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Security Council

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New York

President:	Mr. Fu Cong	(China)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Koudri
	Denmark	Ms. Lassen
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Greece	Mr. Sekeris
	Guyana	Ms. Persaud
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Panama	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Ms. Karim
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Somalia	Mr. Mohamed Yusuf
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Ms. Shea

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, 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 the 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: We are at a very important moment in the unfolding political situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Allow me to first update the Security Council on where these things stand when it comes to the transition.

On 29 January, a broad range of military factions assembled in Damascus and issued a declaration dissolving the 2012 Constitution, exceptional laws, the former parliament, the former army, all previous security agencies, former regime-allied militias and the Baath Party. The declaration said that all revolutionary and military factions, including, notably, civil and political revolutionary bodies, were dissolved and were to be integrated into State institutions. Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa was declared "interim President and head of State for a transitional period", and the declaration authorized him to establish and appoint a provisional legislative council.

The next day, on 30 January, Mr. Al-Sharaa made an address to the nation, in which he pledged to do the following: "work to form a comprehensive transitional Government that expresses the diversity of Syria, its men, women, and youth". He also said he would work towards free and fair elections. He mentioned as specific steps that he would announce a preparatory committee to select a small legislative council, after which he would announce a constitutional declaration to serve as the legal reference for the transitional phase. He also said a preparatory committee for a national dialogue conference would be formed. He has spoken in the media of free and fair elections taking place in four to five years.

The caretaker authorities subsequently briefed me on these issues in more detail and said that we could expect moves in a very short space of time. Indeed today, the establishment of the preparatory committee for the national dialogue conference was officially announced.

The leadership of the caretaker authorities have repeatedly committed publicly and to me that the new Syria will be for all Syrians and built on inclusive and credible foundations. Given the specific road map being laid out as regards governance, the constitution and elections, the words of the caretaker authorities show considerable overlap with the key principles of resolution 2254 (2015). The key will be implementation.

I have made it clear to the caretaker authorities that my mission stands ready to offer counsel and support, as does the entire United Nations family, and I went through the full range of areas where support can be given. The caretaker authorities have thus far committed to consulting closely with me and my office on all steps of a

Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transition. We look forward to seeing that commitment translated into concrete follow-up action. We, for our part, remain ready to work meaningfully and constructively on the next steps with the caretaker authorities, as was agreed, in support of a Syrian-led process, in line with the key principles of resolution 2254 (2015).

While in Syria, I met a diverse range of representatives, groups and individuals from all parts of the country, involved in a full range of political, community, religious and organizational activities. I was deeply struck by the shared conviction among all the Syrians whom I met that the success of Syria's political transition is essential and that it cannot afford to fail. All understand that it may be imperfect, but many are concerned that there has been no rule of law, with no constitutional or legal framework for appointments and policy decisions, nor systematic communication or transparency. Some expressed concerns that the caretaker authorities are taking decisions that go beyond a caretaker mode, including in terms of restructuring State institutions, with potential impact on specific communities. All Syrians with whom I met welcomed the public commitments of the caretaker authorities over the past two months but want them to be translated into concrete steps. I heard many stress to me how much they support institutional appointments, the transitional Government, the provisional legislative body, the national dialogue process and any preparatory committees and that they need to be credible and inclusive, with the participation of all segments of society — ideally identified by a transparent process of consultation — a clear and time-bound road map forward on next steps, including a constitutional process and a path towards free and fair elections, and transitional justice, as Mr. Al-Sharaa himself has promised.

Many Syrians — men and women — expressed concern at reports of discriminatory practices targeting women and of increasing social pressure towards certain norms. Of course, we have seen caretaker authorities reassure women on their rights, and, in some instances, we have seen those involved in discriminatory practices detained. But Syrian women also want more than protection: they want meaningful participation in decision-making or appointments to key positions on the basis of their qualifications. They want to participate in transitional institutions so that their perspectives are considered, including on issues related to the status and rights of Syrian women.

It is important to underscore that the current efforts towards a political transition are unfolding in a situation of territorial division and hot conflict in north-east Syria, which is extremely concerning. There are still daily front-line hostilities, affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure and exchanges of artillery and air strikes, and there has been a series of car bombs in mostly residential areas, prompting serious civilian casualties. I welcome the fact that the caretaker authorities and the Syrian Democratic Forces have opened a direct channel, even if progress has not yet emerged. I strongly encourage the United States of America, Türkiye and regional and Syrian partners to work together on genuine compromises that enable peace and stability to take hold in north-east Syria. It is vital to avoid further conflict, which could have drastic effects on Syrian civilians, stability, the economy, the transition, the fight against Da'esh and, potentially, international peace and security. It is crucial that all doors remain open to ensuring the inclusion of all parts of Syria and all key constituencies within the political transition process.

It is also important to stress that the security landscape remains complex in the rest of Syria too. The caretaker authorities continue to consolidate their presence, including through efforts to build a national army, with widespread support for ensuring that no weapons be held other than by the State. Many groups, however, still exercise some or even significant autonomy. Many Syrians expressed fears about security fragmentation and fears that it could be exploited by external actors,

particularly if the transition goes awry. Many expressed parallel concerns that ongoing efforts for public sector restructuring may push hundreds of thousands, including former security elements, into need, potentially jeopardizing stability in the future. There are further layers of security complexity, especially with the ongoing threat and presence of Da'esh, areas in which there is a security vacuum and reports of rising crime rates in some areas.

I believe that moving towards the shared goal of stability and a national army will likely be linked to the overall political transition and its credibility and inclusiveness. Let me also clearly appeal to all international stakeholders to maintain a coordinated front in supporting that goal. Let me also add that many Syrians have expressed serious concerns about the inclusion of foreign fighters in the senior ranks of the new armed forces, as well as individuals associated with violations. I also wish to note the visit of an Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons delegation to Damascus and its meeting with the caretaker authorities.

Let me note a related challenge: the very concerning reports of incidents still taking place against the backdrop of the authorities' security operations, including men killed in the exchange of fire and reported serious ill-treatment in detention. In addition, residents are reportedly facing incidents of kidnapping, looting, expropriation of property and forced evictions of families from public housing. The caretaker authorities told me plainly that there is no policy of revenge or retribution, and they have reportedly taken some steps to hold to account those responsible. They have also released hundreds of detained persons, but there is still a lack of clarity on due process for those detained, including access by specialized humanitarian organizations to places of detention. There is a risk of a trend of individual incidents developing into a cycle of retribution and revenge. It is the responsibility of the caretaker authorities to ensure that all armed actors cease those kinds of actions, to amplify their assurances into concrete procedures and to work on a comprehensive transitional justice framework.

The caretaker authorities have made important statements regarding Israel. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force says that the Israel Defense Forces have established multiple positions in the area of separation, in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Such facts on the ground are not easily reversed. I appeal to the Council to hold Israel to its commitment that this is a temporary presence and stress that Israel must withdraw. The United Nations is engaging Israel and the caretaker authorities to that end.

Syrians also impressed on me the urgent need for the international community to help to ensure economic stability, particularly with moves on sanctions. The economic challenges are mounting fast, especially with sudden humanitarian donor cuts. Many Syrians will be measuring success in hours of electricity, the price of food and levels of employment. Sanctioning States should make meaningful moves towards easing sanctions from the outset, including in the critical sectors of energy, investment and finance, including the Central Bank. I welcome the important decisions and signals from the European Union and United States of America in recent weeks, and I hope that those moves can be built upon quickly. I have also conveyed to the caretaker authorities the assessment that, as indicated by sanctioning States, a credible transition will be essential to continuing and expanding positive and bold sanctions moves. Syria needs tremendous support in other areas too, including large-scale investments in Syria's recovery, reconstruction and long-term prosperity. What I hear from key Member States that have the capacity to provide such support is that their confidence to make such investments will go hand in hand with concrete steps towards an inclusive, transparent transition, reforms to overcome previous corruption and mismanagement and action in other areas we have discussed — security, terrorism and chemical weapons.

To conclude, I encourage the caretaker authorities to make good on their commitments to the Syrian people by clear and concrete actions on the transition and in engagement with my Office. I encourage the international community to do its part on sanctions, the economy and Syrian sovereignty — all essential to a successful transition too. And I stress that the United Nations will continue to render its support to the Syrian political transition through the political work and support of my Office, deliver as one across the full range of the United Nations family and stress the importance of all key international actors working together in a coordinated manner.

