential. Thanks to several weeks of effort and a show of commitment by all parties, I am also encouraged by the cross-line assessment mission to the Allouk water station on 21 May. As the Council is aware, the station has been out of operation since 5 October last year, when multiple air strikes in the north-east damaged the electricity network. As the main water source for more than 610,000 people in Al-Hasakah governorate, it will be critical for its operation to be restored ahead of the coming summer months. As a direct consequence of the severe water, fuel and electricity crises, women in particular are struggling to meet their hygiene needs and malnutrition rates have risen dramatically, a direct result of the damage to that network.

Another issue that has been the subject of our discussions far too frequently — and Mr. Pedersen referred to it — is the protection of civilians. Although the level of hostilities has thankfully subsided from its peak, fighting continues to be a reality for many civilians. Syrian women and girls continue to be exposed to negative coping mechanisms and appalling levels of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. Daily fighting — at its fiercest, as we have heard, in north-western Syria — continues to cause civilian injuries and deaths, including among children, as well as the damage of detentions and inhumanity, as Mr. Pedersen also described. It continues to harm the humanitarian response. A recent uptick in hostilities in Deir ez-Zor governorate in eastern Syria, in very close proximity to the United Nations hub and other humanitarian premises, damaged humanitarian assets and led to a temporary suspension of humanitarian operations, not something that we wanted to see. I therefore want to reiterate what the Council has heard from me and Mr. Pedersen repeatedly over the past three years. All parties have obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects. That includes taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian personnel and assets, in the course of military operations, as well as allowing access and the rapid and unimpeded passage of relief and workers' movement.

Perhaps one of the biggest concerns for the months and years to come relates to underfunding for the humanitarian response. As I said at the beginning, as humanitarian needs continue to rise in Syria and poverty continues to draw more people in, for all kinds of reasons

that we will no doubt discuss, so does the importance of sustained support for the people of Syria and their humanitarian needs. And with the courage and resolve that I witnessed in the aftermath of the earthquakes last year — and throughout my time in office — the humanitarian community does not walk away. We stay and we deliver, as we can, must and should. That includes an emphasis on early-recovery efforts. I was in Doha and Abu Dhabi last week and talked extensively to the authorities there about the need for funding for early recovery in Syria. As Mr. Pedersen has described, it is an essential component not only for the welfare of people across Syria but also for the planning and possibilities of safe and voluntary refugee return. We cannot do any of that without adequate funding.

We have seen a steady drop in funding levels over the past three years — 55 per cent funded in 2021 to 39 per cent last year. We had a good meeting of senior officials in Brussels. While we will need a little time to see where those pledges go, at the moment, I have to say that in the middle of the year we are only 9 per cent funded for the humanitarian response plan for Syria. It has never been this bad, and the needs have never been this large. Obviously we are very thankful to the European Union and donors for their continued support. Many of them are here in this Chamber. And of course, as usual, we always ask for more.

The humanitarian response in Syria is essential to saving lives and alleviating suffering, but it is not part of the crisis and it cannot provide a solution to it. The only sustainable solution — and why I am so pleased to be sitting next to the Special Envoy — is via an inclusive, Syrian-led political process that meets the people's legitimate aspirations, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015). And as I have said in private, I want to take the opportunity to bear witness in public to Mr. Pedersen's extraordinary work on behalf of the Syrian people. He never stops. He never sleeps.

Over the past three years there have been moments when the greater good has overcome the political deadlock at least to some degree. That was what we hoped to see after the earthquakes, and we thought that we had opportunities, but they have yet to be realized. When Syria was overwhelmed by the coronavirus disease pandemic, commitments made by all the parties enabled the timely roll-out and delivery of vaccines across the country. It can be done. The fact that it can be done and is not is a shame on all of us. The Government of Syria adopted emergency measures

after the earthquake, and the Government of Türkiye did the same after the earthquake that affected its people, allowing access for the urgent relief efforts. Sanctions measures were eased and the flash appeal was fully funded. I think that it was a standout achievement last year. And we are still grateful for the facilitation of our own staff's access, which continues to this day as a result of decisions made in Damascus right after the earthquake. We had many cross-border missions as a result, for which we are very grateful. It is essential to our oversight of the process and our understanding of the needs.

But we cannot wait for the next appalling cataclysm to come to make genuine progress towards ending this catastrophe, as the economic crisis deepens and as regional tensions — Mr. Pedersen referred to the war in Gaza — threaten the safety, security and prospects of the Syrian people. I therefore end as I began, with an appeal to the Council to support the efforts of the Special Envoy and his work on behalf of all of us and on behalf of the Syrian people. That is the priority.

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

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

Mr. Chumakov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and the Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. Martin Griffiths, whom we wish we did not have to bid farewell to, for their briefings on the current political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

With the continuing escalation of military action in the area of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, now in its eighth month, the risk of Syria's involvement in a region-wide confrontation, particularly along the Blue Line and in the Syrian Golan Heights, remains high. That was clearly confirmed by the strike on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus last month, which provoked a response from Tehran and a forceful response in return by Israel. We were concerned to note yet another incident on 20 May, when two Israeli F-16 tactical fighter jets sent guided aerial missiles from airspace over the Mediterranean Sea aimed at the southern outskirts of the city of Homs. The air strike killed four Syrians, injured five others and caused material damage. We condemn such attacks in the strongest possible terms. We call on Israel to refrain from military actions on the territory of Syria and its neighbours, as they are fraught

with extremely dangerous consequences for the entire region, which is already destabilized as a result of the incessant bloodshed in the Gaza Strip and the spillover of tensions into the West Bank and Lebanon.

Against that backdrop, the illegal military presence of United States armed forces in Syria on a pretext of fighting terrorism is having a destabilizing effect. In a clear demonstration of Washington's double standards, our American colleagues are trying to whitewash the Security Council-designated terrorists of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham who control Idlib, condemning the authorities in Damascus and its allies for fighting them. At the same time, the United States is trying to portray Israel's brutal military operation against the civilian population of Gaza — an operation that the Israel Defense Forces call a fight against Hamas, which is not recognized by the United Nations as a terrorist movement — as a fight against terrorism and Israel's exercise of the right to self-defence.

Our United States colleagues on the Council are essentially occupying part of the territory of a State Member of the United Nations without taking any responsibility for the civilians there who are under Washington's control. According to a special report from Amnesty International, in the network of prisons — no fewer than 27 facilities — and camps that the United States has created east of the Euphrates, there are 56,000 people, including nationals from 74 countries. Of them, 29,000 are children, most of them under the age of 12. That is the highest number of minors held in detention anywhere in the world. Refugees and internally displaced persons are being deprived of regular humanitarian assistance, subjected to torture and other forms of ill treatment, and all that with the knowledge and involvement of the United States and the allies helping them on the ground.

With regard to the political track, we would like to reiterate that our delegation has consistently maintained that there is no alternative to advancing the process of an intra-Syrian settlement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) through the mediation of Special Envoy Pedersen, which should be based on respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We firmly believe that it is the Syrians themselves, without external pressure, who should reach agreement on all outstanding issues, including choosing a new venue for the next round of the Constitutional Committee as the only platform for direct dialogue.

