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Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

Provisional

9798th meeting
Tuesday, 3 December 2024, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Wood	(United States of America)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Gaouaoui
	China	Mr. Fu Cong
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Ms. Persaud
	Japan	Mr. Mikanagi
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sierra Leone	Ms. Karim
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Switzerland	Mrs. Chanda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, 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 intend to invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Mr. Raed Al Saleh, Director of the White Helmets.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Before this meeting begins, I wish to draw attention to the totally inadmissible policy of the United States presidency, which, regrettably, has been abusing its powers since the very first day.

This meeting was convened at the request of the three African members of the Council and Guyana, and the initiative was supported by Russia and the People's Republic of China. Not a single Western delegation, including the United States itself in its national capacity, supported that request. Apparently, they are not the least bit concerned about the situation in Syria, which has been subject to an unprecedented terrorist attack that was clearly coordinated from abroad. Well, this is not a ceremonial Security Council meeting like those held on the hackneyed Ukrainian issue for the purpose of scoring points with domestic audiences.

The United States presidency has taken things a step further. In breach of established practice and without any consultation with those delegations that requested that this meeting be held, they single-handedly added another briefer — a representative of the heinous non-governmental organization known as the "White Helmets". The White Helmets, as is well known, have been repeatedly implicated in large-scale falsifications that were geared towards vilifying the Syrian authorities. They have no expertise whatsoever when it comes to what is currently transpiring in Aleppo. At this critical juncture, in which the Council has an obligation to express solidarity with the Syrian State in the face of the terrorist threat, the American presidency is attempting to sow division in its ranks by politicizing the discussion. That policy by the United States is unworthy of a permanent member of the Security Council. We demand a vote on the participation of the additional briefer, and we call on the members of the Security Council to vote against the proposal of the United States.

The President: The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I just wanted to say that we fully support the inclusion of Mr. Al Saleh in today's meeting. He and the White Helmets have worked tirelessly over 10 years, risking their lives to save the lives of those worst affected by the conflict in Syria, and it is only right that he should be able to share his experience of the ongoing violence with us today.

The President: In view of the comments made by Council members, I propose to put to the vote the proposal to extend an invitation to Mr. Raed Al Saleh, Director of the White Helmets, under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, to provide a briefing to the Security Council under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East".

I shall now put the proposal to the vote.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:
Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:
China, Russian Federation

Abstaining:
Algeria, Mozambique

The President: The proposal received 11 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 2 abstentions. The proposal to invite Mr. Raed Al Saleh has been adopted.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: In the past week, we have seen dramatic shifts in the front lines in the Syrian Arab Republic, radically altering a status quo that had been largely in place for well over four years. The situation is extremely fluid and dangerous, but as I brief the Security Council today, a vast swathe of territory has come under the control of non-State actors, including Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and armed opposition groups, including the Syrian National Army. Those groups now de facto control territory containing what we estimate to be some 7 million people, including Aleppo, Syria's second biggest city and a vast and diverse metropolis of more than 2 million people.

On 27 November, the Al-Fatah Al-Mubin joint operations room — a coalition containing both Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and armed opposition groups — launched a ground operation with drone cover across agreed de-escalation lines, taking de facto control of almost the entirety of the Aleppo and Idlib governorates. Syrian Government forces have since regrouped and established defensive lines in Hama, repelling some fighters. But as I speak here this afternoon, those lines are being severely tested, with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and armed opposition groups gaining ground today, advancing very close to Hama — a major city of some 1 million people. Pro-Government air strikes have intensified in recent days, with reports of strikes on both military and civilian targets, including civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, causing civilian casualties. As Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and armed opposition groups have advanced, they have fired barrages of drones and rockets, with reports of civilian casualties as a result in Aleppo and Hama.

Meanwhile, we have seen violence erupt on a second axis, with the opposition Syrian National Army launching an operation on 30 November on Tell Rifaat, a pocket north of Aleppo city under the de facto control of forces affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In response, SDF forces in north-east Syria moved rapidly to connect with those pockets. The Syrian National Army has now largely defeated those forces in those areas, with a large-scale evacuation of fighters and tens of thousands of civilians to north-east Syria.

In addition, the potential for conflict on other axes remains alive. This morning, the SDF took seven villages previously under the control of government forces in Deir ez-Zor, citing an imminent Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant threat, reportedly with military support from the United States-led international coalition. There have been increased front-line hostilities between the Syrian National Army and SDF in areas of the north-east, with reports of escalating tensions near Manbij coming in as we speak. Israeli air strikes hit the Syrian-Lebanese border this week and Damascus today.