Let us remember that the challenges Syria faces are myriad and immense, including an ongoing conflict, a fragmented security landscape, a battered economy and a population emerging from 14 years of war in a situation of great hope, but division too. An inclusive, credible and transparent political transition that is Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, assisted by the United Nations and with a united international community, in line with the key principles of resolution 2254 (2015), remains the best and only path to addressing those challenges. The Syrian people must finally be given the opportunity to restore their sovereignty, overcome the conflict, determine their future and realize their legitimate aspirations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

Ms. Msuya: As the Special Envoy just said, we must seize the opportunity of this moment for the people of the Syrian Arab Republic. That means grappling with the immense humanitarian crisis affecting more than 70 per cent of the population. It also means addressing additional needs, as hostilities in some areas continue, particularly in the north. Fighting in and around Manbij, in eastern Aleppo, has displaced more than 25,000 people and caused dozens of civilian casualties. Last week, 19 women and a driver were killed when a car bomb exploded near a vehicle transporting female agricultural workers. Fighting continues to hamper efforts to repair the Tishreen Dam, depriving people of water and electricity. Further east, hostilities have also continued in Raqqa and Al-Hasakah governorates, affecting civilians, water stations and other types of civilian infrastructure. Meanwhile, explosive ordnance continues to pose a threat to civilians and hamper humanitarian aid across the country, killing dozens of people and injuring dozens more in recent weeks. All parties must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure in the course of military actions.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners are working to deliver critical assistance while adapting our systems to the shifting context in Syria. Since late November 2024, we have provided more than 3.3 million people with bread assistance and other food aid. Mobile teams are providing health and nutrition services, including for newly displaced people. Young children and women are being screened and treated for malnutrition. The cross-border operation from Türkiye remains essential. During the past month, 94 trucks carrying food, health and other supplies crossed through the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam crossings — more than triple the number during the same period last year. We also welcome the continued deliveries of assistance from countries of the region and remain ready to further strengthen coordination to ensure that we are reaching as many people in need as we can across Syria. We are also organizing assessment missions to better understand needs, including in areas we had previously not been able to access. A country-wide rapid needs assessment is under way, with initial results expected soon.

Since the activation of the humanitarian system's scale-up designation and the visit of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in December 2024, Syria remains at the top of our priority list. Several senior representatives of humanitarian

agencies have visited Syria to bolster operations and engage with partners and the caretaker authorities, including the heads of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme. We continue to seek new and more efficient ways to scale up operations. That includes working to move towards a streamlined coordination architecture. The new structure will be led by the Humanitarian Coordinator in Damascus, with a humanitarian country team bringing together humanitarian actors operating across Syria. We expect that transition to be completed by the end of June.

We continue to engage with the caretaker authorities on the assurances they have provided to facilitate access, ease bureaucratic procedures and engage in practical dialogue with the humanitarian community. Our engagement remains constructive, and we have seen some notable improvements. Last week, cash withdrawal limits for aid organizations were lifted, and transactions authorized in Syrian pounds or United States dollars — steps we hope will ease challenges around liquidity, particularly for non-governmental organizations. We have also been informed that all pending humanitarian shipments at ports of entry have been cleared. We continue to engage on procedures for the registration of non-governmental organizations and field visits. We also welcome the caretaker authorities' authorization for the United Nations to continue existing arrangements for cross-border deliveries of aid from Türkiye through Bab Al-Hawa for a further six months. We hope that those movements, as well as those through other crossings, will continue to be facilitated.

Funding shortfalls continue to impose an enormous constraint on our ability to scale up further. Dozens of health facilities are at risk of closure. Water and sanitation services have been suspended in displacement camps in the north-west, affecting more than 635,000 people. We are also awaiting further clarity on the implications of the freeze on United States-funded activities and associated humanitarian waivers. In 2024, United States funding accounted for more than a quarter of support for the humanitarian response plan for Syria. Delays or suspension of funding will affect whether vulnerable people can access essential services.

The United Nations and our partners are appealing for $1.2 billion to reach 6.7 million people through March, as we develop a full appeal for the rest of the year based on new assessments. This is an effort to prioritize assistance to reach the most vulnerable people. Three quarters of those we hope to reach are women and children, 40 per cent are internally displaced and more than 15 per cent have a disability. As donors consider their future support for Syria in the context of the current transition, maintaining vital humanitarian support will be critical. We hope that any future financial pledges will be generous and commitments of support robust.

Now is the time to invest in Syria's future. Alongside the most critical life-saving support, we must sustain and restore critical health, water and other services that can enable people to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Many of the 6 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are weighing the momentous decision of whether to return. Since December 2024, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that approximately 270,000 have returned. According to a rapid intention survey conducted by UNHCR in a number of neighbouring countries last month, more than a quarter of refugees hope to return home in the coming year, a notable increase from similar surveys last year. Many of the more than 7 million people who are internally displaced are making similar assessments. As United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said during his visit to Syria last month, sustainable, safe and dignified returns require substantial investment in livelihoods, health services, rebuilding schools and restoring electricity and water infrastructure.

Let me conclude by reiterating our key asks. We need respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. We need the smooth facilitation

of assistance into and within the country, to allow us to reach as many people as possible with the resources available. And we need the necessary funding to scale up and sustain our response, alongside investment in Syria's development. Finally, as ever, we need a peaceful political transition and support for the Special Envoy's critical efforts.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Msuya for her briefing.

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

Ms. Shea (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their briefings. We appreciate their candid assessments of the political and humanitarian situation in Syria and their continued engagement in Damascus.

During Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent engagements with regional leaders, he highlighted the need for an inclusive transition in Syria. The United States believes that Council members should continue to urge an expansive representation of Syrian voices in Syria's future. Secretary Rubio has also underscored the need to prevent Syria from becoming a safe haven for terrorism. We want a Syria that denies foreign malign actors the opportunity to exploit Syria's transition for their own objectives. For many years, the Al-Assad regime allowed Iran and its terrorist proxies, including Hizbullah, to use Syrian territory to threaten regional security and traffic dangerous weapons. Now, we are concerned by reports of newly formed groups in Syria that are inciting violence, including by seeking to draw Israel into direct conflict. Those groups are reportedly receiving financial and logistical support from Iran, even after Iran's departure from Syria. The warning signs of Iran's nefarious influence and intent to re-establish its presence in Syria are clear. For those reasons, we must collectively call on Iran to stop undermining Syria's stability and security. Ongoing armed hostilities in northern Syria are also concerning, And the United States will continue to pursue a ceasefire that will enable our local partners to focus on combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS**)** and maintain the security of detention facilities and displaced persons camps.

Since the territorial defeat of ISIS, United States assistance has played a vital role in managing and securing the Al-Hol and Al-Roj displaced persons camps in north-east Syria and, critically, Syrian Democratic Forces-managed facilities detaining thousands of ISIS fighters, but that assistance cannot last forever. The United States has shouldered too much of that burden for too long. Ultimately, the camps cannot remain a direct United States financial responsibility. We accordingly continue to urge countries to expeditiously repatriate their displaced and detained nationals who remain in the region. We are encouraged by Karla Quintana's visit to Syria, the first such visit by the head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We encourage close cooperation with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons, including the opening of an office of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Damascus that will help the families of the missing get the answers that they have long deserved, including for Americans and partner country nationals. To that end, we also continue to encourage cooperation with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and Syrian accountability groups. We also took note that the United Nations received approval to resume deliveries of humanitarian assistance through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, and we will continue to encourage sustained access. We remain in close touch with our allies and partners and emphasize the importance of reaching stability in Syria to make our country and the region more secure.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Joyce Msuya, for their detailed briefings on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

We note that the contours of the domestic political landscape in Syria are coming into relief, and although we still lack many elements to draw comprehensive conclusions about further prospects of developments there, it is nevertheless clear to all that the country continues to face major challenges and problems. Furthermore, the fragile situation that has arisen, with clear indications of political uncertainty, is something that certain external players have eagerly capitalized on for the advancement of their parochial agendas. For example, amid the tumult, Israel has completely destroyed the military and defence capabilities of the Syrian Arab Republic and expanded the area of its occupation in the Golan Heights. Those illegal actions by West Jerusalem fly in the face of international law and cannot be justified in any way. Israel has an obligation to immediately withdraw its units from the occupied Syrian territories, including Mount Hermon, especially given that Damascus has reaffirmed its commitment to the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, which establishes conditions for the return of Syrian troops to their posts on the Bravo side.

We are also concerned about the recent clashes along the Syrian-Lebanese border, including with the use of artillery. We call on both neighbouring countries to de-escalate and to resolve problems that arise through dialogue. An important contributing factor in this should be achieved through the establishment of a sustained timely channel of communication between the political and military leadership in Damascus and Beirut.

The Kurdish question remains a pressing issue. We note the ongoing dialogue between the Syrian authorities and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). However, we note the fact that the SDF, as well as the Syrian National Army, have not joined the ranks of the Syrian armed forces. That inevitably raises concern. It is hard not to see that as a worrisome sign of the widening and deepening divides along ethnic and religious lines. Those are also reflected in the ongoing persecution of the Alawite minority associated with the former Government. While the interim authorities in Damascus have publicly spoken out against extrajudicial killings, the Internet is replete with clips showing acts of violence against Alawites and other Syrians accused of cooperating with the former Government. Attempts to replace legitimate justice with vigilante justice are completely unacceptable. There is a need to reunite law enforcement bodies as soon as possible and to restore the State’s monopoly on the use of force.