It is with deep regret that we must agree with the assessment that the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. But while there is no doubt that the extreme weather conditions in that Arab country are aggravating its citizens' already dire situation, it is important to recognize that 16.7 million Syrians are now in need of assistance not because of the floods but because of the devastating conflict, now in its fourteenth year, that has been fuelled by Western countries for political reasons. The massive destruction over the years caused by the crisis, the stifling illegal unilateral sanctions and the occupying United States forces' plundering of Syrian natural resources are all things that the United Nations system should have spoken about more boldly. Mr. Pedersen mentioned today that there is excessive overcompliance with sanctions, but that requires a separate discussion.

We are concerned about the excessive politicization of the humanitarian file, which among other things is manifest in the record low level of funding for the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Syria. As we heard today from Mr. Griffiths, the figures are paltry. So far only 9 per cent of the required funds has been mobilized. That is obviously insufficient to cover even the basic needs of Syrians, not to mention the early-recovery programmes that Western countries are pushing off the humanitarian agenda. And even the United Nations bodies themselves are in no hurry to become involved on a large scale. The Secretariat's guide "Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria" is shameful proof of that. In fact, it directly prohibits United Nations bodies on the ground from engaging in reconstruction activities.

The eighth pseudo-humanitarian conference held recently in Brussels is merely yet another show of hypocrisy on the part of the collective West. These events, held without the participation of the legitimate Syrian authorities, long ago became entrenched gatherings of the like-minded who, under slogans about help and care, continue to use the humanitarian agenda for their own purposes and to undermine Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The organizers pay lip service to helping Syrians and cite figures about donations, but in reality their efforts are focused only on containing refugees in Syria's neighbouring countries and preventing people from migrating to Europe or returning home. On the eve of the Brussels conference, we were surprised to see OCHA issue some kind of "reminder" to all diplomatic missions in New

York and Geneva about the importance of participating in the meeting. We would like to ask what that means. Should we take it as a sign that OCHA has decided to act as an organizer of the conference? And was it addressed to those countries that were not invited to the event, for instance?

Returning to the topic of refugees, we want to once again draw attention to the fact that aid should not be aimed at continuing to keep Syrians in their host countries but should rather encourage them to return home. That is why international assistance programmes should be concentrated in Syria itself. There are safe areas there where the infrastructure needs uncomplicated measures that are achievable for the United Nations. All the prerequisites for such work are in place. The Syrian authorities have shown goodwill and have behaved responsibly by continuing to extend permits to United Nations personnel for the use of crossings on the border with Türkiye and relaxing their attitude in agreeing to United Nations requests and facilitating its missions. Signs of life are appearing in the cross-line mechanism. It is now important to use all the available opportunities to ensure the flow of aid and coordination on the ground in close cooperation with Damascus.

We are deeply concerned about the promotion in the United States of an inhumane new sanctions bill, entitled the Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act, which, if enacted, would particularly affect the Syrians who are most in need. In that context, a special United Nations report on the impact of sanctions on humanitarian activities in Syria continues to be highly relevant. We would like to once again point out that the drafting and issuance of such reports, regardless of whether they please Western donors, is now a direct obligation of the United Nations Resident Coordinator system, based on General Assembly resolution 58/198, on “Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries”.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Griffiths and Special Envoy Pedersen for their sobering briefings on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Griffiths. As we heard, this is his last in-person briefing on Syria, and, as we know, he has plans for retirement, so I would like to thank him sincerely for his outstanding work as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and for his commitment and all his efforts worldwide. He

is an extraordinary humanitarian, and he will be sorely missed in this Chamber. I thank him very much.

The United States remains committed to the provision by the United Nations of humanitarian assistance, including through cross-border and cross-line modalities in Syria. At Monday's Brussels conference we pledged \$593 million to that end. At the same time, we have made it clear that reauthorizing the crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai in 90-day increments is not a sustainable approach to addressing the scale of humanitarian needs in Syria. We reiterate our call to the Syrian regime to allow long-term United Nations access through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, well before the six-month authorization expires in July. Syrians cannot be left hanging on the edge every few months.

What is more, we must call attention to the desperate situation in the Rukban settlement for internally displaced persons in south-eastern Syria. For years, the regime and its Russian backers have blocked all United Nations attempts to provide aid to the thousands of civilians living in Rukban. Now the regime is cracking down on the commercial traders who are Rukban's primary source of food, basic medicine and other necessities. Reports from Rukban indicate that food could run out within days. There is no justification for the regime and Russia to stop humanitarian assistance from reaching civilians in need. There is just no justification at all. The regime must immediately consent to United Nations requests for access and stop blocking aid from reaching those who so desperately need it.

With Syria's dire humanitarian situation, human rights violations and lack of accountability for regime crimes and abuses, it is no wonder that Syrian refugees overwhelmingly believe they cannot return to their country. We thank countries in the region that continue to protect Syrian refugees, and we encourage all countries hosting them to uphold the principle of non-refoulement. It is clear that the Syrian regime has not created the conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns. It has yet to guarantee humanitarian access or end its practices of disappearances, unjust detentions, torture and death. It has yet to clarify the status of missing individuals or put a stop to mandatory conscription. And it has yet to respect rights related to housing, land and property.

In addition to those humanitarian and human rights concerns, the political situation in Syria remains untenable. We note the Bahrain declaration's affirmation of the need to end the Syrian crisis in line with resolution 2254 (2015). And indeed, we share the concern that Secretary-General Guterres recently expressed to Arab leaders about the Syrian people's suffering. And we call on Council members to press the regime for concrete actions to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

That said, ahead of last year's Summit of the League of Arab States, the United States expressed its belief that inviting Al-Assad to sit at the same table as other regional leaders would do nothing to help the people of Syria and would not end the decade-plus-long conflict. We remain sceptical that the Arab League's engagement with the Syrian regime will accomplish its objectives. Still, we continue to urge those engaging with the regime to do so in pursuit of the objectives of resolution 2254 (2015).

For its part, the United States will continue to support efforts to hold the Al-Assad regime accountable for its atrocities and will continue to lead the way in providing assistance to the Syrian people.

Thirteen years since the conflict began, it is long past time that the regime end its intransigence and genuinely work with the opposition to reach agreement on a path forward for all of Syria. And I think a good place to start would be a return to the Constitutional Committee. Absent authentic and enduring progress towards a political resolution of the conflict, we cannot consider lifting United States sanctions.

And let me reiterate the concern of the United States that the Syrian regime has allowed Iranian-aligned militia groups to operate on its territory, even as Iran provides the militias with advanced weapons 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 the Syrian people increasingly resent their presence.

The United States will continue to work with its diplomatic partners to prevent further escalation in Syria and its neighbouring countries. And we will continue to push for sustainable humanitarian aid and a sustainable political resolution to the conflict, to give the Syrian people a taste of democracy, stability and the freedom they deserve.

And let me say to my Russian colleague, people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. Russia is carrying out an unprovoked war in Ukraine against the people of Ukraine. And yet, the Russian representative is speaking here about peace? It is a clear reflection of Russia's commitment or lack thereof and Russia's humanitarian concerns.

And finally, I really want to ask about the Russian Federation's commitment to Syria. What did the Russian Federation contribute to Syria's humanitarian needs or to Syria's recovery needs that the Russian representative speaks so strongly about? Let us not talk about hypocrisy in this Chamber.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths for their briefings, and above all, for their commitment. As this is one of Mr. Griffiths last meetings or last in-person meetings of the Security Council, I would like to most sincerely thank him on behalf of my country for all his humanitarian commitments, in particular with regard to Syria. I personally have had the opportunity to work with Martin Griffiths in a number of capacities, in particular and especially intensely in the past year and a half on Syria. I can say that I very much appreciate the fact that we were able to work together after the earthquake and the regrettable veto (see S/PV.9371). He has always encouraged the Council to act for humankind and in defence of those most in need. We wish him all the best for the next stages. I cannot imagine that it will truly be retirement. In any case, I thank Martin Griffiths once again.

