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Security Council

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Thursday, 21 March 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yamazaki	(Japan)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Malta	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. George
	Slovenia	Mr. Ponikvar
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy 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: First, I wish *Ramadan mubarak*, a blessed Ramadan, to all those observing.

After 13 years of conflict in Syria, and despite a year that has seen new diplomatic avenues, the tragic reality is that developments are all going in the wrong direction — including on the security, humanitarian, human rights, economic and political fronts. I am alarmed at the trajectory of events and the lack of progress in reversing them.

Take security — 13 years in, conflict has continued, with acute violence on many fronts and continued regional spillover. This month alone we have seen further Israeli strikes, including one that Iran says killed a member of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Israel says it has conducted more than 50 strikes in Syria since 7 October. We have also seen further rocket fire from southern Syria into the occupied Syrian Golan; an uptick in violence in Idlib, where pro-Government air strikes and now drone strikes have been resumed after a relative hiatus and where the listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham has launched drone strikes and cross-line raids into Government areas; further Turkish drone strikes in north-eastern Syria, with exchanges of shelling and rocket fire between armed opposition groups and the Syrian Democratic Forces; the mobilization of the Jordanian Air Force on its border with Syria, where there were reports of drones about to enter Jordanian territory; shelling exchanges between Government forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces along the Euphrates; and new attacks by Da'esh that killed civilians, including, once again, large numbers of civilians searching for truffles in the desert.

The conflict in Gaza and its regional ramifications remain an acute source of concern, and de-escalation there is essential, starting with an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The de-escalation of the conflict in Syria itself is equally urgent, building on existing ceasefire arrangements and aimed at a nationwide ceasefire in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected, and actions against groups that the Security Council has listed as terrorist must be firmly in line with international humanitarian law.

The Assistant Secretary-General will brief Council members on the humanitarian front in detail but let me just highlight a few facts. It is staggering that 16.7 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, the highest number at any point during the 13 years of conflict. We must be able to reach those in need through all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line. We urge donors, traditional and non-traditional, to give generously to the humanitarian response, including for early recovery. It cannot be that funding is decreasing as the humanitarian needs are increasing. The effects of sanctions on ordinary Syrians must be mitigated and avoided. It is particularly worrisome that overcompliance continues to affect humanitarian operations. More broadly, we are seeing massive challenges to basic State services across Syria in areas such as health, education and energy, against a backdrop of economic collapse and institutional degradation. That is already affecting millions, and the long-term implications of those trends for the State's functioning, and indeed for efforts to reach a political solution in Syria, should concern all of us.

Meanwhile, and as I have reported to the Council, more than 100,000 people are estimated to be arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared or missing. With regard to releases at scale, information about the fate and whereabouts of the missing and access to all places of detention, we have seen no progress on any of those points. Worrisome reports continue of arbitrary arrests and abductions, as well as torture, including sexual violence, in places of detention across several parts of Syria. Half the pre-war population has continued to

languish in displacement or exile, in many cases for more than a decade. They are not returning in large numbers, and when asked why, they cite both protection and livelihood concerns, which are clearly not being sufficiently addressed.

Women activists in Syria are reporting increased harassment and threats of physical violence. Syrian women across the spectrum have shared with us their deep concern after a local council member in north-western Syria was reportedly murdered following months of threats and harassment. We continue to call for the protection of Syrian women and their rightful and essential place in political and civic life, especially in March as we mark International Women's Day.

After 13 years, protesters are still taking to the streets in some areas to express grievances that have gone unaddressed, including in northern Syria and Dara'a this month. An eight-month protest movement in Suwayda has also continued. This month saw a general strike, with some protesters entering and ransacking Government buildings. The first protester was killed, and there were later reports of retaliatory attacks on Government security installations, for which no one claimed responsibility, by anonymous armed groups. Separately, we have also seen protests erupt in Idlib against abuses by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

I used to say that five foreign armies are active and present in Syria. But in the conflict's fourteenth year, we can now say there are six. There is also a multitude of armed actors, in addition to Security Council-listed terrorist groups. Millions of Syrians are split across those areas of control. The longer that status quo persists, the more I fear that different areas will drift farther apart, deepening the challenge of restoring Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity. We hear a loud and clear sense of dismay at all those trend lines in our continuing exchanges with a wide range of Syrian civil society actors, including this month through the engagement in Istanbul of my Deputy, Ms. Najat Rochdi, through the Civil Society Support Room. There is deep concern among Syrians about the impact that has been felt from Syria's division under different authorities for almost a generation. We hear strong demands for an end to hostilities and for civilian protection, stabilization, livelihood and education opportunities.

There is no military route to resolving those myriad challenges — only a comprehensive political solution can do that. This month I discussed the depth of the crisis with Syria's Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad, with President Badr Jamous of the Syrian Negotiations Commission and with Russian, Iranian, Turkish, Chinese, Arab, American and European counterparts. My message was clear. The political track, which is blocked and dormant, needs to be unstuck**.** With regard to the Constitutional Committee, I reported last month (see S/PV.9559) that having tried many options, and as a bridging proposal, I had invited the Constitutional Committee members to hold the ninth session of the small body of the Committee in Geneva in April. The Negotiations Commission accepted the invitation. The Government did not. I went through the issue in some detail in Damascus. I have since had further contacts with the Negotiations Commission. As I have repeated throughout, I remain open to any alternative venue that draws a consensus from both the Syrian parties and the host, and I am continuing my engagement. But unless and until that consensus is reached, I continue to appeal for the Committee to reconvene in Geneva in a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process. I have also appealed to the parties to prepare on substance and to be ready to put forward constitutional proposals once the Committee is resumed.

With regard to step-for-step confidence-building, I would like to remind the Council that there are concrete ideas on the table. In Damascus, I urged the Syrian Government to engage in a deepened and concrete dialogue, which would be essential to developing joint reciprocal and parallel steps from different parties. It is more urgent than ever for that to start — otherwise, the trend lines that I have outlined will only continue to move in the wrong direction rather than towards a sane, calm and neutral environment.