Lastly, we must not forget the lessons of the recent past, when the ill-considered and short-sighted steps undertaken in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq strengthened the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to such an extent that the group has become a serious threat not only to the region but also to the entire world. We call on the new Syrian authorities to pay increased attention to those issues. ISIL and other terrorist groups promoting ideologies of revenge and the break-up of Syrian society must not be allowed to exploit the security vacuum that has emerged.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, Syria continues to be in a dire state of crisis. The economic situation is deteriorating, with 90 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, and 2.5 million children not attending school at all, which carries with it serious consequences for the future of the country and its prospects for sustainable development. We trust that once the Security Council decides which of its members will be the penholder for the Syrian humanitarian dossier, those issues will be prioritized. The calls and initiatives of the United Nations humanitarian wing to increase the scale of assistance to the Syrian population deserve unconditional support, all the more so because it is possible to establish effective mechanisms for the provision of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian workers maintain a presence on the ground, and cross-border corridors continue to

operate. United Nations authorities do not have grievances with regard to the new Syrian authorities in the context of ensuring greater humanitarian access.

Another factor that has not changed in Syria since last year is the lack of funding from the international community, without which results will not be achieved. Owing to the lack of funds, food deliveries have been reduced by 80 per cent, despite the fact that 13 million people need food assistance. More than 100 health centres in north-west Syria have been shut down owing to limited funding. There are also difficulties in providing a sustainable water supply for 600,000 people. The modest levels of humanitarian assistance in Syria are clearly illustrated in recent reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which refer not to the amount of aid delivered, but rather to the humanitarian needs assessment missions and the difficulties in ensuring security in certain regions. A new humanitarian appeal for Syria, planned for the first three months of this year, that is, January to March, also does not inspire optimism. To date, essentially at the midpoint of this appeal, only 9 per cent of the anticipated funds, a total of $112 million, have been made available to humanitarian workers. Clearly, that is a drop in the ocean when it comes to alleviating the plight of millions in need. The wait-and-see position of major donors together with the continuing sanctions restrictions imposed by the United States and its allies are visibly exacerbating humanitarian problems in Syria.

Yet again, we are compelled to repeat our call to our Western colleagues to embrace the imperative of humanity with regard to the Syrian people, who are still unable to recover from the devastating upheavals. It is necessary to abandon the politicized approach that has been applied to the Syrian humanitarian dossier for the past 14 years, and that should be reflected not only in an increase in the amount of aid delivered, but also in the lifting of the sanctions which have strangled the Syrian economy and the lifting of barriers for the launch of recovery projects in the country. In that context, we view the recent decision by a number of countries to ease some of anti-Syrian restrictive measures that they had previously imposed as steps in the right direction. Today, when Western capitals do not have even fabricated pretexts for maintaining unilateral sanctions, the time is ripe to abandon confrontational approaches to the Syrian crisis and consolidate international efforts to help rebuild the country. Those efforts should be inclusive and not seek to exclude any of the influential States that can help to restore peaceful life in Syria. We continue to believe that there is a need and that it is timely to organize the international conference proposed by Geir Pedersen with the participation of all concerned Syrian stakeholders and international actors without exception. That will help to unite the efforts of external players and contribute to resolving the Syrian crisis.

The United Nations should play a key role in supporting a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned inclusive political process based on the principles set out in resolution 2254 (2015). Those include reaffirming the provision that Syria's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity must be respected, as well as preparations for and the holding of elections, the results of which will not be challenged. We fully support the efforts undertaken in that regard by Special Envoy Pedersen.

For our part, we intend to continue to forge bilateral, multifaceted cooperation with the fraternal country of Syria on the principles of traditional friendship and mutual respect. A Russian inter-agency delegation visited Damascus. And today a telephone conversation will be held between President Putin and the President of Syria for the transitional period, Mr. Al-Sharaa. Our relations are time-tested and do not rely on the political calculations. We stand ready to continue to provide assistance to the Syrians in the post-crisis rebuilding of the country.

Ms. Lassen (Denmark): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their very useful updates today.

Last month, we spoke of a new day dawning in Syria, of a future where all Syrians live in freedom and dignity, and of a political transition which must not fail (see S/PV.9832). Today, we continue to believe in that possibility. The road may not be smooth, but it can be achieved if the Security Council and the international community stand together in their guidance and support to the new Syria.

I will focus on four points today.

First, the political transition must be credible, inclusive and transparent. While we welcome the positive announcements by the interim Government, they must be transformed into action. We call on the interim Government to set a clear course for the political transition in the spirit of the key principles of resolution 2254 (2015). All segments of Syrian society must be represented. In particular, the full, equal and meaningful participation of Syrian women must be ensured in the transition process. They have been the backbone of social and political movements, calling for democracy, equality and inclusivity, and their contributions are critical for transitional justice and sustainable peace. As the Special Envoy said, Syrian women want more than protection: they want participation, and they deserve it. The United Nations, through Special Envoy Pedersen, is well placed to assist the transitional Syrian leadership in charting this complex path forward. Denmark fully supports the Special Envoy in that endeavour.

Secondly, as we have heard today, Syria remains an urgent humanitarian and protection crisis. As Assistant Secretary-General Msuya stated, millions of Syrians remain in acute need against the backdrop of a continuing economic crisis and a persistent gap in humanitarian funding. Food insecurity is widespread, and the need for investments in rehabilitation and reconstruction of shelters and infrastructure is further amplified by the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Mines, along with unexploded ordnance, remain an immense challenge for humanitarian operations and economic recovery. The essential services upon which the population depends must also be revitalized. Access to water and electricity are not just acute needs, they serve as enablers for long-term stability and livelihoods. The European Union expects to ease sanctions on key sectors so as to enable recovery and reconstruction in Syria. While we aim to move fast to encourage positive development, we should also be ready to reverse the course if the situation worsens. Fortunately, humanitarian access has improved, but challenges remain. It is essential that progress is sustained in order to ensure the full, rapid, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to all Syrians, wherever they may be. We cannot tolerate any backsliding in principal humanitarian operations.

Thirdly, for Syria to heal, accountability for the grave crimes of the Al-Assad regime must be ensured. The fate of the missing, detained and disappeared must be established, and the demands of victims for a transitional justice process must be heard. Now is the time to expand and coordinate these efforts, including by considering what additional efforts will be needed. We reaffirm our full support to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic 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, or IIIM, as it is called. We welcome statements by the interim Government in support of accountability and urge them to continue to work with these units and stress the importance of also including civil society and victims. The international community has a responsibility to support such efforts.

Finally, I wish to say a few words on the security situation, which, as we have heard this morning, remains very complex. As we discussed in the Council on Monday (see S/PV.9856), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) still has

the ability to adapt, exploit instability and spread its influence. ISIL's potential resurgence poses a serious risk to Syria, the Middle East and the world. Regarding the situation in south-west Syria, Denmark reiterates its full support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, which must be allowed to implement its mandate unhindered. While we recognize Israeli security concerns, we are alarmed by reports of a permanent Israeli presence, including on Mount Hermon, and the announcements that Israeli troops plan to remain in the area of separation. Denmark also remains concerned about the situation in north-eastern Syria and encourages the continuation of talks between the interim Government and the Kurdish authorities. All parties should seek a peaceful outcome to their deliberations while respecting international law.

As Syria begins this new chapter, the international community, including the Council, has a responsibility to act and to meet this moment with both compassion and commitment. We call on all actors to join us in that endeavour.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I, too, would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for their timely briefings and steadfast efforts. We recognize that the caretaker authorities are now at an inflection point, bearing the responsibility to demonstrate their legitimacy and leadership to all Syrians and the international community. However, the prevailing security and humanitarian challenges are severely hampering their capacity.

Allow me to make four points in that regard.

First, we look forward to Syria overcoming continuing instability across the country and achieving the peaceful reintegration of all armed factions. Concerns remain over ongoing clashes between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)and the Syrian National Army in north-east Syria, prolonged military operations of the Israel Defense Forces in Qunaytirah and deadly incidents along the border with Lebanon. We also remain wary that Da'esh could gravely exploit these fluid developments to expand its operational capabilities in central Syria and beyond. In that connection, it is essential to mitigate security risks and rebuild State institutions through the peaceful integration of all armed factions. Acknowledging the efforts of the caretaker authorities in this reintegration process, we encourage all international actors with leverage to facilitate negotiations between the caretaker authorities and armed factions, in particular, the Syrian National Army and the SDF.

Secondly, we call on the caretaker authorities to implement their commitment to an inclusive transition without delay. With the deadline for launching a transitional authority fast approaching in early March, this moment will be decisive in determining if local and global concerns regarding its political inclusivity can be dispelled. From the formation of a transitional Cabinet to the legislative council and National Dialogue Conference, all sectors of Syrian society, regardless of gender, religion, political affiliation or ethnicity, must be genuinely represented. In that regard, we note with satisfaction the announcement on the Preparatory Committee, which includes women and representatives from non-governmental organizations. To that end, the transition must engage with the United Nations at every stage in order to secure alignment with the principles set forth in resolution 2254 (2015). From electoral assistance to constitutional processes; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and transitional justice, the technical expertise of the United Nations can provide invaluable support at this critical juncture, particularly given the limited resources of the authorities. We note their willingness to cooperate with the United Nations and look forward to such enhanced engagement.