Along with the Special Envoy, Switzerland is very concerned about the lack of progress towards a political solution in Syria, in particular regarding the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and the step-by-step approach proposed by the Special Envoy. It is regrettable that the momentum to relaunch a viable political process and dialogue between regional players, initiated in the aftermath of the tragic earthquake of February 2023, has faltered. It was truly an opportunity that we hoped could be seized. In that respect, we will continue to be ready to make our good offices available in Geneva for any initiatives or peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations. The priority is the urgent need for a political solution in Syria in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The establishment of a nationwide ceasefire is a fundamental milestone in the resolution to consolidate peace. In view of the hostilities that continue to affect various parts of the country, such a ceasefire is more necessary than ever. For that to happen, Syrian territory must also be protected from the spread of the Middle East conflict.

With a view to lasting peace, Switzerland will continue to support the work of the United Nations and civil society organizations to ensure that the serious violations of international law committed since 2011 do not go unpunished, for there can be no peace without justice in Syria.

I would now like to turn to humanitarian issues.

Over the past year, the humanitarian situation in Syria has deteriorated further, and armed violence has continued and even increased across the country. Switzerland reiterates its call on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as humanitarian access. In that respect, it is to be welcomed that the authorization for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings has been renewed for three months, for which we are very grateful. Nevertheless, humanitarian actors need greater predictability to plan their activities, especially with increasingly dwindling resources. Humanitarian access must not be limited in time. We reiterate that all assistance modalities, including cross-border and cross-line assistance — are necessary to meet the enormous needs in the country. Allowing and facilitating the rapid and unhindered passage of humanitarian aid to populations in need is an obligation under international humanitarian law, incumbent not only on all parties to the conflict, but also on all States.

There are 16.7 million people in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance, including almost 13 million suffering from food insecurity. As financial resources dwindle and needs increase across Syria, the international community's response must not be limited to emergency humanitarian assistance. More sustainable humanitarian action, including early-recovery projects, is essential to increase people's resilience and improve their living conditions, as well as to provide them economic prospects for the future.

We know that the consequences of the Syrian crisis are weighing heavily on the countries of the region.

That is why, at the Brussels Conference, Switzerland pledged over \$65 million for the current year to help people in need in Syria and in the region. And we will deliver on those promises.

Despite the many deteriorating humanitarian contexts, we cannot forget the flight of the Syrian people. But it is clear that to address those humanitarian needs, we will need a political solution. In that context, I would like to respond to the Special Envoy's appeal and pledge that we will work him on the way forward.

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

We would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their valuable briefings. We recognize their tireless efforts, despite the myriad challenges, to bring the Syrian crisis to an end and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. Let me add my best wishes for the speedy recovery of Mr. Griffiths. The international community, the Security Council and the United Nations need talented people like him who are dedicated to the cause of humanity.

Since our previous meeting (see S/PV.9618), all indicators, including the security, political, humanitarian and economic components, continue to trend downwards for Syria. Despite misgivings that the parties have not been able to agree to a political settlement, there is still space to restart the process.

In the light of that, the A3+ would like to offer several recommendations.

First, the parties to the conflict must commit to reconvening the Constitutional Committee. The agreement to hold its ninth session must be fulfilled. Progress on the political track is indispensable for the plethora of pending issues. The A3+ calls upon all parties to engage constructively in finding a political solution to guarantee Syria's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Secondly, we all we urge all refugee-hosting countries to respect international law, in particular, international refugee law. The necessary conditions must be created to facilitate the voluntary, dignified and safe return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes.

Thirdly, we reiterate our call for a Syrian -owned and -led political process, under the auspices of the United Nations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore express our strong support for the efforts of the Special Envoy and urge the parties to the conflict to engage in the Special Envoy's confidence-building initiative.

Fourthly, we firmly condemn the violation of Syria's sovereignty and call upon all actors to refrain from actions that trigger further escalation in the region. The A3+ is seriously concerned about escalation and miscalculation in the Gaza conflict and the impacts it could have on the stability and peace of Syria and the region as a whole.

After more than 13 years of crisis, the humanitarian needs of Syria and the Syrian people are constantly growing due to the conflict, economic recession and the unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria. The A3+ regrets that the 2023 humanitarian response plan is currently only 21 per cent funded. The lack of adequate funding has disrupted humanitarian activities, with 13 million Syrians in need of life-saving support. We welcome the convening of the eighth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held in Brussels on 27 May, and urge all donors to fulfil their commitments.

The A3+ emphasize the importance of the early-recovery project vision of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and calls upon all parties to collaborate with the United Nations system so as to ensure its success. The Syrian economy must also recover. Syrians cannot rely solely on the generosity of donors and humanitarian assistance. Economic sanctions must be lifted.

The A3+, namely, Guyana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Algeria, calls for a genuine political process that addresses all challenges facing Syria today and helps the Syrian people meet their legitimate aspirations. All efforts should be aligned towards that objective rather than the pursuit of narrow political interests and calculations. After the years of suffering of the Syrian people, that is our duty to them.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Griffiths for their briefings. I would also like to pay a heartfelt tribute to Mr. Griffiths for all that he has done on the Syrian dossier and, more generally, for his extraordinary

contribution to the activities of the United Nations in recent years. Allow me to make three points.

First of all, it is regrettable that the Damascus regime persists in blocking all progress on the political process undertaken within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). That is the framework, along with all prospects likely to enable the restoration of stability in Syria, that the international community is ready to explore, together with the Syrian regime. The situation in the country is destabilizing the region. Da'esh is resurgent, and the increase in drug trafficking — some of it organized by the regime — is jeopardizing regional security. We therefore call on Damascus to reconsider its policies of obstruction. A just and lasting peace in Syria requires a political solution based on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore support Mr. Pedersen's efforts to ensure the implementation of the resolution's aspects. Only if tangible progress is made can sanctions be lifted and reconstruction financed.

Secondly, the situation of Syrian refugees in the region remains alarming. France expresses its support for the countries hosting them, in particular T rkiye, Jordan and Lebanon. The European Union has just announced a €1 billion support plan for Lebanon. We must give special support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in neighbouring countries. Syrian refugees must be protected wherever they are. At the same time, we want refugees who wish to do so to be able to return to their country in safe and dignified conditions. We will therefore continue our work with the UNHCR to encourage the Syrian regime to create the conditions for such a return as well as to alleviate the burden on the host countries. In that respect, it is essential that Damascus revise its approach.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate. The renewal of the authorization for the two crossing points of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai on 13 May is good news, as is the conclusion of a mission across the front lines to the Allouk pumping station. It is essential to enable aid to reach Syria through all the available channels. However, the funding remains far below requirements. We must remain mobilized. That was the spirit of the eighth Brussels conference, held on Monday, which raised €5 billion. For its part, France has announced a new contribution for 2024 of €300 million, including €150 million in donations.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for today's briefings. I too join in expressing special thanks to Mr. Griffiths for his dedication and tireless work on Syrian humanitarian questions. My delegation would also like to reiterate its full support to the Special Envoy for his unwavering efforts to advance the Syrian political process.