I have also stressed that ultimately, a more comprehensive approach is needed — one that addresses the full range of issues and that can restore Syria's sovereignty and fulfil its people's legitimate aspirations. Those issues are not all in Syrian hands. Yes, the political future of Syria is for the Syrians to determine, but a way out of the crisis also requires the contributions of the international actors that play an outsize role in Syria today. And it requires compromises from all Syrian and international players. We need preparatory talks for the day when all those key players are ready to work on a comprehensive compromise across a whole range of interlinked tracks. That will require contributions from the Syrian parties and all

existing groupings, such as the Astana format, the Arab contact group and the Western quad, as well as the Council. I will engage all key players in that regard, because the past years of diplomacy have shown that no existing actor or group of actors alone can come close to resolving this crisis. The sooner that all players accept that and are ready to come to the table, the better it will be for the tired and long-suffering Syrian people, and the closer we will be to the realization of resolution 2254 (2015).

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

Ms. Msuya: Let me begin by wishing *Ramadan Kareem*, a generous Ramadan, to all who observe it. This year the holy month comes as Syria marks 13 years of conflict, with yet more civilian deaths and injuries — most notably in northern Syria — and mounting humanitarian needs across the country. More than 7 million people remain displaced from their homes, and more than half the population — nearly 13 million people — need food assistance.

The surging acute malnutrition among children under the age of five has tripled in the past five years, and more than half a million children will need lifesaving treatment for it this year. More people in Syria now need humanitarian aid than at any time in the history of the crisis. And yet funding for our humanitarian appeal has fallen to a record low level.

As families across Syria celebrate Mother's Day today, we are reminded that women and girls all over the country continue to grapple with some of the worst effects of the humanitarian crisis. Our colleagues in Syria recently met with several women who were marking the start of Ramadan in Aleppo. Hanaa, a mother of five who now also cares for five orphaned grandchildren, said that it has been almost a year since her family had meat or cheese. She is constantly worried about sending her grandchildren to school with empty stomachs. Another, Maha, said that she is often forced to make painful choices, such as between basic food and medicine for her children. And in Idlib, Umm Ahmed, a mother of 12, told our colleagues that she has been living in a tent since being displaced from her home five years ago. She spends her days with her children at a landfill, looking for materials to sell to buy food. She is not able to cook for her family this Ramadan because she is not receiving any food baskets.

Despite the enormous needs, the ability of the humanitarian community to provide assistance is severely limited. As we noted last month, our annual humanitarian appeal for 2023 received less than 40 per cent of the required funding. The consequences are devastating. The World Food Programme (WFP) has been compelled to reduce its emergency food assistance from 3 million to 1 million people per month. The WFP is now only able to reach a third of the most severely food insecure. In the north-west, over 30 outpatient therapeutic feeding programmes for malnourished children have been forced to close since October. Over 75 nutrition rapid response teams — about half the total — have also suspended operations.

Meanwhile food prices and the cost of living continue to climb to record highs. In the past year, the cost of a household's minimum expenditure basket has doubled, with food prices increasing by more than 140 per cent. Prices for some key items, such as chickpeas and potatoes, have risen by more than 200 per cent. The minimum wage now covers only 11 per cent of basic food needs.

Vital health services are also being reduced, and the prices of medicine have surged 200 per cent in the space of two years. In north-west Syria, 49 health facilities had partially or fully suspended their operations by the end of last year. Without additional funding, many more expected to follow by the end of this month.

In the north-east, the World Health Organization's referral services for people needing more advanced health support will be suspended at the end of this month. Those services have supported 8,000 to 10,000 patients per year — 70 per cent of them women.

We are doing what we can to bridge the gap. Last month, the United Nations allocated $20 million to Syria through the Central Emergency Response Fund's underfunded emergencies window. But far more is needed in order to meet such massive levels of need and avert even more painful cuts in vital support. The scarcity of resources only reinforces how critical it is to deliver aid through all available routes.

For the 4.2 million people in need in north-west Syria, the cross-border response from Türkiye continues to play an indispensable role. It allows us to deliver life-saving relief, provide essential protection, health and education services, and conduct regular assessment and monitoring missions to Idlib and northern Aleppo.

The expansion of crossline deliveries throughout Syria, including to the north-west, remains a top priority.

Our appeals are familiar. As the Secretary-General emphasized in his recent statement marking the thirteenth year of the crisis, we need respect for international humanitarian law. That includes the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We need sustained and unhindered humanitarian access through all modalities. And we urgently need the necessary funding to sustain life-saving assistance and expand early recovery.

Once again, we call for renewed and genuine commitment to a political solution to end the conflict in the hope that next year the people of Syria will have a peaceful Ramadan with fewer impossible choices to make.

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

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Msuya for their assessments of the military, political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

In addition to what we have heard, it is also clear to us that Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip are having an extremely negative impact on the situation in friendly Syria. The effect of the sharp rise in tensions on the Syrian-Israeli border is exacerbated by active external interference coupled with the ongoing illegal foreign presence in the north and north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Under these circumstances, we are particularly concerned about the intensification of air strikes, including along the Blue Line, by the Israeli Air Force against civilian targets in Syria. Such irresponsible actions threaten to drag both Syria and a number of its neighbours into a full-scale regional confrontation.

We strongly condemn such attacks against the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. We see them as a flagrant violation of Syrian sovereignty and the basic norms of international law. We also note that Israeli strikes are having a serious negative impact on the timely humanitarian response of United Nations entities. Under these circumstances, the silence of our Western colleagues is hypocritical, as they must understand the risks directly stemming from what is happening.

September will mark the tenth anniversary of the illegal military presence of the United States in Syria, under the pretext of supposedly fighting terrorism on the country's territory. In reality, the United States is looting Syria's resources and playing an extremely destabilizing role. At the same time, the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is something that our United States colleagues have essentially stopped doing. They have long been using the fighters they have nurtured exclusively for their own purposes, including for acts of sabotage against Syrian Government forces. With regard to the Security Council-listed terrorists of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which control Idlib and oppose the legitimate Syrian Government in Damascus, the United States and its European allies are trying to whitewash them.

The hypocrisy of Washington and its satellites is particularly glaring when it comes to humanitarian access in Syria. We constantly hear about the importance and supposed effectiveness of United Nations cross-border humanitarian deliveries to Syria's north-western regions. Aside from that, in 2024 alone, the United Nations sent 75 assessment and monitoring missions from Türkiye to the region. However, neither Damascus nor the members of the Security Council know anything about the real objectives and purposes of those visits. Repeated requests to that end by the Syrian authorities have gone unanswered. That leads to only one conclusion: the Secretariat is prioritizing cooperation with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists over its cooperation with the legitimate authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is not even worth mentioning the Western delegations on the Security Council that are ready to forgive their subordinates in Idlib for anything. In that sense, it seems logical that, since 24 June 2023, not a single cross-line convoy has been sent to Idlib from the Government-controlled territory, despite all the assurances we have been given.