Thirdly, the international community must explore all avenues to address Syria's long-term humanitarian and economic challenges. Humanitarian needs cannot be

prioritized in isolation from economic development. We recognize OCHA's early recovery strategy as an appropriate approach, as it not only responds to immediate humanitarian needs but also contributes to rebuilding the economy. In that regard, while humanitarian assistance is more urgent than ever, we note that Syria's economic recovery will remain severely constrained as long as sanctions persist. We welcome positive developments such as the United States general licence for Syria and the European Union's road map for lifting sanctions, and look forward to further change in that regard. It is important to remain mindful that such measures, originally imposed in response to the Al-Assad regime's suppression and brutal crimes, now hamper the political support necessary for realizing an inclusive and peaceful transition of Syria.

Fourthly, we call for a careful approach in addressing the issue of Syrian refugees. Conditions on the ground are still insecure and inadequate for safe, large-scale returns. We appreciate the road map of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for facilitating voluntary returns for Syrian refugees. While clarifying that it does not advocate return for those not ready to do so, we also endorse UNHCR's call for all States to uphold the principle of non-refoulement at all times.

In closing, the Republic of Korea sincerely hopes that this historic momentum, which has emerged miraculously after 14 years, will be further strengthened through an inclusive Syrian-led political process, thereby opening the path to hope, peace and prosperity not only for Syria, but for the entire Middle East.

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

At the outset, the A3+ would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their valuable briefings.

Now more than ever, the Syrian people are seeking meaningful change in their country, a change that will enable them to realize their legitimate aspirations for peace, stability, prosperity and well-being.

The A3+ calls on the international community to support Syria's transition and assist the Syrian people in achieving a peaceful, sustainable, lasting and inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, the A3+ emphasizes the pivotal role that the United Nations can play in facilitating a process that is inclusive and reflects the aspirations of the Syrian people, and urges all parties to engage constructively in good faith.

We welcome the recent engagement between the caretaker authorities and Special Envoy Pedersen and reiterate our unwavering support for the efforts of the Special Envoy. The A3+ takes note of the announcements made by the caretaker authorities on 30 January and looks forward to the next steps in the transition period, including the development of a new Constitution and a Government that acts on behalf of all Syrian people. We emphasize that rebuilding Syria must be a collective effort of all its people, irrespective of their backgrounds.

The Syrian people have suffered immensely for more than 13 years and deserve peace, stability and prosperity. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Syria and urgently call for a nationwide cease-fire. The A3+ strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and violence that continue to claim the lives of Syrian citizens, and urges all actors to refrain from actions that fuel further instability. This is a time for dialogue, not revenge. Syria cannot and must not descend back into violence. Further instability will only breed terrorism and extend years of suffering for the Syrian people.

The A3+ calls on all actors to respect and uphold Syria's unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Syria cannot be divided, nor should it be used as a battleground for geopolitical rivalries. The A3+ strongly condemns the Israeli incursions into Syrian territory and its presence in the demilitarized buffer zone in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. We reiterate our call for full adherence to and respect for the provisions of that Agreement and underscore the need to prevent further escalation in the region.

Alongside the political instability in Syria, there is a worsening humanitarian crisis. The scale of needs in the country is staggering, and the mobilization of resources remains insufficient to meet the required level of support. The crisis has been further compounded by the return of more than 635,000 people since September 2024, many of whom are struggling to re-establish lives and livelihoods in communities that are uninhabitable, owing to extensive infrastructural damage.

The A3+ expresses grave concern about the critical funding gap for the humanitarian response plan for Syria and urges donors to fulfil their commitments, ensuring adequate funding for humanitarian assistance, including for the displaced population, 80 per cent of whom are women and children. We welcome the decision to renew the authorization for the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months until 7 August 2025. The A3+ urges all relevant actors to work together to expand and sustain humanitarian access across Syria, including through cross-line and cross-border mechanisms.

Furthermore, displaced Syrians continue to face immense hardships far from home, and their return is hindered by significant challenges related to protection, security and economic conditions. The A3+ underscores the importance of creating an environment that enables the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced Syrians to their homes, in line with international law and in coordination with United Nations agencies.

Such an environment cannot be established without an effective early recovery strategy for a prosperous economy, supported by regional and international partners. Reconstruction efforts are critical to a sustainable economic recovery in Syria. The A3+ takes note of the decisions by some actors to suspend or lift certain sanctions and calls for their full removal. Unilateral sanctions are hindering recovery efforts and impeding the safe return of Syrians to their homes. The A3+ stresses the need for a balanced approach that addresses humanitarian relief and long-term economic recovery, ensuring that no measures exacerbate the suffering of the Syrian people. The A3+ believes that a coordinated strategy ranging from humanitarian assistance to development is critical for Syria to overcome its current challenges. Without economic prosperity, Syria risks relapsing into violence, with millions of weapons beyond the control of the State.

Our responsibility towards the Syrian people is immense. We must rise to the moment and join forces to ensure that Syria's transition is successful. The success of Syria's transition will not only benefit its people but also contribute to regional and international peace and security. We cannot fail in that endeavour.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings.

It has been only two months since a long-elusive dream for the Syrian people to live a life in peace, freedom and prosperity became tangible and within reach. The interim authorities face a historic opportunity and an important responsibility to live up to the aspirations of the Syrian people. The international community has its own share of responsibility in helping to fulfil those aspirations. In that light, the core principles and objectives of resolution 2254 (2015) remain valid, and Special Envoy

Pedersen continues to enjoy our full support. In that regard, I would like to make three points.

First, there is no sustainable political solution without genuine inclusion. Syria's peaceful political transition is essential. It must succeed. Its success will be determined by all Syrians being genuinely protected and by all Syrians, women and men, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliations, being fully included in shaping Syria's future. Their rights must be protected and respected by a future Constitution that conforms with international human rights standards. A new, united Syria must use the voices of both civil society and women.

As a road map for a credible and inclusive transition begins to emerge, we encourage the interim authorities to continue to lead that process in a manner that is both credible and timely, and we welcome today's announcement about forming a preparatory committee for a national dialogue conference. We are encouraged by the interim authorities' initial engagement with the international community. That was confirmed in all the discussions held with our Minister for Foreign Affairs in Damascus last week. A constructive dialogue with neighbours and regional actors, along with continued cooperation with the United Nations, will be essential during the transitional period. We should point out that at the end of January the European Union's Foreign Ministers reached a political agreement on beginning to ease sanctions on Syria. That will give the Syrian economy a much-needed boost and help the Syrian people get back on their feet.

Secondly, there can be no sustainable peace without safety and security. We reiterate our call for protecting civilians and safeguarding critical infrastructure and humanitarian facilities. A large number of Syrians, among them many women and children, continue to live in life-threatening or undignified conditions. We welcome the scaling up of assistance, and we join the calls for additional international support for the efforts of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations. We call on all parties to cease any activity that could lead to further escalation. In that regard, respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Syria is imperative. The fighting in north-eastern Syria must stop. We need a solution that protects everyone's legitimate security interests and the rights of all.

We also remain deeply concerned about the situation in the Golan Heights and reiterate our call for full respect for the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces. We urge Israel to adhere to international law and withdraw from positions that compromise Syria's sovereignty and the demilitarized status of the buffer zone. It is imperative to ensure that no room is left in the new Syria for extremism and terrorism. It is equally important for Syria to close its chemical-weapons file for good. We expect Syria to fully comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Lastly, there is no lasting peace without accountability. It is particularly important to advance accountability efforts in order to lay the ground for transitional justice. Accountability and justice for victims will be essential to a stable and peaceful Syria. All the individuals responsible for breaches of international law, especially international humanitarian law and human rights law, some of which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. We call on all States to ensure that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice.

Mr. Alfaro de Alba (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the briefers, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Geir Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, for their valuable contributions. We also welcome the delegations of Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, Syria and Türkiye to today's meeting.

The transition in Syria has reached a key point in defining its future and ensuring a lasting and inclusive peace. Panama reaffirms that the process must be led by

Syrians, respect their sovereignty and territorial integrity and be guided by the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015), with the continuing support of the United Nations, which we consider essential. We also take note of the dissolution of the Syrian Constitution and recognize that the country's institutional future must be decided exclusively by its people. Stability and reconstruction in Syria require a legitimate political framework based on consensus and the rule of law. Any long, unjustified delays in Syria's political transition process, or in the process aimed at holding free elections that can yield clear and unquestionable results, would be counterproductive and worrisome.

However, the proposal for holding a national conference could be an important step that opens up an opportunity to better define the country's road map. Its success will depend on its inclusiveness, transparency and ability to reflect the legitimate aspirations of the entire Syrian population in a timely manner. Only a genuine and representative dialogue can enable a legitimate and sustainable political transition that guarantees stability, reconciliation and respect for human rights. The process should ensure the participation of all actors, including civil society, and the effective and safe inclusion of key groups, especially organizations of women and young people. Syria's stability continues to be affected by the persistence of fighting in various regions, in particular in the north-east, where violence continues to aggravate the humanitarian crisis and hamper reconciliation and recovery efforts.