However, it is regrettable that we are witnessing no progress on the security and political process in Syria. There has been active armed conflict in the north-west and north-east. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is continuing its attacks across the country. Recent intense exchanges of fire over the Golan Heights have contributed additional concerns to the security horizon and demonstrate that Syria still has its own dynamics of conflict inside its territory. And besides those internal factors, external issues such as the catastrophe in Gaza and the tensions along the Blue Line have the potential to lead to further deterioration of the security situation in Syria. Above all, no country in the region is safe from the possibility of spillover until the conflict in Gaza is resolved.

It is also regrettable that no tangible progress has been seen so far on the political situation. However, the Special Envoy's suggestion just now for holding a bridge meeting in Geneva ahead of the Constitutional Committee could be a good starting point for the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). My delegation continues to support the Special Envoy's endeavours, and believes that holding the Constitutional Committee could lead to an inclusive and Syria-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, as stated in resolution 2254 (2015).

The economic and humanitarian situation in Syria is getting worse as time goes on. Syria's malfunctioning economy is nearly in ruins and the heatwaves and intense storms the country has seen this summer are compounding the situation. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths said in his briefing, the humanitarian assistance for Syria is seriously underfunded. But at the same time, it is undeniable that it is the current political situation in Syria that is restricting humanitarian access and posing ongoing risks to humanitarian workers. In that connection, the political dynamics should not be hampering the efforts to keep the cross-border operations open and ensure that health, nutrition, protection, education and other critical services can continue to be provided to the Syrian people.

Transcending this vicious cycle is both urgent and necessary. All key stakeholders, both inside and outside Syria, should be pragmatic, realistic and tolerant of each other in order to catalyse progress in that direction. In that vein, we believe that a breakthrough such as the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee can spur a transformation and create forward momentum. Lastly, let me reiterate that the comprehensive approach is both in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and based on the aspirations of the international community, including the long-suffering Syrian people.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. On this occasion, Malta also sincerely thanks Mr. Griffiths for his exceptional leadership and principled approach to humanitarian action. It has been a guiding light for us in these times of global humanitarian need.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria continues unabated. Hunger continues to stalk millions as we witness increased malnutrition in Homs, Hama and Aleppo governorates, alongside water shortages in rural Aleppo. The Syrian economy is in free fall and the value of the Syrian pound continues to plummet. Inflation has eroded the modest purchasing power that some Syrians depended on to survive. The impact of the Red Sea crisis has driven up maritime transportation costs, with goods now reaching Syria later and at higher prices than before. Those factors, and the 14 years of conflict in Syria, have made the population more vulnerable to climate shocks. Heavy flooding in the winter months and drought in the summer have compounded the humanitarian needs. They erode the resilience of already fragile communities and are evident in public-health crises and outbreaks of communicable diseases such as cholera.

As Malta has noted on many occasions, Syria remains a grave protection crisis, with the impact of the protracted conflict being acutely felt by women, children and older people. The mounting security threats in the north-west have meant that many obstetric and newborn emergency care facilities have suspended their services. Gender-based violence remains pervasive and child marriage is on the rise. Within that context, Malta welcomed the extension of the border crossing points at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai earlier this month. We reiterate, however, that all aid modalities must remain open for as long as they are required. Facilitating life-saving humanitarian aid must never

be part of political negotiations. We must also see an expansion of cross-line aid delivery, funding for early recovery, livelihoods and resilience programming, and of overall greater resources for the Syria humanitarian response plan for 2024. We welcome the outcome of the eighth Brussels conference, which concluded earlier this week, with its pledge of some \$8.1 billion in grants and loans for Syrians.

Turning to the political side, Malta commends the work of the Special Envoy in seeking to achieve a resumption of the Constitutional Committee. We remain deeply disappointed, however, by the lack of engagement from Damascus. The time has come to set aside the differences over the venue and to schedule and hold the next round of the Constitutional Committee. The status quo is untenable. Verifiable, reciprocal and meaningful steps for steps can break the political deadlock and spur progress. Making progress on the issue of missing and arbitrarily detained persons will show goodwill and a good-faith effort to bring about a resolution of the conflict. Demonstrating progress on ensuring the protection and safety of returnees is also critical and vital to creating the right conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. The rights of Syrian refugees must be safeguarded.

It is now more essential than ever to work to advance and implement the political and humanitarian strategies required to put a floor under the suffering of the Syrian people, thereby ensuring that the millions in desperate need cannot fall any farther. After 14 years of conflict, it is critical to resolve its root causes and issues firmly and faithfully. As Under-Secretary-General Griffiths just said, we cannot wait for the next cataclysm for the greater good to overcome the political deadlock. There is no more time to wait.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. Let me also add my country's sincere thanks to Mr. Griffiths for all his work as Emergency Relief Coordinator, including in Syria.

Slovenia remains deeply concerned about the ongoing spiral of violence in the Middle East. That has to stop before it pulls the whole region even further beyond the point of no return. We echo the Special Envoy's statement that Syria "is not a frozen conflict, and nor are its effects felt only in Syria" (*S/PV.9618*, p. 2). We reiterate our call on all actors in the region and in Syria itself, and on those who can exert influence on

the parties to the conflict, to show the utmost restraint, work for de-escalation and show respect for international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law.

I would like to make the following three points. First, we urge all actors in and outside Syria to act in good faith to engage substantively, without delay or excuse, with the Special Envoy on relaunching a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. The full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of all Syrian women in the process is highly important. As we have said before, there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria, and only a resumption of a credible and viable political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), can lead to a much-needed nationwide ceasefire. The Special Envoy enjoys our full support in that regard.

Secondly, a resumption of the political process is also essential if the spiral of continued humanitarian and economic decline in Syria is to be reversed. Today's briefing by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs once again confirmed how critical the situation on the ground is and how urgent it is for more help to be provided. An urgent response is needed when it comes to access to food, safe water, health, nutritional services and schools, as well as to ensuring the protection of the vulnerable population, especially women and children. Unfortunately, Syria also provides a demonstration of the link between climate and the humanitarian-development nexus. We have seen the devastating consequences of the recent flooding there, and we anticipate with concern the harmful effects of the heatwaves and water scarcity approaching in the summer. Early-recovery efforts to strengthen the resilience of the population to extreme weather events will be critical if we are to limit the extent of the expected damage.

We encourage everyone not only to call for more of the critical aid that Syria needs but also to commit to actual pledges so as to avoid any further closure of humanitarian programmes and activities. In view of that, as some speakers have already mentioned, the European Union pledged more than €2 billion for 2024 and 2025 at the eighth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. That assistance will support Syrians both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, as well as their host communities in Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Considering the scale of the humanitarian needs, we reiterate the importance of ensuring sustainable, predictable and efficient flows of

aid — including cross-border and cross-line — across the whole of Syria as long as necessary. We reiterate that all parties must allow and facilitate the rapid, safe and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid to and through areas under their control. We emphasize the role of humanitarian workers, who must be able to work in safety and security. The implementation of Security Council resolutions and full respect for international law are therefore key factors in ameliorating the humanitarian disaster.