That attitude towards ordinary Syrians is leading to a steady degradation of the humanitarian situation in Syria. The main factor, in addition to those we have already listed today, include the suffocating pressure of sanctions on the part of Western countries. Only a blind man would fail to notice that. We once again draw the attention of the Resident Coordinator in Syria and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as an important element of the country team, to the unacceptable delays in the issuance of the report on the impact of sanctions, which was promised more than a

year ago. We hope that work on that report is in the final stages, and today we would like to hear from the Secretariat when it will be published. The consequences of the use of unilateral coercive measures are not limited to the economy. On Monday, 25 March, Russia will convene an informal Arria Formula meeting of the Security Council on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the ability of States to combat terrorism. We invite all members of the Security Council and other interested countries to participate.

It is tragic to realize that the Council has essentially lost sight of the subject of Syria's early recovery. Western countries, which bear full responsibility for the destruction of civilian infrastructure in that Arab country, have washed their hands of this issue, while simultaneously shackling Syrians with sanctions.

Against that backdrop, donor support has fallen to a record low. The 2023 United Nations humanitarian plan for Syria was financed at less than 40 per cent. We all remember very well that as early as the summer of 2023, the World Food Programme was forced to halve its coverage of those in need due to a lack of funds. That entails not only negative consequences for ordinary Syrians, but also serious problems for humanitarian entities that are forced to navigate between the growing needs on the ground and their ability to provide Syrians with at least some assistance.

In the light of the overall lack of funding and the security situation in internally displaced persons camps, the situation of the residents of Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps looks increasingly tragic. We call on countries whose citizens are still there to show political will and bring their people home. Upon the instructions of the President Putin, we are paying very close attention to this matter.

On 10 March, with the assistance of Ms. Maria Lvova-Belova, Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, another group of Russian children, aged 5 to 17, who had been staying in refugee camps in the area beyond the Euphrates, were returned home. That was preceded by the lengthy work of searching for minors, establishing their parentage, coordinating and processing documents and exchanging data. The humanitarian mission to repatriate Russian children from the Middle East region has been coordinated by the Presidential Commissioner since 2018. Thus far, we have repatriated 546 children to Russia, including from Syria.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about the political track. We have consistently and resolutely supported the resumption of the work of the Constitutional Committee as part of advancing the Syrian-owned and -led political process, with the assistance of the United Nations and in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015). Unfortunately, the relaunch of the Constitutional Committee as the main platform for direct inter-Syrian dialogue has encountered difficulties in selecting a venue acceptable to the Syrians themselves. We are convinced that, without first agreeing on a venue with the Syrians, announcing subsequent meetings of the Committee is, to put it mildly, short-sighted and counterproductive. That is particularly true with regard to Geneva, which, unfortunately, has lost its neutral status.

In that regard, we hope that the Special Envoy will be able to find an acceptable option for the Syrian parties.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings.

This month marks a grim milestone — 13 years of war. It has been 13 years since Syrians gathered in cities like Dara'a to call for a Government that respects fundamental rights and freedoms. It has been 13 years since the Syrian regime met this revolution for dignity with deadly force against its own people. And it has been 13 years of Syria languishing under a brutal regime that knows only the language of violence to address political dissent.

Those violations continue to this day, but so too does the spirit of the revolution that began all those years ago. In many parts of the country and all across the Syrian diaspora, the Syrian people are still peacefully raising their voices for change and refusing to be forced into submission. For example, for more than six months, residents of Al-Suwayda have been calling for a peaceful political transition, the implementation resolution 2254 (2015) and accountability for those who opened fire on anti-regime protests or were involved in the killing of Jawad Al-Barouki. Those protests and more like them underscore the need of all Council members to support the Syrian people's freedom of expression and right to peaceful assembly. They highlight the importance of the full implementation of all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015) and support for Special Envoy Pedersen's work and they underscore the need for a Syrian-focused and -led solution to the conflict.

We commend Special Envoy Pedersen's steadfast efforts to advance the political track and his tireless work to reconvene Syrian parties in Geneva for the Constitutional Committee. We call on all Council members to push the Syrian regime to do its part and finally engage in the political process in good faith — because 13 years since this conflict began, we know the human cost of inaction. Too many Syrians continue to flee persecution in their home country, and surveys consistently show that Syrians feel that they cannot return to their home country because of regime oppression, torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, forced conscription and other human rights abuses.

The United States remains deeply grateful to countries of the region that have welcomed and continue to host Syrian refugees. We also recognize the critical nature of the services of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees in Syria. We therefore appreciate the Organization's urgent action to investigate the allegations against UNRWA staff in Gaza and launch an independent review of neutrality practices.

We remain alarmed by the stark humanitarian needs in Syria. And we know that, absent a political solution, those needs will persist. We must therefore redouble efforts to reach a political solution while simultaneously working collectively to enable humanitarians to reach all in need. For our part, the United States will continue to support United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations as they provide protection and services to Syrians in need. We will continue to support all modalities to deliver assistance, including through the three crossings utilized by the United Nations to reach communities in north-west Syria from Türkiye. And we will continue to use all tools at our disposal, including sanctions, to promote accountability for the regime's abuses. Indeed. United States sanctions will remain in place until, at a minimum, there is concrete, measurable progress towards a political solution.

It has been 13 years since a hopeful revolution devolved into the situation we see today. Let us work to build a better future for the Syrian people so that we do not need to mark more milestones like this one in the years to come.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their briefings.

This month of March marks the tragic thirteenth anniversary of the conflict in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of victims have died or disappeared, millions have been displaced and made refugees, and civilian infrastructure and social links have been destroyed on a scale unprecedented in the country's history.

Now, 13 years after the start of the war, a political solution to end the conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is still not within reach. Indeed, to hear Mr. Pedersen, the opposite is true. As regional tensions have mounted, the level of hostilities across Syria has risen significantly and has only worsened the humanitarian, economic and social crisis. Switzerland therefore calls on all parties and those with an influence on them to work for a domestic ceasefire, respect their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law and commit to preventing an even more serious regional escalation.