In addition, the conflict's effects are being felt beyond its borders, generating tensions in neighbouring countries and affecting regional stability. Violations of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces in the Golan Heights have put the work of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in jeopardy, limiting its ability to carry out its monitoring mandate and increasing tension in the area. In addition, the recent clashes on the border between Syria and Lebanon have created a highly volatile situation that is affecting security in both countries. The presence of irregular armed groups in the region has worsened the tensions, prompting the Lebanese Armed Forces to mobilize reinforcements in the area to contain the violence and protect the civilian population. The use of missiles and drones in cross-border attacks puts entire communities at risk and could lead to an escalation with unpredictable consequences in the region.

More than a decade of conflict has led to a devastating humanitarian crisis and caused basic services to collapse, affecting critical infrastructure. Currently, 16.5 million people depend on humanitarian assistance, with 12.9 million food-insecure, and forced displacement continues to increase. International sanctions have posed an additional challenge to the delivery of humanitarian aid, affecting the ability to respond effectively to the needs of the population. For now, the Security Council should remain vigilant regarding any obstacles or circumstances that could affect the arrival of humanitarian assistance or Syria's economic recovery. On top of this, the presence of chemical weapons and unexploded ordnance continues to endanger the population, making it difficult to restore and safely return those who have been displaced. Such threats prolong instability and hamper reconstruction efforts in the country as well as posing an immediate risk to civilians. In that regard, Panama welcomed with optimism the recent visit to Damascus of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the resumption of dialogue with Syria's interim authorities after 11 years of stalemate, in a positive if insufficient step. The verifiable elimination of any remnants of Syria's chemical-weapons programme must be ensured in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Syria's future must be built on the will of its people and their legitimate right to live in peace. Panama reiterates its commitment to all initiatives that promote an inclusive and sustainable reconciliation process, based on respect for the dignity

and rights of all Syrians and on strengthening justice and creating the conditions for ensuring the necessary accountability.

Mr. Sekeris (Greece): Let me start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings and invaluable work.

Syria's stability is pivotal for the whole region. Greece has long-standing economic, political and cultural relations with Syria, and we want to open a new chapter in our ties and contribute to the stability and prosperity of that country. That is why our Foreign Minister visited Damascus last Sunday to convey that message. At the same time, we have certain expectations of the de facto authorities in Syria.

In that respect, I wish to underscore four points.

First, only an inclusive political transition will be viable in Syria. We expect a fully inclusive political transition, including all Syrian voices — for instance, Christians, Druze and the Kurds — towards a fully representative and non-sectarian Government that will prepare a constitutional reform and lead towards elections in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015). The only sustainable path forward is one of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, fully inclusive political process that is free of foreign interference, following an inclusive national dialogue. Any alternative would sow the seeds of future instability, which the brave Syrian people can simply not afford.

We took careful note of Mr. Al-Sharaa's appointment as President for a transitional phase and of his being bestowed the ability to appoint a transitional legislative body. We are carefully monitoring how that will affect the political process. We would eagerly welcome additional clarity in that regard. We should spare no effort to ensure the integration of all affected male and female civilians, including the vibrant Christian community and all religious and ethnic groups, in the political life of the country. Safeguarding Syria's rich cultural heritage and religious monuments is also key.

Secondly, the humanitarian and security situation must be urgently addressed. Greece is particularly worried about the humanitarian conditions on the ground. Syrian infrastructure is largely devastated, and food and electricity are scarce in large swathes of the country, while fighting ensues, particularly in cities in the north and north-east. Meanwhile, the real risk of the resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups remains. ISIL operates in pockets of Syrian land. It is crucial that we prevent its potential re-emergence — a substantial menace to neighbouring countries and regional stability. The threat of non-conventional weapons must also be addressed. Syria must abide by all relevant Security Council resolutions, demonstrating a clear willingness to cooperate with the international community, particularly on chemical weapons stockpiles. We are encouraged by the positive signs of cooperation between the de facto authorities and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We call for its sustained contribution.

Thirdly, the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees must remain on our collective horizon. Syrians deserve to go home and contribute to rebuilding their country. We fully support the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in that regard, along with collective efforts to restore shelters and critical infrastructure in Syria, contributing to the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees. We have noted the willingness of many Syrians to explore the conditions for their return, and the international community must rise to that occasion.

Of course, we take careful note of appeals for the suspension of sanctions. The European Union (EU) Foreign Ministers recently agreed on opening the discussion for a step-by-step easing of some sectoral sanctions on Syria to assist its recovery.

The EU collectively sent a signal of willingness to re-engage with Syria while also advising caution and laying out its expectations for a fully inclusive political process, namely, Syria's commitment to fully respecting international law, including — let me stress — the international law of the sea, and respect for the sovereignty and sovereign rights of neighbouring countries. In that respect, the EU's steps are conditional and reversible.

Fourthly, we call on all parties to respect the unity, independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria. Deeply concerned by systematic violations of Syria's sovereignty, we expect all actors to contribute responsibly and sincerely to the stabilization and reconciliation efforts of the international community. All regional stakeholders must refrain from acts that could jeopardize the political transition in the country for the sake of their own foreign or domestic policy objectives. In the north-east, we are particularly concerned by threats against the Kurds, who have been critical partners in the fight against ISIL. Escalation and provocative rhetoric do not help. We cannot afford another conflagration in the region. We should not — and cannot — ignore that the Kurdish element has been critical in containing the resurgence of terrorism. Furthermore, Greece expresses its full support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the implementation of its mandate and calls for respect of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

A new era emerged for Syrians on 8 December 2024. There is a path towards a prosperous, stable and inclusive Syria. To get there, we believe that the Council's message must be clear: international legitimacy and recognition lie at the end of a fully inclusive political path, with strong and inclusive State institutions and with respect of international law. Those are critical elements for ensuring regional stability and promoting Syria's long-term security and prosperity.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya for their comprehensive briefings and update.

Pakistan values its historic ties with the brotherly people of Syria, who have endured immense hardship due to internal divisions and external interventions. The Prime Minister of Pakistan has welcomed Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa's assumption of office as President during this transitional phase. The recent political developments present an opportunity to restore normalcy, stability and peace in Syria. We hope that the new leadership will guide Syria towards peace, stability and prosperity. We take note of the assurance from the caretaker Foreign Minister today in Dubai that a new Government will be launched on 1 March and will represent the Syrian people as much as possible and take its diversity into account.

We also recognize the efforts of regional and international partners in supporting Syria's stability. In that regard, Pakistan welcomes the Riyadh meetings on Syria hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 12 January. Such initiatives play an important role in advancing dialogue, fostering an inclusive and peaceful political transition and supporting Syria's reconstruction within the framework of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process. Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be fully respected. Israel's continued military actions and its declared intent to maintain an indefinite presence in the areas of separation are blatant violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Those illegal actions must be condemned, and Syria's territorial integrity must be upheld, including through Israeli withdrawal from the areas of separation and from the occupied Golan Heights.

The key principles of resolution 2254 (2015) can serve as useful guidelines in promoting political inclusion and internal consensus. A strong and unified national security framework is key to ensuring Syria's long-term stability and preventing external interference. We are concerned about the reported continuation of incidents

of violence in various parts of Syria. Syria must not become a safe haven for terrorism. The presence of foreign fighters and groups with known terrorist affiliation requires vigilance. Any resurgence of Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and their affiliated groups must be prevented. We are also concerned about reports of the inclusion of foreign terrorist groups in Syria's governing and security structure. No foreign fighters or armed entities, such as those in north-east Syria, should be allowed to operate outside the State's control. The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team should continue to assess and report on the situation.

The humanitarian situation remains dire. More than 16.5 million Syrians require urgent assistance, making that one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history. Food insecurity, a collapsing healthcare system and a struggling education sector require immediate international attention and support. Yet, humanitarian funding remains severely inadequate, as we have heard. The international community must step up its efforts to meet Syria's urgent humanitarian needs and support long-term recovery.

Sanctions remain a major obstacle to Syria's recovery. Unilateral sanctions, originally imposed on the former leadership, now primarily harm the Syrian people. Those must be reassessed and reviewed to facilitate economic recovery and humanitarian relief. And United Nations sanctions should also be periodically reviewed to ensure they do not impede Syria's reconstruction while maintaining vigilance against terrorist-affiliated entities. A balanced and pragmatic approach is needed to address the economic hardships and the humanitarian crisis.

In conclusion, the path to peace and stability in Syria requires a credible political transition, national unity and an inclusive governance framework. The international community must remain engaged and constructive in supporting that process. Pakistan stands firmly with the brotherly and resilient people of Syria.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their very informative briefings today.

I will make three points.

First, a little over two months have passed since the interim authorities took control of Damascus, offering hope for a brighter and more peaceful future for the Syrian people. We are encouraged by the efforts made in the weeks since, and we welcome the interim authorities' pledges to form an inclusive transitional Government, leading to free and fair elections.

We welcome the engagement among the Special Envoy, his Office and the interim authorities and his plans to return to Damascus shortly. As the Special Envoy has said, Syria's political transition cannot afford to fail.

As Syrians take the next steps towards a political process, we expect to see appointments to the transitional Government and the recently announced Legislative Council and the Preparatory Committee, which represent the diversity of Syrian society. We hope there will be a clear process and timeline for the next phase of the transition, which respects the rights and safety of all Syrians.