Thirdly, advances on the political track could pave the way for creating an environment conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The conditions necessary for their safe, dignified and voluntary return are not yet met. We urge the Government of Syria to do its part to effectively address the underlying causes and create the environment that would allow these people to voluntarily return in safety and dignity. We commend Syria's neighbours for hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees for more than a decade while navigating their own challenges, including on the economic front, and we encourage them to continue to do so. However, we are very concerned about the reports of severe human rights violations and abuses against Syrian refugees in some of those countries, including arbitrary detention, torture, and forced deportations, which violate the principle of non-refoulement in international law. That is unacceptable and must be stopped, including by ensuring accountability and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Finally, the people of Syria have suffered enough. The status quo is not in the interests of the people of Syria, and nor should it be in the interests of the Government of Syria. It is high time to reinvigorate the political process. That is essential if we are to move towards a much-needed nationwide ceasefire for the people of Syria and the wider region.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings. I would like to take this opportunity to once again express our thanks and my best wishes to Under-Secretary-General Griffiths.

China has always firmly supported a political solution to the Syrian issue through a political process based on the principle of Syrian leadership and ownership and the work of Special Envoy Pedersen, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We welcome the

convening of the thirty-third session of the Council of the League of Arab States and look forward to enhanced communication and cooperation between the League, the countries of the region and the Syrian Government, which will play a constructive role in promoting a political solution. We support the necessary measures taken by the Syrian Government to combat terrorism and call on the international community to rescind double standards and show zero tolerance for terrorism in Syria in any form, in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions.

China is deeply concerned about Israel's continued air strikes on Syrian territory. The parties must exercise restraint and avoid aggravating the tensions, and the relevant extraterritorial Powers should work constructively to help cool the situation in the region.

The current humanitarian situation in Syria remains grave. The international community should increase its assistance to Syria and ensure adequate, non-earmarked financial support for early-recovery projects throughout the country. Over the past year the United Nations and the Syrian Government have communicated effectively and smoothly, and the opening of border crossings for aid delivery has been extended several times. China calls on the parties concerned to cooperate actively so as to make progress on cross-line relief efforts as well.

Unilateral sanctions and the plundering of resources have long impeded Syria's economic recovery and social development and its people's ability to maintain livelihoods. Such activities should cease without delay. We expect United Nations humanitarian agencies, including the Office of the Resident Coordinator, to pay great attention to the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the humanitarian situation in Syria and to report to the Security Council in a timely manner. We urge all foreign forces to immediately end their illegal military presence in Syria.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and of course Mr. Martin Griffiths, representing the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for the information they provided. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Griffiths for the time he has spent working at the helm of OCHA and for his humanitarian spirit and the leadership he has demonstrated.

As has been said time and again in the past few months, the main concern regarding Syria is the

escalation of violence resulting from the level of conflict in the region. Ecuador reaffirms its call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to resume a sustainable political dialogue as the only way to counteract the conflict's destabilizing effects on peace and security in the region. The ideal of a prosperous, stable and peaceful Syria, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), can be made possible only by a genuine intention to de-escalate the level of conflict, re-establish trust and return to a path of political negotiation and dialogue. Special Envoy Pedersen must therefore continue his efforts to resume meetings of the Constitutional Committee and establish confidence-building measures or define other initiatives that can achieve a lasting political solution to the crisis in Syria.

The humanitarian situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate in the face of the increasing hostilities. In the past month United Nations teams have recorded deaths, injuries and damage to units providing humanitarian assistance. OCHA warns that 16.7 million people — or 70 per cent of the population — require humanitarian assistance to survive. And according to the World Food Programme, the numbers of children suffering from malnutrition have tripled so far this year and 13 million people around the country are suffering from food insecurity. Ecuador is concerned about the situation of the millions of Syrians who have been forcibly displaced and the extreme level of vulnerability of women and girls, while the hopes for their safe, dignified and voluntary return have been diminished by the political stalemate. The work of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic must make progress if it is to provide answers regarding the fate of the more than 100,000 missing persons. I want to emphasize the importance of strengthening the fight against terrorism and violent extremism from a regional and concerted perspective.

Lastly, unconditional access for humanitarian assistance through the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, which will expire in July and August, must be guaranteed.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their valuable briefings and tireless work. I would like to join other members of the Security Council in sincerely thanking Mr. Griffiths in person, although we may have another occasion to thank him online. Today, unfortunately, the world badly needs the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, but fortunately we have had him to lead it. I am grateful to him.

As the Syrian crisis enters its fourteenth year, the humanitarian situation is at its worst level yet. The number of refugees continues to grow, the economy continues to deteriorate, basic infrastructure is extremely fragile, nine of 10 people are living in poverty and there are no prospects for a political solution. As the Special Envoy often says, the status quo is untenable and will eventually lead to an explosion that risks destabilizing the region further. Japan has continued its engagement with the Syrian Government and the other parties concerned, recognizing the importance of three pillars — advancing the political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), fostering an environment conducive to the return of refugees and strengthening cooperation with the international community.

First, as the Special Envoy noted, the political process is in serious jeopardy. We see a fundamental problem in the lack of trust between the Syrian Government and other key stakeholders. In that regard, the Government should engage more constructively with the efforts to achieve a resumption of the Constitutional Committee, the only platform that will allow the opposition to participate in the political process.

Secondly, an environment conducive to the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees is not yet in place. The growing dissatisfaction with Syrian refugees in some of Syria's neighbours is also a matter of great concern. We welcome the progress in discussions between the Syrian Government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on that matter. To that end, Japan will strengthen its assistance, including through community support, in order to contribute to the speedy return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Thirdly, a foundation of trust is essential to strengthen cooperation, and trust is built through a series of positive actions. We welcome the Syrian Government's recent consent to extend the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings. We greatly value the efforts of Mr. Griffiths and his team in that regard.

In the absence of political progress, aid fatigue has set in. We must commit to actual pledges and seek more efficient means of assistance, including through early-recovery support, as highlighted recently at the eighth Brussels conference. The Syrian Government must also take further steps, including in the political process,

to enable the international community to further strengthen its support for Syria. For its part, Japan has decided to provide additional early-recovery assistance totalling approximately \$25 million this year. It includes aid in the areas of medical care, education and water and sanitation, and is based on a whole-of-Syria approach across a wide range of areas, regardless of whether they are under Government or non-Government control.

As a responsible member of the Council, Japan continues to do its utmost by engaging with the Syrian Government and other parties to resolve this long-standing crisis in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The people of Syria deserve no less.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing, and I would like to pay particular tribute to Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for his leadership and his efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people over many years.

We are in the fourteenth year of this conflict. I therefore want to make three broad points about the changes we must see.

First, one year on from Syria's readmission to the League of Arab States, we have seen no real change in the regime's behaviour — not on human rights violations, not on the safety of civilians and not on creating the conditions necessary for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees. What is more, Captagon flows have continued to increase, threatening the stability of the region, and attacks by Da'esh are increasing. We call on the Syrian regime to respond to the positive overtures of our Arab partners by changing its behaviour.

Secondly, we have continued to respond to the devastating humanitarian crisis. This week the United Kingdom and other donors met in Brussels to pledge our support to the Syrian people. The United Kingdom is proud to have committed up to \$264 million in humanitarian assistance this year, bringing its total funding to over \$5 billion since the crisis began. That aid will be delivered to communities across Syria and includes \$43.7 million for early recovery. We are stepping up our humanitarian funding, and we call on others to do the same.

We also call on the regime to grant cross-border access for as long as is required, based on humanitarian needs. We note the renewal of permissions earlier this month for aid to cross through two border points.