The Security Council must play a key role in the fight against impunity, which is a sine qua non if lasting peace is to be achieved. To that end, we support the work of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. There must be dialogue at every level. Switzerland welcomes the efforts of the Special Envoy and his team, based on the step-for-step approach, in coordination with the countries in the region interested in working for a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We will continue to make Geneva available to host all types of talks and initiatives aimed at promoting lasting peace in Syria, such as the United Nations-facilitated Constitutional Committee.

Whether they are citizens, refugees, political representatives or members of civil society, Syrian women are active at all levels, all too often at the risk of their lives. Arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and the targeting of women human rights defenders undermine the very foundations of dialogue and an environment conducive to a political solution. Yet as resolution 2254 (2015) reminds us, it

is up to the Syrian population, in all its components, to define the future of Syria.

As the humanitarian penholder for Syria, I would now like to turn to the humanitarian situation. Despite regional concerns, we must not forget the Syrian people who are being affected by the continuing deterioration in the humanitarian situation. We are particularly concerned about the increase in the rate of acute malnutrition and the continuing rise in humanitarian needs in all regions of Syria. In that regard, we note the repeated calls by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other humanitarian actors for funding that is adequate to the country's needs. Humanitarian partners must be able to work in security, and humanitarian operations must be more predictable if they are to meet the needs of nearly 17 million people. We stress that all aid modalities, including cross-border and cross-line aid, remain essential to meeting the humanitarian needs. We want to remind everyone that all parties have an obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate the passage of humanitarian aid to and through the areas under their control.

Lastly, Switzerland expresses its deep concern about the persistence of serious violations of international law, particularly against children. Syrian children have never known their country to be free of conflict since the day they were born. They are particularly vulnerable to a multitude of risks that we have already mentioned here, and they represent almost half of the population in need. We are particularly concerned about the increase in reported cases of stunting in children under the age of five, which is a result of chronic undernourishment and causes irreversible physical and psychological damage. After 13 long years, children must be protected and given a place so that in time they will be able to participate in the choices and decisions that affect their future and that of their families and their country.

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

We want to express our gratitude to Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and to Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their insightful briefings and for their efforts to resolve the crisis and restore peace in Syria in order to alleviate the suffering of its people. We acknowledge Mr. Pedersen's recent visit to Damascus and his continued efforts to revive the political process and reconvene the Constitutional Committee. We urge the parties to overcome the current deadlock regarding the convening of the ninth meeting of the Constitutional Committee. At this critical juncture for Syria, it is imperative to ensure that the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process, with support from the international community, continues towards a lasting resolution of the crisis that has plagued Syria for more than 13 years. After enduring such instability and suffering, the Syrian people need support in emerging from their current political and economic challenges.

In line with the Secretary-General's call, we emphasize the importance of reaching a genuine and credible political solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and facilitates the safe and dignified return of refugees. We commend the Special Envoy's efforts to advance the inclusive political process and achieve a sustainable solution. We also acknowledge the critical role of Syrian women and youth in achieving sustainable peace in Syria. Their active involvement is essential to a comprehensive and enduring resolution of the crisis. Women and young people bring unique perspectives to the table, making their participation indispensable in shaping the future of Syria.

The A3+ regrets the deteriorating situation and repeated attacks in the Golan Heights and call for an immediate halt to such actions, emphasizing respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the rejection of all external interference. Any resumption of hostilities only perpetuates insecurity and undermines the gains made and progress already achieved in the political process and will potentially fuel terrorist activities, in the wider region as well as in Syria. In that regard, the A3+ calls for improved coordination that can effectively combat terrorism in Syria and enable the Syrian Government to regain control of its entire territory.

Thirteen years into the Syrian crisis, the humanitarian situation remains dire, with 16.7 million people in need, more than half of them women. An unprecedented humanitarian crisis is unfolding, plunging Syrians into deep despair. More than 90 per cent of Syrians now

live in poverty, and the economy is in free fall, due to tightening sanctions. The A3+ calls for sufficient and predictable funding for the Syria humanitarian response plan to address the food insecurity crisis and meet the people's needs. The underfunding of the humanitarian response plan in 2023, which achieved less than 40 per cent of what was needed, has forced humanitarian agencies to reduce their food assistance and suspend health services, thereby exacerbating the crisis. We believe that Syria should not continue to rely solely on humanitarian funding, and we emphasize the importance of investment to reduce its dependence on external assistance and alleviate the humanitarian burden. We support the early-recovery project vision of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and call for it to be adequately funded, but we recognize that additional efforts are needed to address the Syrian population's needs and facilitate the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons. To achieve that, Syria must revive its economic growth and prosperity. The A3+ therefore calls urgently for reducing the sanctions on Syria, which are having a negative impact on its economy and exacerbating the humanitarian challenges.

In conclusion, the advancement of peace and sustainable development are interconnected. Algeria, Guyana, Mozambique and Sierra Leone reiterate their call for a nationwide ceasefire and for immediate negotiations between the parties towards a political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015), with a view to bringing comprehensive peace, stability, and sustainable development to Syria.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya. I welcome the presence of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye, to whom I will listen carefully.

This month marks 13 years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, and despite the efforts of the international community, partners in the region and all the actors involved, the possibility of achieving a sustainable and lasting peace, which is the goal of any process that seeks to eliminate violence and which is enshrined in resolution 2254 (2015), seems distant. Ecuador shares Special Envoy Pedersen's call, and I would say the desire of the international community generally, for ending the fighting, strengthening the fight against terrorism and ensuring compliance with obligations under international humanitarian law in order to preserve the life and integrity of civilians and critical infrastructure. The only possible way forward in Syria is to revive a pluralistic, constructive and substantive political dialogue. Work must therefore be done to build confidence and strengthen the political will to re-establish the Constitutional Committee meetings, the step-for-step negotiation strategy and other mechanisms designed for that purpose. In any case, the political process must be restarted.

The security situation in the region is fragile and improving it requires a commitment on the part of the countries in the region. There is an urgent need to articulate a common approach to cooperation in order to confront the terrorist groups and dismantle the threats to the country and the region.