Secondly, we have been clear, as others have too, that Syrians should chart their own future and that a political process should be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led. However, as Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya both reminded us, it is essential that the international community step in and support, as the challenges are vast, and the humanitarian needs acute. It is imperative that the United Nations, alongside the international community, play a vital role in supporting Syrians to stabilize and then rebuild their country. The deep scars and damage of over a decade of conflict cannot be healed in a matter of months.

Last week the United Kingdom, working with the World Food Programme, committed over $3.7 million to the Grain from Ukraine initiative, which will enable Ukraine to support the most vulnerable Syrians and alleviate suffering. Therefore, we endorse the Special Envoy's call for us to also take the opportunity to scale up early recovery and sustainable programming to enable Syrians to feed themselves, keep the lights on, create jobs and build a better future.

Finally, we welcome the visit to Damascus of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on 8 February. That marks a positive step forward. We must use this window of opportunity and work to support the OPCW and Syria to declare and destroy Al-Assad's remaining chemical weapons programme for a more stable and secure Syria.

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

After several years of war and violence, Syria has embarked on a phase of historic transition that has raised many hopes. During this phase, France is ready to stand by the Syrian people and support the transition. That is the message that the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, conveyed to Ahmed Al-Sharaa, interim President of the Syrian transitional authorities, during their conversation on 5 February.

France and the European Union have already taken initiatives along those lines, in particular the partial lifting of economic sanctions on 27 January. The ministerial conference on Syria, which France will host tomorrow, will be another opportunity to express the international community's support for the transition. Ahead of the conference, we will also organize an exchange on humanitarian assistance, development and reconstruction.

The Syrian people need international solidarity. We must pay particular attention to the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. It is essential to support the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to help refugees who so wish to return to Syria.

With regard to the transition process, we have taken note of the announcements on 29 and 30 January, which have raised many expectations among Syrians. It is essential that a peaceful and inclusive transition in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015) be put in place. The implementation of the national dialogue and the presentation of a clear timetable for the transition would reassure the Syrians and their partners. We support the efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen to support the process. The United Nations, with its expertise and in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015), has an important role to play.

The mechanisms to combat impunity and the search for missing persons can also contribute to reconciliation and political transition.

At the same time, there is an urgent need to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing hostilities in the country. That is the case in the north-east, where any solution must preserve the security interests and the rights of all, in particular the Syrian Kurds, while respecting Syria's territorial integrity.

We must also continue the fight against terrorism, in particular against Da'esh. We must not forget that it was from Syrian territory that the November 2015 attacks in Paris were conceived, and we know that terrorist groups continue to operate in the region.

The utmost vigilance must be exercised with regard to the dissemination of weapons, in particular those from Syria's chemical programme. The fall of the previous regime provides an opportunity to destroy those weapons. The meeting of

the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons with the Syrian authorities is a positive first step.

Finally, France is following the developments in the Golan Heights with concern. It calls on Israel to withdraw from the area and to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, which is binding on both Israel and Syria. France reiterates its full support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, whose security must be maintained.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings.

The Syrian people, who have long been mired in suffering and hardship caused by war and chaos, are longing for the return of peace and stability to their country so that they can start a life of calm and dignity as soon as possible. At this critical juncture, it is important for the international community to provide constructive assistance to Syria. China supports the promotion of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process and the achievement of a solution that meets the aspirations of all Syrian people through inclusive dialogue and consultations. Resolution 2254 (2015) embodies the basic consensus within the international community and provides important guidance for addressing the Syrian issue. It remains valid in the current situation. The holding of the National Dialogue Conference is a key step in the political transition for which a clear timetable should be set as soon as possible and implemented steadily. China supports the active role played by the United Nations and the Special Envoy in this process, as well as the efforts of the League of Arab States to help Syria in its political transition and reconstruction. Syria must not become a safe haven for terrorists. That is the bottom line that must be adhered to.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2025/72) points out that Syria serves as a centre for the planning of terrorist activities and that terrorist organizations may seek to strengthen their position by exploiting the recent sudden change in the situation in Syria. The international community should therefore remain highly vigilant in that regard. The protracted presence of large numbers of foreign terrorist fighters in Syria has created a hidden security risk. China supports speeding up the process of repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters and calls on the countries concerned to take back their nationals.

At the same time, China urges Syria to fulfil its counter-terrorism obligations and to combat all terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party, in order to prevent them from threatening the security of other countries.

As we heard just now from the briefings, the current humanitarian situation in Syria is extremely dire, and it is worrisome to see that the survival and development of tens of millions of people is at stake. China appreciates the efforts of United Nations agencies to scale up humanitarian assistance to Syria under very difficult conditions. The illegal unilateral sanctions on Syria imposed by one country has caused great harm to the Syrian people. China's consistent position is that such measures should not have existed in the first place. In order to meet the needs of humanitarian assistance and the development of Syria it is necessary to take actions to eliminate the negative impact of those measures.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the sovereignty, independence, unity and territory integrity of Syria should be respected under all circumstances. Resolution 497 (1981), on the Golan, and the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement

between Israeli and Syrian Forces must be implemented. China urges Israel to withdraw from Syrian territory without delay.

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*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, and your delegation on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. You can rely on our support and our trust in your able leadership of the work of the Council. We also thank the Permanent Mission of Algeria for its successful management of the Council's affairs last month.

I express my country's solidarity and sympathy with Greece and its people following the series of earthquakes that struck the Greek island of Santorini, which coincide with the anniversary of the devastating earthquake and its aftershocks that Syria witnessed on these very days, two years ago. I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Joyce Msuya, for their briefings.

Syria has embarked on a transitional phase that was launched and outlined during the Conference for Announcing the Victory of the Syrian Revolution, held in Damascus on 29 January 2025. The Conference concluded with a set of decisions that mark a new era in Syria's political history, including the abolition of the 2012 Constitution and all the exceptional laws — the dissolution of the People's Assembly, the army, all security agencies, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party and the parties of the National Progressive Front. It also included the dissolution of all military factions and revolutionary political and civil bodies and their integration into State institutions. The Conference also decided to appoint Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa as the country's President during the transitional phase to carry out the duties of the presidency and representation of the country at the international level and to authorize him to form an interim legislative council to assume the legislative functions until a permanent constitution for the country is ratified and enters into effect.

During the transitional phase, work will be undertaken to preserve Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and to achieve its renaissance through the genuine participation of all Syrians — men, women and young persons inside and outside the country — with a view to building their future in freedom and dignity, without exclusion or marginalization. Work is also under way to form a comprehensive transitional Government that reflects the diversity and richness of Syria with all its components, men and women. That Government will undertake the work of building the new Syria's institutions until we reach a stage of free and fair elections.

Under his mandate as President of the country during the transitional phase, the President of the Republic will announce a Preparatory Committee to select a smaller legislative council to fill the current void. Today the President made a declaration to define the Members to the National Dialogue Conference, which will constitute a direct platform for consultations and the presentation of various viewpoints on the upcoming political programme leading up to the Constitutional Declaration, which will determine the identity of the State and the nature of its future regime. It will also be the legal reference for the transitional phase.

Accordingly, our focus during the coming period will be on the following priorities.

First, we must achieve civil peace and establish genuine transitional justice that guarantees the accountability of criminals whose hands have been stained with the blood of Syrians.

Secondly, we must unite the Syrian territories, uphold the authority of the State and the rule of law over all its territories and restrict weapons to the State.

Thirdly, we must build strong institutions based on competence, justice, integrity and participation.

Fourthly, we must establish the foundations of a strong economy that provides real and decent job opportunities to improve living conditions, restore basic services and embark on the path of development.

My Government reaffirms its commitment to build friendly relations with all countries on the basis of mutual respect and common interests. It emphasizes that the new Syria will not be a haven for terrorism or a threat to any country — neighbour or otherwise. Recently, Syria has witnessed and continues to witness intense political and diplomatic momentum to inaugurate a new phase premised on strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations with countries of the region and other United Nations Member States in order to contribute to preserving international peace and security and upholding the values of friendly relations and cooperation among Member States.

That approach is also reflected in multilateral engagement and the reinforcement of partnerships with the United Nations. Syrians are eagerly awaiting improved humanitarian and living condition and basic services, especially electricity, as well as economic recovery, reconstruction and a return to a path towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Immediate action is therefore necessary to avoid disappointing them. They need a qualitative shift that meets their aspirations and rewards them for the sacrifices they have made and the hardships they have endured, ensuring that a better Syria can be created by Syrians for all Syrians. The Syrian Government has demonstrated great openness in that regard, receiving numerous United Nations delegations and relevant international bodies with a view to ushering in a new era of cooperation in a number of areas, especially on the humanitarian front. That includes investigating the fate of the missing and the people who were disappeared by the former regime and its security services and returning the martyrs' remains to their families, bringing them closure and ending their suffering.