However, as others have said, those short-term and last-minute extensions by the regime mean access is still unpredictable. Since needs are higher than ever in Syria, humanitarians need to be able to reach people in a predictable, principled and cost-effective way. The three remaining United Nations border crossing points are a critical lifeline, and humanitarian agencies need safe access to reach populations in need.

Finally, the only long-term solution to ending the conflict is through the United Nations-led political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). We reiterate our support to the Special Envoy's efforts and call on the parties to cooperate fully towards delivering a lasting political settlement in Syria.

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

Mr. Chumakov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It would be disrespectful to leave a question posed directly by the Permanent Representative of the United States unanswered. I will not comment on the remark about throwing stones in glass houses and will instead focus on today's agenda.

Our country is actively working to rebuild Syria, whose destruction was brought about by the actions of the occupying armed forces, which are illegally present on Syria's territory. Once again, I emphasize that the Russian armed forces are in the Syrian Arab Republic at the invitation of the Syrian side. We are supplying humanitarian aid to the population of the long-suffering country through both bilateral and multilateral channels. We are providing assistance, including financial assistance, for the implementation of development programmes. The Syrians, the recipients benefiting from that assistance, are well aware of those activities. When providing assistance, it is important to take into account the priorities of the recipient.

I will provide a few examples. Thanks to our efforts made in cooperation with the Syrian authorities, to date, more than 2 million Syrian citizens have been able to return to their homes, of whom more than 1,375,000 were internally displaced persons and more than 1 million were returnees from abroad. Since 2020, in various regions of the country, more than 22,000 socially significant and industrial facilities have been repaired and put in service and another 4,000 facilities are currently being rebuilt.

In order to support Syrian agriculture, 11 new cooperative farms have been established in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartus, Dar'a and Suwayda' governorates. Concessional lending programmes have been launched, and in Deir ez-Zor governorate, we have put a central irrigation station into operation, which made it possible to bring approximately 7,500 hectares of farmland back into use. Furthermore, in Damascus, Deir ez-Zor and Homs governorates, 921 residential facilities are being completed.

We are also working to preserve Syria's cultural and historical heritage. I am referring to the work of the Department for Rescue Archaeology of the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Syria's Directorate-General for Antiquities and Museums.

In conclusion, we are supporting the efforts of the legitimate Syrian authorities, whom unfortunately some delegations unjustifiably refer to as a regime, to create the conditions for peaceful life in the country, rather than supporting terrorists, whose attacks continue to kill civilians.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the friendly delegation of Mozambique on successfully managing the work of the Council this month. I have listened attentively to the two briefings. I would like to express my utmost thanks and appreciation to Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for the efforts that he has undertaken during his tenure. We, as the Government of Syria, look forward to continuing our cooperation with his successor and with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and to building on the positive steps that have been taken so far, in accordance with the humanitarian principles provided for in General Assembly resolution 46/182, free of politicization and dictates.

The Syrian Government is continuing its constructive cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies operating in Syria and is facilitating their work with a view to enabling them to deliver on their mandates, contributing to the alleviation of the suffering of Syrians and improving the humanitarian

and living situation in Syria. In that context, I would like to provide the following updates.

First, the Syrian Government has approved OCHA's request to extend the permission given to the United Nations to use Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings for an additional three months, ending on 13 August, in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian civilians in the north-west of Syria. That means there are five crossings through which the United Nations is authorized to conduct its operations: three border crossings — Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai — and two cross-lines crossings — Saraqib and Sarmada.

We have taken note of OCHA's decision to launch the humanitarian inspection unit to replace the monitoring mechanism whose mandate expired. However, we still have concerns about the cross-border mechanism that are known and clear to everyone. We once again reiterate the importance of ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches its intended beneficiaries, namely, Syrian civilians in north-western Syria, and not the terrorist organizations and their affiliated entities, which seize that assistance and divert it in order to finance their criminal terrorist activities and to buy peoples' loyalty.

Secondly, the Syrian Government approved OCHA's dispatch of several cross-line convoys carrying assistance from Aleppo to Sarmada in north-western Syria. However, the terrorist organizations have been preventing the convoys to date from gaining access to that area, which is not new. In the period following the earthquake, the Syrian Government, the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and several partners and donors made great efforts to dispatch convoys across lines, which resulted in some convoys waiting at the crossings for days because the terrorist organizations denied their entry. Many representatives of donors from Europe, Arab countries, partners and United Nations agencies saw that with their own eyes. The Syrian Government also granted the United Nations several approvals to deliver assistance to the Tall Abyad area in north-eastern Syria. We are following up on the matter of issuing more approvals to that end.

Thirdly, as in previous years, the Syrian Government has made every effort to enable students residing in areas controlled by terrorist organizations and militias in north-western and north-eastern Syria to leave those areas in order to sit for the basic education

and high school exams currently under way so as to not undermine their academic future.

Despite the diminishing financing through UNICEF and the World Food Programme as a result of the shortfall of funding and assistance, thousands of students and their families were received and adequately supported in hosting facilities established by the Syrian Government, while the terrorist organizations in Idlib prevented the exit of thousands of students being held hostage as human shields in the areas controlled by those organizations, which are against education and, instead, want to spread ignorance, backwardness and extremism — regrettably, with the help of some Western countries.

Fourthly, the Syrian Government is working with the Lebanese authorities to facilitate the voluntary return of hundreds of Syrian refugees from Lebanon, and it will continue its collaborative efforts in that regard despite attempts by some to disrupt the process by making and spreading unfounded allegations.

Fifthly, as part of the Syrian Government's continuous efforts to ensure the rule of law and the principles of justice, the Ministry of Interior issued strict instructions stressing the need to adhere to statutory periods for detention and investigation, to avoid extending the period of detention, except in serious criminal cases, and to avoid all forms of abusive treatment of detainees that violate the provisions of article 53 of the Syrian Constitution and law number 16, on the criminalization of torture. We also applied a number of measures to protect the innocent and to uphold the rights of detained suspects by duly informing their families of their whereabouts.

The eighth so-called “Brussels Conference for the Future of Syria and the Region” was held a couple of days ago, with the active participation of actors directly involved in supporting terrorism and spreading chaos, killing and destruction in my country. As usual, pledges were made, but not many of them have been fulfilled. So far, only 9 per cent of the pledges made in 2024 have been met — even as we approach the halfway point, with June beginning in two days. That shows that the pledges and commitments in Brussels are mainly for show and will not be honoured.

Furthermore, the funding that is provided should not always be accompanied by discriminatory policies of earmarked funding limited to areas where terrorist organizations and militias are present, in north-

eastern and north-western Syria, thus discriminatorily and inhumanely denying that aid to millions of Syrians elsewhere.

The outcomes of the Conference reflect the disregard of the actors in the European Union for the calls made recently by eight European countries to reassess the erroneous European policies and to adopt new approaches that allow for the voluntary return of refugees. The Conference adopted a strange and reprehensible position calling for the non-return of refugees, under the pretext that conditions are currently not conducive to their return. That position was preceded by the announcement of funding plans by certain hosting countries to keep refugees where they are and to prevent them from reaching Europe.

It would have been more effective to allocate funding to facilitate and support the dignified return of refugees to their homeland and to promote early recovery projects and improve their standard of living by providing basic services and needs, all of which require the immediate, complete and unconditional lifting of all unilateral coercive measures and collective punishment policies imposed by the United States Administration and the European Union against all Syrians, prompting them to embark upon perilous, sometimes lethal, journeys across the sea in order to become refugees who earn their living and search for job opportunities.