The Security Council must continue to consider the situation in Syria on behalf of the 16.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, the 13 million in need of food assistance, the 6.8 million internally displaced and a further 5 million who have sought refuge in third countries, almost half of whom are women and girls. All of them are facing the growing consequences of homelessness, discrimination, financial destitution and increased risks of exploitation and abuse. It is also vital that the Syrian Government provide reliable answers on the fate of more than 100,000 missing persons and take steps to release the unknown numbers of those who have been arbitrarily detained and subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Similarly, the situation of Syrian refugees in third countries must be carefully examined and care taken to ensure that any return initiative complies with international standards.

In conclusion, I hope that the efforts of the international community will culminate in a political solution to the crisis in Syria, leading to sustainable peace, socioeconomic recovery and national reconciliation.

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

I would like to stress three points. On 15 March we marked the thirteenth anniversary of the Syrian people's peaceful uprising. The conflict has claimed more than 500,000 lives since March 2011 and has forced the displacement of more than half the Syrian population. Since March 2011, the Damascus regime has paid no attention whatever to the demands of its people. On the contrary, it has responded with repression. The

peaceful demonstrations in Suwayda show that their aspirations for peace, freedom and dignity are still there. Despite the efforts of Mr. Pedersen, who I want to emphasize has our full support, the regime is still unwilling to compromise, particularly with regard to the Constitutional Committee. Yet only a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) can bring peace to the Syrian people.

Today France and the European Union see no reason to lift the sanctions or finance the rebuilding of a country that has largely been destroyed by its own Government and its allies. But those decisions can be reversed. That depends on real progress in the political process. France and the European Union have continued to support the Syrian people by providing humanitarian assistance. Some 16.7 million people are in need of aid. Mobilizing everyone to meet the needs of the Syrian population remains essential. We feel compelled to point out that the aid is currently being funded almost exclusively by Europe, the United States, Canada and Japan. Humanitarian access, including cross-border access, must not only be guaranteed but be predictable and durable, and the relevant international humanitarian law applies to all.

In an increasingly volatile context, France is redoubling its efforts to prevent a regional escalation in which Syrians would be the first to be affected. Lastly, we are worried by the surge in Da'esh activity and the boom in Captagon trafficking. Those threats are fuelled by instability and by the complicity of the Damascus regime. We are giving support to our partners in the region that are dealing with the consequences of those activities.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I too would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their remarks and for their continued efforts to address the political and humanitarian crises in Syria.

This month marks the thirteenth year of Syria's internationalized civil war — one of the deadliest conflicts of the twenty-first century, which has resulted in as many as 306,000 casualties. Despite repeated attempts at mediation, intervention by the Council and efforts on the part of civil society, the conflict remains entrenched. Malta greatly appreciates the work of the Special Envoy and commends his tireless efforts to carve out space for compromise, confidence and conciliation between the parties. Regrettably, however, those parties remain far apart. Malta urges genuine engagement with the good offices of the Special Envoy on his step-for-step initiative. We also call on all with influence over the parties to agree on a date and venue for a resumed session of the Constitutional Committee. That must not be delayed any further.

Month after month, we have been devastated by the reports of violent clashes across front lines. The continued air strikes and artillery shelling are killing, injuring and maiming dozens of people every month, and the reports of those incidents represent only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to grasping the suffering of the civilian population. We are gravely concerned about the gap in humanitarian funding for the United Nations response in support of the 16 million Syrians in need. We have also taken note of the work of Syrian women's civil society organizations and of women human rights defenders across north-western Syria. They are facing increasing pressure from local authorities, which threatens their vital civil and legal work in the public arena, and we reiterate their calls for support and protection. Without bridging the humanitarian gap and providing those groups with support and protection, we will see a reduction in medical, protection and education services whose impact will be most acutely felt by women, girls and children. Today we heard the stories of Hanaa, Maha and Umm Ahmed, and there are many, many more like them.

Malta reiterates the need for programming to promote early recovery, resilience and livelihoods in Syria in order to help stabilize the humanitarian situation. That approach also protects the dignity of Syrians and will support a more sustainable aid approach in the years ahead. In that respect, we also commend the work of the United Nations and all the humanitarian agencies and partners operating in Syria. We are pleased to see the continued authorization of the border crossing points, Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai, and we emphasize that they should remain in place as long as the needs remain. We also reiterate the need for the facilitation of aid via all modalities in Syria, including the cross-line modality. As we heard today, more people need humanitarian aid in Syria now than at any point in the crisis. And as the Secretary-General recently emphasized, international humanitarian law has to be respected.

As we in the Council say every month, there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The only way forward is a political settlement in line with

resolution 2254 (2015). Progress on the issue of the detained, the disappeared and the missing would give some semblance of peace to the thousands of families who know nothing about what happened to their loved ones. In that regard, we welcome the development of the terms of reference for the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and we call for allocating a budget sufficient to setting up a well-functioning body.

Now more than ever, and with the spillover effects of the war on Gaza being felt throughout the region, we must all redouble our political efforts. As the Special Envoy said last month (see S/PV.9559), we must reject the status quo in Syria and refute the notion held in some quarters that this conflict is easier to manage than to solve.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their work and the work of their teams in trying to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, and for their briefings today.

Thirteen years ago, the Syrian people took to the streets in peaceful protest to demand freedom, dignity and respect for human rights. The Al-Assad regime suppressed the protests and launched a ruthless campaign of violence that continues to this day. More than 500,000 people have died, and more than half the Syrian population has been forcibly displaced. Thirteen years on, we need to see three key changes.

First, there should be urgent positive steps taken on the political process, based on resolution 2254 (2015). Month after month, the Council comes together to stress the importance of that resolution. The Astana format and the Arab contact group have underscored its importance, but we have not seen the parties — and specifically the regime — take the steps that the Council has called for. Too much time has elapsed since the Constitutional Committee last met. We welcome Mr. Pedersen's continued efforts to convene a meeting of the Constitutional Committee in the near future and reiterate our call to the Al-Assad regime to engage meaningfully in the political process.

Secondly, humanitarian support and early recovery remain critical. The United Kingdom has remained a committed donor throughout the conflict, contributing more than $4 billion since 2011. We call on others to join our early-recovery efforts, which have supported education and learning, particularly for girls, and opportunities to support people's livelihoods in order to increase their self-reliance. In a time of constrained resources, it is the responsibility of all parties to enable principled, sustainable and unhindered access, including cross-border, so as to ensure that vulnerable communities in north-western Syria can be reached.