As the Council heard from Ms. Msuya, in its ongoing cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs the Syrian Government has extended its authorization to the United Nations and its specialized agencies to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for a further six months until 7 August, so that humanitarian aid can be delivered to all Syrians in need. In the past two months refugees and internally displaced persons have begun to return to their homes, but there are still numerous obstacles to large-scale, dignified and voluntary returns. They are primarily the result of extensive damage to infrastructure and public and private property, a lack of essential services — especially electricity, which continues to be an urgent need in most areas — the limited availability of medical and relief supplies, a deteriorating economic situation and widespread contamination by landmines and explosive remnants. Given the colossal needs, humanitarian relief workers are sounding the alarm about the lack of funding for the humanitarian response in Syria. By the end of last year, only 34.5 per cent of the 2024 humanitarian response plan had been covered. At this critical juncture the funding has fallen short, and it is very important, at a watershed moment in Syria's history, that the international community respond effectively to the needs of the Syrian people by stepping up its financial and humanitarian support.

Amid those developments, sanctions remain a major obstacle to economic recovery and to a climate conducive to the return of refugees. While Syria welcomes the six-month exemptions and exceptions granted by the United States and the decision of the European Union to suspend the sanctions on several key sectors for a

year, we look forward to seeing the sanctions on the Syrian people lifted completely, as they are detrimental to a number of aspects of daily life. We are hopeful that tomorrow's Aqaba 3 conference in Paris will send an unequivocal message that calls for lifting the sanctions and supporting Syrians at this pivotal stage in their country's history.

The Israeli occupation army has continued to infringe on Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity in violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Its forces have illegally crossed the lines of the area of separation without justification or provocation. They have conducted incursions dozens of kilometres into Syrian territory, seized large swathes of territory estimated at hundreds of square kilometres in and around Quneitra governorate and Jabal Al-Shaykh and stretching as far as Rif Dimashq and Dara'a governorates. In the course of those illegal incursions, they have conducted raids against the areas' residents, confiscating their property and displacing or abducting a number of them. They have bulldozed large areas of agricultural land, established military posts and inflicted harsh conditions and inhumane treatment on civilians. They have also built bases and military observation posts and undertaken engineering works, including constructing a helipad on Jabal Al-Shaykh, exposing the falsity of the Israeli occupation authorities' claims about the temporary and limited nature of their hostile and entirely unjustifiable actions against Syria.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms Israel's flagrant aggressions against its territory and reiterates its call to the Security Council to assume its responsibilities by taking firm and immediate measures to compel Israel to end its occupation of the Syrian Golan, immediately halt its ongoing aggression against Syrian territory, withdraw immediately and unconditionally from all the areas it has entered, fully adhere to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, respect the mandates of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and ensure the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

The Syrian people look forward to leaving an era of pain and suffering behind. We believe our country has what it takes to make progress, above all human capital, natural resources and an unwavering will and determination. We are able and determined to do our utmost to make a success of this pivotal phase and lead our country towards a bright future that is worthy of Syria, its people, its rich civilization and its human heritage, while building a State founded on law, justice and equality. We urge the Council to stand by Syria at this critical juncture, as it embarks on a brighter future that fosters security and stability in the region and avoids the bleak scenarios presented by actors with ill intentions towards Syria and its people. They are fomenting division by spreading hate speech, inciting violence and sowing discord, particularly through their misuse of social media platforms. Syria will remain a nation for all of its people — one that takes pride in its rich religious, ethnic and cultural diversity and eschews divisive terms such as "minorities" or "majorities", along with any other destructive narratives.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I extend my hearty congratulations to China on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, Mr. President. I also warmly commend Algeria for its successful leadership and conclusion of its presidency in January. We thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General Msuya for their briefings and their support for the constructive engagement of the United Nations with the Syrian caretaker authorities

to improve the current situation in Syria. Given that situation, I would like to make the following points.

First, Syria continues to face significant humanitarian and economic challenges. Addressing those issues will require prioritizing the rebuilding of critical infrastructure and the restoration of essential services, particularly early-recovery projects that are vital to the country's reconstruction efforts. However, those efforts are severely hindered by the unjust and unlawful extraterritorial sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union. Temporary relief and limited humanitarian exemptions from those illegal measures are not sustainable solutions. They should be fully lifted, as they do disproportionate harm to the most vulnerable population groups, violate the fundamental rights of the Syrian people, and obstruct the country's recovery. Equally importantly, removing those illegal measures is essential to creating the conditions necessarily for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of all Syrian refugees and displaced persons.

Secondly, the resurgence of terrorism in Syria is an escalating and urgent threat. The presence of foreign terrorist fighters with conflicting agendas has exacerbated instability, jeopardizing both regional and global security. As the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism warned in this Chamber (see S/PV.9856), the risk that stockpiles of advanced weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists remains a serious concern. An estimated 42,500 individuals, some with alleged links to Da'esh, remain in detention camps in north-eastern Syria. A structured, accountable process for repatriation is essential to restoring stability in Syria and the broader region. Foreign terrorist fighters must be returned to their countries of origin, held accountable through legal proceedings and prevented from posing further threats. Iran remains firmly committed to combating terrorism and is prepared to cooperate with legitimate international partners to address those critical challenges.

Thirdly, the rights of all communities must be fully respected in accordance with international law, and any political pressure and harassment aimed at displacing minorities in Syria, particularly Alawites and Shiites, must cease immediately. Likewise, safeguarding Syrian religious sites is crucial to preserving the country's identity and unity. In that context, all communities should have unrestricted access to their religious places and be able to practice their rituals freely without fear of persecution, intimidation or arrest.

Fourthly, Israel continues to be a serious threat to Syria, repeatedly violating Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Defying all of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the regime refuses to withdraw from the occupied Golan Heights. With United States support, Israel has expanded its occupation and systematically dismantled Syria's military and research infrastructure. The Council should take decisive action to stop those violations and compel Israel to withdraw from all the occupied Syrian territory.

Fifthly, Iran once again reaffirms its unwavering commitment to Syrian sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. Syria's future should be determined by its people alone, free from any external interference or impositions. Iran supports the formation of an inclusive Government through free elections and a comprehensive national dialogue, ensuring fair representation for all Syrians. Resolution 2254 (2015) provides a clear framework for that, with constitutional reform a key priority. Furthermore, Iran underscores Syria's rightful and well-deserved place in the international community, emphasizing its commitment to international and bilateral obligations while safeguarding its sovereignty.

Sixthly, we categorically and unequivocally reject the baseless allegations that the representative of the United States made about my country. The accusations are not only unfounded but appear to be made solely to distort truth and reality on

the ground and mislead the international community. Regrettably, such claims are neither surprising nor unexpected. They are merely a product of directives from Washington, which finds it necessary to make accusations about Iran at every Security Council meeting. But the facts speak for themselves. Under the pretext of counter-terrorism, the United States has repeatedly violated Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity for many years and provided a safe haven for terrorist groups and for Israel's occupation regime to further its geopolitical ambitions.

In conclusion, Iran remains dedicated to playing a constructive role, working in coordination with the United Nations, regional partners and the Syrian Government, which represents the will of the Syrian people, with a view to achieving lasting peace and stability in Syria and the broader region. In that context, we fully support the efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and stress that the United Nations must play a central role in that process.

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

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We congratulate you, Mr. President, on presiding over the Security Council this month, and we align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Group of Arab States. We thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy, and Ms. Joyce Msuya, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their comprehensive briefings.

The State of Qatar is proud of the firm position it has taken over the past 13 years in standing alongside our brother people of Syria and in our firm support for their demands for a life of dignity, freedom and social justice. That firm position has led to our resumption of our close fraternal ties with the Syrian Arab Republic. The official visit to Damascus on 30 January by His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, was the first by a Head of State following the historic changes in Syria. He congratulated Syria's President, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa, on the Syrian revolution's victory and his selection to lead the country in its transitional period, reaffirming Qatar's position in support of Syria's unity, sovereignty and independence. In that regard, Qatar welcomes the positive steps that the new Syrian Administration has taken, particularly in maintaining civilian safety and the stability of State institutions, ensuring the continuity of public services and securing the essential needs of the Syrian people. We also welcome the steps that have been taken with a view to restructuring Syria and strengthening consensus and unity among all Syrian parties, paving the way for consolidating civil peace, security and stability and building a State based on law, institutions and development. Those steps represent the start of a new era that will enable the Syrian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations for freedom, justice and peace.

The current phase requires a State monopoly over weaponry through a single army that reflects all the components of Syrian society, without exception, in order to protect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. Our brother Syrian people have made immense sacrifices and deserve the acknowledgement and support of the international community for their national project. Based on our moral responsibility towards our brothers in Syria and in order to improve their humanitarian and living conditions, the State of Qatar has established an air bridge to deliver humanitarian assistance. So far we have sent 13 military aircraft, carrying a total of 378 tons of aid. We have also pledged technical support for restoring infrastructure, including support for the electricity sector, which will help to improve the operational capacity of more than 10 regions of Syria. With Qatar and Türkiye's sponsorship, a housing project for sheltering the displaced, equipped with basic service facilities, was recently launched in Al-Amal in northern Syria. The current humanitarian situation calls for strengthening joint international efforts to

increase humanitarian assistance and ensure its unhindered access to all the areas of Syria affected.