The Bahrain declaration issued by the Arab summit on 16 May called for creating an enabling environment for the dignified, safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland, including the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria.

In that context, we reiterate our call for the issuance of the results of the study related to the impact of the unilateral coercive measures on humanitarian work in Syria, as Western countries are blocking the release of those results. We ask the Secretariat to instruct its offices in the region to release the results as soon as possible.

The Syrian Government emphasizes that restoring security and stability and improving the humanitarian situation require combating terrorism, ending the illegal foreign military presence on Syrian territories and putting an end to all associated activities, including acts of aggression, support for terrorist entities and militias and the looting of national wealth. It is also necessary to restore the rule of law and State authority

over all Syrian soil and to put an end to the suffering of Syrians as a result of the blockade and economic terrorism policies, whose devastating effects extend to every aspect of their daily lives.

Syria reiterates its commitment to a Syrian-led and -owned political process, without any foreign intervention, that fully respects its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, which are basic principles enshrined in all relevant United Nations resolutions. Those principles were also reiterated in the tenth ministerial meeting of the Chinese–Arab Cooperation Forum being held in Beijing. My country, Syria, holds the other actors and their sponsors fully responsible for obstructing efforts to hold the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee in Baghdad.

In conclusion, Syria stresses that the United Nations and the Security Council should shoulder their responsibilities to put an end to the massacres that are being committed daily by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and to the accompanying attempts by the Israeli authorities to escalate the situation in the region by expanding the scope of its attacks to other countries in the region, including an attack yesterday on the Syrian cities of Homs and Baniyas, which led to the death of a number of citizens, including an infant, and the injury of others. Those crimes would not have continued had it not been for the blind support of the United States and Western countries for Israel and their policies of hypocrisy and double standards.

With regard to the situation in the Rukban camp, previously mentioned by the Permanent Representative of the United States, we would emphasize that the main culprit responsible for the suffering therein is the United States occupation of the Tal area, where Rukban is located. The United States forces sponsor terrorist organizations in that area, including the terrorist Maghawir Al-Thawra organization. Imagine that the party in control of that area, known also as the 55km² area, has the capacity and is ready to provide weapons, training and planning to terrorist organizations, but speaks of humanitarian difficulties faced by certain people there. That shows that the United States Administration is providing weapons and support to terrorists and making use of the issue of suffering in an attempt to offend the Syrian Government.

With regards to what she said about the right of the Syrian people to be free from the suffering that has now been going on for 13 years, we would like to emphasize that that would start with an end to the destructive United States policies, the immediate, full and unconditional removal of all coercive measures and an end to the economic terrorism that is being conducted by the United States Administration against the Syrian people and other peoples. The United States should stop looting our Syrian oil and natural resources. My colleague, the Permanent Representative of the United States, said that her country has pledged \$590 million at the Brussels Conference. Two other representatives of Western countries that are permanent members of the Council referred to similar figures. But the three countries failed to tell members about the damage caused by the illegal coalition along with the United States, British and French acts of aggression, those of the United States and Israel, the coercive measures, the support for terrorism and the looting of Syrian wealth. They did not talk about the damage caused by all of that to the Syrian economy, which is estimated at billions of dollars.

That is why my country has sent official letters to the Security Council and the Secretary-General indicating that the oil and gas sector in Syria has incurred losses totalling more than \$120 billion as a result of United States aggression, the daily looting of oil and the aggression of the illegal coalition formed under the pretext of fighting terrorism. So what aid are they talking about? The United States sanctions are killing civilians, preventing refugees and internally displaced persons from returning, dashing Syrians' hopes and forcing them to migrate and become refugees, just like the bombs that they provide to the Israeli occupation authorities so that they drop them on civilian populated areas in Gaza, killing and displacing them and emptying those areas of their residents.

Some referred to the elections conducted by separatist militias that act as agents for the United States occupation in north-eastern Syria. The alleged elections, like the administrative structures that act as agents of the United States occupation, are illegal and therefore worthless.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We congratulate you on assuming the Security Council

presidency for this month and successfully managing the Council. We thank Mr. Pedersen, the Special Envoy, and Mr. Griffiths, the Under-Secretary-General for their briefings. As this is the final briefing by Mr. Griffiths, we join others in expressing our sincere gratitude for his efforts and leadership.

The humanitarian and economic situation in the Syrian Arab Republic remains dire, and the Syrian people suffer from profound economic challenges. After 13 years of conflict, as the United Nations report indicates, the humanitarian community faces its most challenging funding landscape. The humanitarian response plan for 2024 is only 8 per cent funded, significantly less than at this time last year.

The continuation of the destructive policy of unilateral sanctions exacerbates the plight of the most vulnerable segments of society and serves only to prolong the crisis and worsen the suffering endured by the Syrian population. Unfortunately, Western countries have ignored the dire situation on the ground and continue to pursue their political agenda at all costs. They utilize sanctions as a tool to achieve their objectives, even at the expense of ordinary people, who suffer as a result. Owing to the complex and extensive nature of unilateral sanctions, the alleged humanitarian exemptions often prove ineffective and pointless.

We welcome the sovereign decision of the Syrian Government to renew the permission granted to the United Nations and its specialized agencies to use the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings for an additional three months, until 13 August 2024, to deliver humanitarian aid to civilians in north-west Syria. We hope that that support will ensure sufficient and predictable funding, and that donors will fulfil their pledges.

We commend the tireless efforts of United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners in their work to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. However, preventing the diversion of aid to terrorist organizations in the north-west region and ensuring transparent and non-discriminatory distribution of aid are essential aspects that need careful consideration.

We also emphasize the need for unhindered humanitarian access, through cross-line routes and in full coordination with the Syrian Government. Providing immediate aid is crucial, but it is not a sustainable solution in the long term. Efforts must focus on rebuilding critical infrastructure to create conditions for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced

persons. Given the burden that neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon, have carried during the crisis, the return of refugees and internally displaced people to their respective homes in Syria should not be politicized or used as leverage against the Syrian Government.

As we have said time and again, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be resolved without upholding the full sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country. The restoration of Syria's territorial integrity demands relentless efforts to combat all terrorist groups without interruption. It is imperative, however, that the protection of civilians remains paramount throughout counter-terrorism efforts.

Iran remains committed to a political resolution of the situation in Syria and will continue supporting a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process, as well as assisting the people and Government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country. As we have said, the resumption of the meetings of the Constitutional Committee as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process in Syria is necessary. In that context, we remain committed in our support of the Special Envoy's efforts and his engagement with all parties. Furthermore, along with our Astana format partners, we are committed to working towards long-term and sustainable normalization in and around Syria.

The Israeli-occupying regime continues its acts of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, targeting civilians and vital infrastructure. We strongly condemn those unlawful actions as provocative actions that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Charter of the United Nations and international law and serve only to escalate tensions and undermine stability in Syria and the region. Despite repeated appeals from the Syrian Arab Republic, the Security Council has failed to take any action in response to those illegal actions, not even condemning them.

The recent massacre of people displaced from Gaza in the Rafah camp by that regime on 26 May has once again demonstrated that Israel has crossed all red lines and blatantly violated international humanitarian law, basic principles of international law and Security Council resolutions and disregarded the legally binding orders of the International Court of Justice. All those

violations were carried out with full impunity and fully supported by the United States.