Thirdly, the Al-Assad regime continues to profit from the illicit trade in Captagon, fuelling the regime's oppression of the Syrian people. The United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Jordan co-hosted an event earlier this month in New York to highlight the risks and malign effects of the Captagon trade. We will continue to seek coordinated global action on Captagon, in close cooperation with our regional partners.

In conclusion, a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) represents the only viable mechanism for bringing about sustainable, inclusive peace in Syria.

Mr. Ponikvar (Slovenia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings and their continued commitment to peace in Syria and to its people.

The discussions on Syria that are taking place in the Security Council are very difficult for us. We cannot believe that the conflict has entered its fourteenth year with no end in sight. Syria is experiencing a spillover effect from other parts of the region and at the same time is generating spillover effects of its own. The country itself remains in turmoil, and a whole generation of young Syrians have known their home country only as a place of conflict. How can we, the international community, stand by Syrians in the weeks to come?

First, and most importantly, the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process needs to be resumed. The disagreements about the venue of the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee need to end. Until another agreement is reached, negotiations should resume in Geneva, which remains also the seat of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. Special Envoy Pedersen enjoys our unwavering support and so does his proposal for a Geneva meeting and the development of the Constitutional Committee and its work in a manner that could give hope to the Syrian people. In the meantime, we would also welcome the development of other tracks included in resolution 2254 (2015).

Secondly, 70 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. Considering the scale of humanitarian needs, it is important to ensure sustainable, predictable and efficient aid flows across the whole of Syria as long as needed. It is urgent to utilize and scale up all modalities of delivery, including cross-border and cross-line. Despite welcoming the extension of consent, we call on Syria to extend indefinitely the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Salamah and Al-Rai border crossings at the Syria-Türkiye border.

Strikes on essential facilities, such as water and electricity facilities in north-east Syria, are exacerbating the dire humanitarian situation and must cease immediately. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be spared in the course of military operations.

Thirdly, accountability for gross human rights violations and justice for survivors are the basis for lasting peace and stability. In that light, we stress the need to resolve the plight of the detainees, abductees and missing persons. Slovenia is standing and will continue to stand ready to support the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Finally, we would like to return to the basics. For 13 years we have been listening to the pleas of the Syrian people. We have heard stories of lives lost, dreams crushed and generations lost. It is time to act. We call for an immediate ceasefire and full respect for international humanitarian law.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings.

In the light of their briefings and recent developments, I would like to make the following three points.

First, since the outbreak of the current round of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Israel, over the occupied Golan Heights and the Blue Line, has launched frequent air strikes against various locations in Syria, in grave violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. China is deeply concerned about that. Against the backdrop of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, all parties must exercise restraint, avoid exacerbating tensions, prevent hotspots from fuelling each other and the spread of conflict. Major countries outside the region should play a constructive role in de-escalating the situation. The international community must also redouble its collective efforts to manage the conflict in Gaza and leverage the unconditional Ramadan ceasefire as an entry point to push for a permanent ceasefire, thereby injecting more positive energy into peace and stability in the Middle East, including in Syria.

Secondly, we must promote a political solution to the Syrian issue. At their recent meeting, the League of Arab States Foreign Ministers reaffirmed their abiding commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and objection to any external interference. We are of the view that support from regional countries can give new impetus to the political settlement of the Syrian issue.

We welcome Special Envoy Pedersen's wide-ranging engagements with all parties on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The international community should uphold the Syrian-owned, Syrian-led principle and encourage dialogue and consultations, so as to find a solution acceptable to all parties.

Terrorism is a persistent threat to the political process in Syria. We welcome the measures taken by the Syrian Government to fight terrorism and maintain security and stability. The international community must fight all terrorism in Syria with zero tolerance.

Thirdly, we must work together to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Thanks to the joint efforts by the Syrian Government and the United Nations, the border crossings for aid delivery are now operating effectively. We urge parties concerned to actively cooperate to facilitate cross-line deliveries. Meanwhile, the international community should also scale up its humanitarian assistance to Syria and provide adequate and non-earmarked financial support to early recovery projects throughout Syria.

Unilateral sanctions and the plundering of resources have long hindered the economic recovery, social development and improvement of people's livelihoods in Syria. We urge relevant countries to immediately cease those unlawful acts. Foreign forces should immediately end their illegal military presence in Syria.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for today's briefings. We recognize the ongoing efforts of the Special Envoy, who visited Damascus last week. We also commend his active engagement with

all parties and suggestion of Geneva for the delayed reconvening of the Constitutional Committee.

Nevertheless, we are still awaiting again tangible improvements in the security and political situation in Syria. We remain sidetracked by discussions related to the location of the ninth meeting of the Constitutional Committee. At the very same time, as briefers just said, the number of Syrian people in need has surged to the highest number since 2011, amounting to 16.7 million, or three fourths of the total population, as armed conflict continues throughout Syria. Consistent and predictable humanitarian assistance to Syria through all available modalities is of critical importance at this moment. In this troubling situation, we have to strive to prevent the Syrian issue from being put on the back burner in terms of emergency and readiness, particularly given the constant threat of spillover from Gaza.

As we mark the fourteenth anniversary of the Syrian conflict this month, the Republic of Korea supports the Special Envoy's recent affirmation that only the unwavering pursuit of a political solution to end this conflict can restore hope to the Syrian people.

The Korean Government echoes the call of the United Nations and other Council members to enhance actions to ensure a ceasefire and a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). At the moment, the key is for relevant parties to move forward to the next step of a genuine, efficient and effective discussion on the political solutions, first, by agreeing on the venue of the Syrian Constitutional Committee meetings. In that regard, my delegation urges all relevant parties to increase their cooperation in order to foster dialogue towards sustainable peace and security in Syria.

I would like to conclude by recalling that, with the political situation stalled as it is, it is the Syrian people that continue to suffer the most.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their valuable briefings.

This month, the tragic conflict in Syria has entered its fourteenth year. A whole generation of children have experienced only war and displacement.

With active hostilities and a devastating humanitarian situation, Japan reiterates that the only sustainable solution to this conflict is an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process under United Nations auspices in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We strongly support the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy, including his recent visit to Damascus. Japan calls on all Syrian parties, in particular the Syrian Government, to engage more seriously towards achieving tangible results through the political process.