Given that the reasons for imposing sanctions on Syria no longer exist, and considering the negative impact that they have had on the Syrian people, Qatar therefore calls for lifting them. We would like to point to the statement on the situation in Syria issued on 26 December 2024 at the forty-sixth extraordinary meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), which called for lifting the sanctions in order to empower Syria economically. It also called on all partners, countries and organizations to provide all possible support to the Syrian people, stressing that the GCC countries would continue to provide humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar condemns the Israeli occupation's seizure of the buffer zone with the sister Syrian Arab Republic and adjacent areas, which is a dangerous development and a blatant violation of Syria's sovereignty and unity and of international law. We warn against the policy of fait accompli adopted by the Israeli occupation, which will lead to further violence and tension in the region. We stress the need for the international community to shoulder its legal and moral responsibility to compel the occupation to comply with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

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

Mr. Albanai (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to express my gratitude to Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his valuable briefing. I also thank Ms. Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for her unwavering efforts to strengthen the international humanitarian system, particularly her valuable participation in the launch event of the 2025 Global Humanitarian Overview, which Kuwait hosted in December.

For 13 years, Syria, a land of civilization and history, has suffered under the repercussions of one of the bloodiest wars that the world has seen in the past three decades. While it endured deep wounds that it has been unable to heal, it has not bowed down or given in to despair. But its economy has been weakened, violence has increased, and terrorist groups have found in Syria a breeding ground for their destructive activities. We must therefore do all we can to fight terrorism, and we must work together in that fight, because it poses a threat not only to Syria but to the security of the region and the world. Defeating it is an absolute priority. The security and stability of Syria are crucial to security and stability in the region. The Group of Arab States will stand with our brother people of Syria in the process of rebuilding a unified, independent, stable and secure Syrian Arab State for all its citizens, free from terrorism and extremism, while preserving its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

The Group of Arab States reaffirms its full and principled solidarity with the Syrian Arab Republic in protecting its unity, territorial integrity, sovereignty, security and stability and the safety of its citizens. Today it is undergoing a historic and sensitive transition. Failure is not an option, which is why we must make concerted regional and international efforts to support Syria and its people at a delicate and pivotal stage. We must also promote transitional justice, in line with the approved judicial mechanisms. We must encourage Syria's national unity and inclusive dialogue mechanisms, work to improve the humanitarian situation and advance reconstruction, implement

governance reforms and create conditions conducive to the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their areas of origin. We must support efforts to ascertain the fate of those who are missing or the whereabouts of their remains and that the necessary and full international assistance is delivered. We must ensure the continuity and sustainability of Government institutions. We must protect the rights of all Syrians, regardless of their race or religious affiliation, free of sectarian quotas, under the auspices of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, in accordance with an inclusive, Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process that includes all components of the Syrian people and their national forces and with the principles of resolution 2254 (2015).

Given the difficult economic situation in Syria, it is vital that we work to overcome every obstacle if we are to see our brother people of Syria achieve their legitimate aspirations and ensure their right to a just and comprehensive economic recovery. The Group of Arab States welcomes the continuing dialogue between Syria and the United Nations on all political and humanitarian tracks, aimed at improving the situation in Syria and opening humanitarian crossings, including Bab Al-Hawa, which has been reopened for another six months, thanks to positive and much-appreciated efforts. We underscore the importance of being open to cooperating with the United Nations and continuing the efforts to extend access to humanitarian aid to all segments of the Syrian people.

We need a political process that includes the various components of the Syrian people, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we reiterate the importance of using the current international momentum to achieve a sustainable qualitative leap on the humanitarian, economic and service fronts so as to enable the Syrian people to rebuild their homeland as they wish and as befits their history and future. In that context, we count on the efforts of the international community to meet the urgent needs of all segments of the Syrian people. We must ensure that their suffering is alleviated, the chances of achieving stability and development in the country are enhanced and acute food insecurity is addressed. We must maintain and rebuild basic services, especially those related to health, access to clean water and electricity, and we must identify and remove mines, traps and other detritus. We must combat epidemics and confront the broad spread of chemical pollutants and their catastrophic health and environmental repercussions. We must do all that by taking concrete practical steps to meet the urgent and basic needs of the Syrian people.

The Group of Arab States condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing and growing incursion of the occupying Power into the buffer zone with Syria and the series of adjacent positions in the governorates of Mount Hermon, Quneitra and Rif Dimashq on the outskirts of Damascus, stealing Syria’s resources and bulldozing its land in what amounts to an additional occupation and a flagrant violation of international law.

We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from all Syrian Arab territories and compliance with the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). We affirm that the Golan Heights is occupied Syrian Arab territory, and we call for support for the mandates of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in order to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities, in particular those related to monitoring and reconnaissance operations, as stipulated in the resolution pursuant to which they were established. We call on the Security Council to take all necessary and urgent measures to stop the unilateral Israeli violations, especially the violation of Syrian territorial sovereignty and the continued large-scale Israeli air strikes, and to compel the occupying Power

to respect Syria's sovereignty over all its territories, including the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

In conclusion, the Arab Group affirms the importance of the commitment of all to the unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We reject any attempt to divide Syria or any foreign interference in Syrian affairs. We reiterate our firm and unwavering position in support of the Syrian Arab Republic, as Syria's security is our security, Syria's sustainability is our sustainability, and the aspirations of the Syrian people are our aspirations. We affirm our full support for the brotherly Syrian people, and we stand with them at all levels in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. May Allah the Almighty grant us success and guide us.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I am grateful to Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Msuya for their briefings. We commend the engagement of the United Nations with the new Administration, as Syria needs the Organization's expertise and technical input in this transitional period.

The Syrian people now have a historic opportunity to rebuild their country and shape their future. The international community must extend a helping hand to Syrians. Alongside humanitarian aid, the reconstruction of critical infrastructure and economic recovery are urgently needed. That is essential for improving Syrians' living conditions and encouraging the voluntary return of displaced Syrians to their homeland.

Türkiye welcomes the issuance of a general licence by the United States and the European Union's latest decision on easing sanctions. However, those are not enough. We hope to see additional sanctions relief steps, especially regarding reconstruction efforts and new investments, without imposing preconditions, especially on the energy sector. We also encourage the Council to seriously consider the delisting measures. We cannot afford to miss the opportunity to make possible a stable Syria that can deliver for its people.

Türkiye has always supported the aspirations of the Syrian people and the objectives of the Syrian revolution. My country has embraced millions of displaced Syrians, stepped in to protect Syria's territorial integrity and unity and worked with regional and international stakeholders to advance the political process. Türkiye continues to stand firm in its commitment to ensuring a stable, unified and secure Syria. In addition to the Turkish Embassy in Damascus, our Consulate General in Aleppo resumed its operations.

Türkiye is in close dialogue with the new Administration. After the visit of Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani in January, we hosted President Ahmed Al-Sharaa last week. We underlined the importance of inclusive and representative governance and of national reconciliation in our meetings. We hope that new State structures in the political transition process will be established with broad public support and transparency. The leadership and ownership of the Syrian people, with the support of the United Nations, will be essential for the success of the transition process.

Türkiye encourages the international community and the Syrian diaspora to constructively engage with the new Administration. We welcome the visit of Director-General Fernando Arias of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and his team to Damascus. We will continue to support the cooperation between the OPCW and Syria in eliminating chemical weapons and identifying the perpetrators.

There is no place for either Da'esh or Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units (YPG)/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the future of Syria.

Putting an end to the existence of those terrorist groups is a prerequisite for a peaceful, independent and politically unified Syria. Türkiye appreciates the new Administration's determination to fight terrorism, and it is ready to cooperate with Syria in that regard. YPG/SDF cannot be considered a distinct entity from PKK, as they themselves have declared. The so-called SDF is not a legitimate representative of Syrian Kurds. That terrorist organization's occupation of the north-east is a threat to Syria's territorial integrity and local residents. Its exploitation of Syria's natural gas and oil resources must end. Those resources should be returned to their rightful owners, the Syrian people, to be utilized in building a prosperous Syria.

Non-Syrian elements within those terrorist organizations must leave the country. The remainder of YPG/PKK elements should lay down all their arms. Terrorist organizations in north-east Syria use Da'esh camps and prisons for propaganda to justify their existence. Now, it is time to transfer the security of those camps and prisons to the new Administration. Türkiye is ready to provide all possible support to Syria in that regard. We also call for Da'esh detainees held in the camps and prisons to be repatriated to their countries of origin. Those countries should be ready to take their citizens.

Israel's incursions into Syrian territories are a source of grave concern. Their ongoing military activities in Syria violate Syria's sovereignty and undermine efforts to bring stability to the region as a whole. We condemn Israel's continuing advance into Syrian territory, and we call on the Council to take immediate and decisive action to ensure an end to the Israeli presence in Syria.

Türkiye will spare no effort in providing the necessary support to Syria for recovery and reconstruction during this transition process. We encourage the international community to mobilize all the resources required in that regard. The preservation of Syria's stability, territorial integrity and unity is our utmost priority. It is vital that we all collaborate to prevent any actions that could undermine those fundamental principles.

In conclusion, let me recall that Türkiye has never left the Syrian people — not even when the brutal conflict was at its peak — and it will continue to stand with Syria in the post-conflict period and in peacetime**.**

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.