The international community and, in particular, the Security Council, as the main organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, remain mere observers of those gross violations. We urgently call on the Security Council to abandon its policy of appeasement and to take decisive and urgent action to hold Israel accountable and compel it to stop its military aggression immediately.

We reject the allegations made by the representative of the United States at this meeting. The United States tried to deny its responsibility for the current situation in Syria and the broader region by falsely blaming Iran. They claim to support civilians and uphold international humanitarian law, yet they persist with their failed policies against Syria, using sanctions as tools at the expense of ordinary people.

Iran has always been a positive part of regional developments, treading the path of stabilizing peace and lasting security, including the fight against terrorism in the region.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I am grateful to Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths for their briefings, particularly as it is Mr. Griffiths' final briefing.

Through its unanimous adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), the Security Council reiterated years ago that the only sustainable solution to the conflict is through a political process that should meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. Yet, in this, the fourteenth year of the conflict, the prospects of a lasting political solution remain elusive. The emergence of other large-scale crises should not diminish our attention to Syria, as the economic, security and humanitarian aspects of the crisis continue to deteriorate.

The status quo is not sustainable. A re-energized focus on Syria is needed. The groundwork should be prepared to address the root causes of the crisis. That requires, first and foremost, a change of attitude on the side of the Syrian regime in order to initiate genuine national reconciliation. It is clear that nothing will move in a positive direction in Syria without the revitalization of the political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015).

As we have repeatedly pointed out, convening the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible and with tangible results is crucial to that end. The current deadlock—and indeed, obstructions—pose a danger not only to the political track but also to the other aspects of the crisis, whereas making progress in the political process would contribute to solving problems on other tracks as well, such as the economy and migration.

In that regard, creating the conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrians should be part of all efforts to resolve the crisis. The Syrian regime must assume its primary responsibility in that regard. Improving the economic conditions in and of itself is not enough, there is also a governance issue there. Similarly, the international community should actively support efforts to achieve that goal—namely, the return of refugees—without externalizing the issue, including through supporting destabilization efforts in north-west Syria.

The unimpeded, sustained and predictable delivery of life-saving aid, along with adequate and sustainable humanitarian funding, are critical parts of the holistic approach that we need in order to effectively address the Syrian conflict. Accordingly, we have a right to expect the continued use of the three available border crossings for cross-border aid deliveries to Syria as long as humanitarian needs continue. The Security Council should remain closely engaged in that regard.

On the other hand, the significant drop in humanitarian funding is deeply concerning, especially at a time when the number of people in need of humanitarian aid has reached a record high of almost 17 million people. United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners need predictability and sustainability, not only in access but also in funding. We call upon donors to scale up their contributions to the United Nations Syria humanitarian response plan, which is currently funded at only around 8 per cent. We also reiterate that the United Nations whole-of-Syria approach has formed the backbone of the humanitarian response to the crisis, and we call for an appropriate appointment to be made, without further delay, to the position of Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis.

Regarding the water disruption in the Allouk water station, the reasons behind the problem are not new and are indeed well-known to all United Nations agencies.

That station operates on electrical power coming from the Al-Darbasiyah transformer. The disruption of the electricity supplied by the Al-Darbasiyah transformer, which is under the control of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization, impedes the proper functioning of the Allouk station. In addition to regular cross-line maintenance missions to the station in the past, most recently, on 21 May UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross paid another technical visit to the Allouk water station. We believe that providing a regular flow of electricity to the Allouk station through alternative resources will secure a long-term solution. On the other hand, the breakdown at the Ayn Al-Bayda water station has also resulted in water shortages for almost 200,000 people in the city of Al-Bab. We hope that the restoration work initiated at the Ayn Al-Bayda water station will be completed before the start of the summer and the dry season.

The separatist and destructive agenda of the terrorist organization, namely, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units (YPG)/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and its grave violations, repression and attacks against the local population continue unabated in Syria. The burning of local offices by the PKK/SDF are clear signs. Also, the reactions of local tribes in the Deir ez-Zor area further attest to that. After establishing institutions on the basis of so-called social covenants and creating a so-called court to monitor its implementation, that terrorist organization is now preparing to hold local elections next month. It is crystal clear that that endeavour is in complete contravention of the territorial integrity and unity of Syria, and that supporting that endeavour means acting against resolution 2254 (2015). We continue to strongly emphasize that PKK/YPG/SDF has no place in Syria's future, and we urge all sides to cease engaging with that terrorist organization, whose only objective is to advance its own separatist agenda, not that of Syria, the Syrian people or the international community.

The conflict in Syria continues to pose a serious threat to peace and security in the region and well beyond. Millions of Syrians continue to suffer grave humanitarian repercussions. The Council has set out the pathway to a lasting solution to this conflict with resolution 2254 (2015). It is now high time that all sides take the necessary steps to implement it. Türkiye will continue to support international efforts to achieve a lasting settlement.

In conclusion, I appreciate that almost all members of the Council focused on the meeting of the Constitutional Committee, which is an essential element of the political process. I hope that all sides will take it seriously and give up their policies of obstruction.

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

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor, but I must respond to comments made by the representative of the Syrian regime, just to push back on a number of falsehoods.

The United States has a military presence in Syria for one reason and one reason only, and that is to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. We have been very clear about that for quite some time. That is the only reason we are there.

The charge that the United States is looting Syrian property and oil resources is out of the Syrian playbook. It is absolute nonsense. The United States is not looting Syrian property or seizing its oil resources. Let us not forget that Syria has killed thousands upon thousands of its own people since the war began in 2013. It has used chemical weapons against its own people, as has been stated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons many times. Those are not just ridiculous charges, they are facts. It has tortured its own people. It has sent its people into internal displacement. They have become refugees in other countries. So, the regime continues to carry out a war against its own people, and that is why Syrians do not want to return home. No amount of lies, no distortions, no propaganda can change that reality.

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 will be brief.

After eight months of genocide in Gaza and the position of the United States in the Security Council, the United States has used the veto five times to protect Israel and prevent an end to the massacres and the genocide, prevent the delivery of aid and prevent attempts to stop the forced displacement of Palestinians. All that reveals the true nature of the practices of the United States Administration and its approach to the

Middle East region, which has always been completely and blindly biased towards Israel. It does anything in the service of Israel and to destabilize the security of neighbouring regions.

We have noted the repeated use of the veto by the United States, which undermines any credibility of the allegations made by the representatives of the United States Administration. Members will recall that after substantial efforts in the Council, resolution 2728 (2024), which calls for a ceasefire and a humanitarian pause in the occupied territories, was adopted. What was the United States response to the resolution? It immediately issued a statement, before we even made it back to our offices, saying that it is a non-binding resolution and that it does not set out any additional obligations on the parties. That is the position of the United States, while its Administration recalls and promotes controversial resolutions from history records that serve its interests. When the Council adopts a resolution to end acts of killing and genocide, the United States says that the resolution is non-binding and continues to provide Israel with weapons and smart bombs, as they claim. Those bombs, just like the sanctions imposed by the

United States Administration, kill civilians, entrench economic terrorism and directly destabilize the security and stability of the region. All other claims and allegations set forth by the representative of the United States Administration are of no value.

The President: The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement. Following his statement, the meeting will rise.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I once again apologize for taking the floor, but I would just like to pose a question. I believe that this meeting is supposed to be about the situation in Syria. Is that correct?

The President: Yes.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): That is all I wanted to know.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.