In that vein, the Constitutional Committee must be resumed at an agreed venue as soon as possible. All parties must immediately show their willingness to come to the table and settle the crisis for the sake of both the Syrian people and regional stability.

Given the immense essential needs in Syria, humanitarian assistance must be conducted through all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line modalities. Early recovery projects are also indispensable for the lives of Syrians. Japan is playing its part and recently announced a new contribution, partnering with the United Nations Development Programme to improve Syrian livelihoods and with UNICEF to enhance access to education and child protection services for Syrians affected by the protracted crisis and the 2023 earthquakes. We also recognize that there can be no peace without justice and accountability. More than 100,000 people remain arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared and missing in Syria. It will be crucial to ensure that the newly established mechanism of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic responds to that issue in a timely manner.

In conclusion, many years of conflict have left the Syrian people in a desperate state. We must not let another year pass without directing all our efforts towards a path to peace, security and prosperity. Japan stands in solidarity with the people of Syria, and we will strive to make peace a reality for them.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Every March, the permanent members of the Security Council from the Western countries issue and reiterate misleading statements promoting a false narrative of the terrorist war that my country, Syria, has

been witnessing for the past 13 years. Their statements are designed to cover up those same States' acts of aggression, occupation and suffocating economic blockade in order to undermine Syria's stability, security and development achievements, prejudice our national choices and weaken our regional role, with the aim of serving the Israeli occupation.

My delegation will not go into the content of those statements in detail. They include unfounded, baseless allegations and claims, and the States making them have maintained their unchanged destructive policies and unrealistic illusions, denying them any credibility. Their positions vis-à-vis the genocidal crimes that the Israeli occupation has continued to commit against the Palestinian people for nearly six months now are yet more proof of the falseness of their allegations, lies and blind bias towards the Israeli occupation. Their support and bias have emboldened the occupation authorities to pursue their repeated aggressions against Syrian territories, most recently two acts of aggression against parts of rural Damascus on 17 and 19 March. In that context, Syria reaffirms the content of the letters it has sent to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, asking them to intervene immediately to put an end to Israel's hysterical aggressions and prevent their recurrence. We have been warning the Israeli occupation authorities of the consequences of their criminal actions, which threaten regional and international peace and security.

Contrary to the claims of certain Western States, the Syrian Government has adopted an array of steps and measures aimed at promoting security and stability and meeting the needs of Syrians throughout the country, in addition to creating conditions conducive to refugees' dignified return to their homes. However, as we have seen and heard today in the statements of the three Western permanent members of the Security Council, those Western States have preferred to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the Syrian Government's commendable steps, which deserve support, particularly considering that they have been taken in difficult circumstances in order to tackle the grave challenges left by years of terrorist war, acts of aggression, illegitimate military presences and inhumane unilateral coercive measures.

The Syrian Government is committed to pursuing its constructive cooperation with the United Nations and other partners on the humanitarian and development fronts. We remain hopeful that the United Nations will address the concerns that our delegation has repeatedly mentioned about the terrorist organizations that are hindering the cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance by confiscating, looting and diverting cross-border assistance and thereby depriving civilians of it. We have also mentioned our concern about the meetings that have been held between those responsible for the United Nations Office in Gaziantep and terrorist organizations, as well as the illegal administrative structures affiliated with them. We reaffirm the need to grant the United Nations agencies in Damascus full power in discharging their mandate throughout Syria in complete coordination and cooperation with the Syrian Government, as well as the importance of ending abnormal situations imposed by exceptional circumstances that no longer exist.

Syria also calls for an immediate, full and unconditional lifting of all unilateral coercive measures and for an end to the policies of blockade and the collective punishment of peoples adopted by successive United States Administrations and the European Union, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, particularly its principles of sovereignty and sovereign equality among States. Syria reaffirms that we refuse to link humanitarian funding to political conditions, just as we refuse any dictates imposed on us at the expense of the Syrian people and their security and prosperity.

Mines and explosive devices planted by terrorist organizations in Syria are still claiming the lives of hundreds of Syrians every year, and injuring, maiming and causing permanent disabilities for many others. We therefore again call on the United Nations Mine Action Service to intensify its activities in Syria. We also call for providing the funding and support needed to go beyond the campaign raising awareness about the risks of those unexploded munitions and to focus on removing them and ending the threat they pose to people's lives. In that context, my delegation would like to express its appreciation and gratitude for the support provided by Russia and Armenia, along with various international and non-governmental organizations, to clear several locations planted with mines.

Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates met with Special Envoy Geir Pedersen in Damascus a few days ago. He reiterated that Syria is keen to cooperate with the Special Envoy and is committed to a Syrian national dialogue that should be Syrian-led and -owned, without any external interference. He also welcomed the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee, at a venue that should be agreed on by Syrians. In that

context, I would like to remind the Council that the national side had submitted a constructive proposal to the Special Envoy that would enable the ninth session of the Constitutional Committee to be convened. We call on Mr. Pedersen to pursue his efforts in line with that proposal to allow the Committee to resume its work without any further delay.

My delegation reaffirms that the principle adopted at the beginning of all Security Council resolutions pertaining to Syria is a full commitment to the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and to its independence, unity and territorial integrity. Enforcing that fundamental principle means that Western permanent members of the Security Council must refrain from their aggressive policies, which only brought terrorism and destruction to Syria and the region. That principle also requires ending the illegitimate foreign military presence on Syrian territory, all its violations, the plundering of national resources and the sponsoring of terrorist organizations and separatist militias, as well as acts of cross-border infiltration, the latest instances of which were by Fabrice Desplechin, the so-called French special envoy to Syria, and General Michael Kurilla, Commander of the United States Central Command.

In conclusion, certain Western countries pretend to be committed to Syria and its people and the stability and security of the region. If that is the case, they should change their approach, which has been overtaken by events, and refrain from their misleading and misinformation policies and from twisting facts, and instead adopt an approach based on diplomacy and dialogue. They should support the efforts of the Syrian State aimed at improving the humanitarian situation and the livelihoods of Syrians and restoring the rule of law in all of Syria. They should also help us to fight remnants of terrorists and put an end to the crimes perpetrated by terrorist organizations, including trafficking in looted artefacts and drugs.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their briefings.

This month marks the thirteenth anniversary of the start of the conflict in Syria. Over those 13 years, the Syrian people have suffered greatly, and the conflict has also had adverse consequences on the peace, security and stability of the entire region. Since the start of the conflict, in 2011, certain countries have pursued their political agendas in Syria through military solutions. To that end, they disregarded basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations, violated Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and supported terrorist and separatist groups. Regrettably, after 13 years, those countries are resorting to sanctions as a means to achieve objectives they failed to attain through military or diplomatic channels.

Addressing the root causes of the crisis in Syria requires fundamental actions to ensure lasting peace, security and stability. Several key principles must be thoroughly adhered to by all the parties involved.

First, it must be recognized that there is no military solution. Likewise, actions such as politicizing humanitarian aid, obstructing the return of refugees and displaced persons and, especially, imposing unilateral sanctions serve only to prolong the crisis and worsen the suffering endured by the Syrian population.

Secondly, the conflict cannot be resolved without upholding the full sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Under no circumstances can those essential elements be compromised. The Syrian people refuse to accept the ongoing occupation of their land or any violation of their sovereignty. Moreover, the international community must reject such actions, as they contravene fundamental principles of international law. We reiterate our call for the immediate withdrawal of all uninvited foreign forces from Syria. Specifically, we emphasize the imperative for the withdrawal of United States forces occupying parts of Syrian territory.

Thirdly, the restoration of Syria's territorial integrity demands relentless and unceasing efforts to combat all terrorist groups. Any pause in those operations would provide an opportunity for those groups to solidify their position and perpetrate further atrocities. That would make the conflict last longer and make it harder to find a political solution. It is imperative, however, that the protection of civilians remain paramount throughout counterterrorism efforts.

We strongly condemn the ongoing Israeli military attacks in Syria as both unlawful and provocative, serving only to escalate tensions and undermine stability. The regime must be held accountable and forced to end such aggressive actions immediately.

While providing immediate aid is crucial, it is not a sustainable solution in the long term. Efforts must focus on rebuilding critical infrastructure, creating conditions for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons and advancing the political process. In that context, we call for the immediate lifting of unilateral sanctions. The continuation of such inhumane measures violates the basic human rights of the Syrian people, punishes the entire Syrian population and exacerbates the plight of the most vulnerable segments of society. In addition, the alleged humanitarian exemptions within sanctions frameworks often prove ineffective, given the complex and extensive nature of those sanctions.

For its part, Iran is committed to a political resolution of the crisis. It will continue supporting a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process, as well as assisting the people and the Government of Syria to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country. We support the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen aimed at the resumption of the meetings of the Constitutional Committee as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process. In that regard, we welcome his recent visit to Damascus and engagement with Syrian authorities.

Iran, along with its Astana-format partners, is committed to working towards long-term and sustainable normalization in and around Syria. We support continuing the Syrian-Turkish dialogue as part of that effort. We also support efforts and cooperation within the Astana format to ascertain the fate of missing persons. Lastly, it is of the utmost importance that every possible effort be made to facilitate the safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees to their homeland and to meet their humanitarian needs.

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

Mr. Önal (Türkiye): I also thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings.

Last week marked another grim anniversary of the Syrian conflict. Over the past 13 years, the situation in the country has worsened in humanitarian, political, security and economic aspects. Terrorism has become the greatest threat to Syria's political unity and territorial integrity and to regional peace and stability. The current stalemate is unsustainable for Syria, and it is unsustainable for the wider region. Therefore, it is high time for a realistic stock-taking by all relevant actors.

The essential requirement for a sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis is to achieve a national consensus in line with the expectations of the Syrian people. Moreover, the international community also needs to realign its overall approach to the conflict in a way that would support that objective at the regional and international levels. That requires all stakeholders to review their positions and to make paradigm shifts where necessary in order to contribute to lasting peace and stability. In that regard, active engagement in mutually reinforcing processes in the political, security and humanitarian fields, as well as in facilitating the return of refugees and early recovery, is a necessity that cannot be delayed further.

A change of attitude is needed, particularly on three critical issues.

First, the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process under United Nations facilitation must be revived. The contours of a negotiated political solution to this crisis were actually drawn years ago by the Council through its unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). Its provisions must be upheld and implemented. All relevant actors should support, without any further delay, the convening of the Constitutional Committee. Let us not forget that the Constitutional Committee was a tangible outcome of the Astana process and remains the only platform where the Syrian parties can come together under United Nations facilitation to produce a negotiated solution to the conflict, and thus shape the future of their country.

Secondly, the mistake of subcontracting the fight against Da'esh to another terrorist organization — namely, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces — must end. That separatist entity is neither Syrian nor democratic. It is nothing but the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units itself.

Thirdly, it is clear that the sequential approaches that make the return of refugees contingent on advances in the political process have not brought about the desired result to date. Creating the necessary conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees must be part and parcel of the settlement process now. That means scaling up early-recovery projects and funding for them across Syria, including in the opposition-held areas, based on impartial needs

assessments by the United Nations. It also means supporting stabilization efforts in north-west Syria.

Ensuring the continued flow of urgent humanitarian aid to those in need remains a collective responsibility. In 2024, a staggering 16.7 million people are estimated to need humanitarian assistance in Syria. That is the highest number of people in need since the start of the conflict. Despite that, we have been witnessing downward trends in aid deliveries and humanitarian funding for Syria. The failure to reauthorize the Security Council mandate for the cross-border mechanism in a post-earthquake context has compromised the predictability of operations. In order to compensate for that, humanitarian workers need assurances that all three available border crossings will continue to be used for United Nations aid deliveries as long as needs persist.

This year we also saw humanitarian funding for Syria hit a record low. The United Nations humanitarian response plan for Syria was only 38 per cent funded in 2023, making it the least-financed plan in the history of the United Nations Syria response. We cannot expect humanitarians to work miracles in conflict zones without supporting them with humanitarian access and adequate funding.

In conclusion, the toll of the 13-year conflict shows us that anything short of a readjusted, holistic approach that addresses the various dimensions of the Syrian crisis in a simultaneous and interrelated manner has no chance of success. Türkiye will continue its efforts to help achieve peace and stability in Syria through constructive engagement with all parties.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.