The Syrian Government has said that the terrorist attacks pose grave dangers to Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, to regional security and to the international community. It has stated its intention to combat terrorism and restore all Syrian territories to its control. The Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran have expressed their support, saying that the attacks are a violation of the Astana agreements and blaming external forces. The Syrian opposition and affiliated institutions initially framed the operation as deterring what they said were escalating attacks by Syrian government forces on civilians and enabling the return of the displaced. Statements since have said that the operation will continue until the Government engages in a political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015) and have announced intentions to seize territory from the Syrian Government and SDF. Türkiye has characterized the events as a response to repeated violations of the Astana agreements, stating that it is not involved in current clashes. Türkiye has said that those events show that Damascus must reconcile with both its people and the legitimate political opposition in Syria. The United States of America, which has forces on the ground in eastern Syria, has said that it has nothing to do with the offensive, calling for de-escalation and a credible United Nations-led political process.

Let me stress: the situation is in flux, and it is very early days, with an unclear information environment. But members must be aware that these developments have provoked different reactions among the Syrian people — a grave threat for some, a signal of hope for others. We have seen a series of public pronouncements by different armed actors in the north-west, including Security Council-designated Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, offering reassurances to all civilians, including minorities, and including assurances of religious freedom. In the past three days, we have seen some media reports of civilians in Aleppo continuing their normal lives, for instance with churches holding services this weekend.

However, at the same time, some civilian and minority voices have expressed to us despair and fear about what it would mean over time for those areas to come under the control of armed factions that include a Security Council-listed terrorist group. Some women leaders have expressed particular fears or concerns and are seeking reassurances.

There are reports of services resuming in Aleppo. But there are also fears about what it will mean for service delivery, if designated entities oversee de facto administrative arrangements in a city of 2 million people. That is particularly concerning, and therefore, it will be important that the Council renew the relevant provisions of the humanitarian carveout in resolution 2664 (2022). I hope all of those with influence can address those issues.

There are videos and testimonies of detainees — men and women — being released from detention centres, including some who say they were detained for over a decade. But equally there have been videos of large-scale detention of prisoners of war by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and armed opposition groups.

There are signs of many displaced persons, from inside and outside of Syria, returning to their homes for the first time in years or even a decade. But equally tens of thousands have already been displaced — some by air strikes, some by increased hostilities and some by shifts in control. In Sheikh Maqsoud and other neighbourhoods in Aleppo city, there are many tens of thousands of civilians under the control of some remaining People's Protection Units or SDF units, expressing fears that they too may soon be forced to leave their homes.

Underlying all of that is an enormous uncertainty about the immediate future and the danger that more bloodshed could be on its way.

My first core message today is simple: we need de-escalation and we need calm. I appeal to all parties to fulfil their obligations under international law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and allow safe passage for Syrians fleeing violence. But that alone does not suffice. Further military escalation risks mass displacement and civilian casualties. The past 14 years of conflict have decisively shown that no Syrian party or existing grouping of actors can resolve the Syrian conflict via military means. We must de-escalate and ensure a cooperative approach to countering listed terrorist groups.

But — and this is my second core message — de-escalation needs to be accompanied by a credible political horizon for the Syrian people. For almost half a decade we saw front lines frozen and violence often elevated but somewhat contained, due to a patchwork of ceasefire arrangements agreed between international actors in 2019 and 2020. That was positive. But without being pegged to a political process to resolve the crisis, that amounted to only a conflict-management approach. And that is not enough.

I have long been warning that this was unsustainable, especially after rising violence within Syria the past three years, alongside regional spillover and expanding Israeli strikes. Now, in the space of a week, we have seen the de-escalation lines agreed in 2020 and earlier entirely unravel.

The Syrian parties and key international stakeholders need to be seriously engaged in meaningful and substantive negotiations to find a way out of the conflict. That is why today I call for urgent and serious political engagement among Syrian and international stakeholders to spare bloodshed and focus on a political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). To that end, I have been working the phone with the full range Syrian parties and key international stakeholders, urging concrete and immediate action on those two fronts, including with the Syrian Government, the Syrian opposition, Türkiye, Russia, Iran, the United States and Arab and European players. I will be in the region in the coming days for a range of high-level meetings.

I have clearly signalled — and signal here once again — my readiness to use my good offices to convene international and Syrian stakeholders in new and comprehensive peace talks on Syria.

I have been sharing and discussing ideas in that regard for several months, precisely because I anticipated that the unsustainable status quo would collapse and a common consensus on a comprehensive approach would be needed — an approach that goes beyond only the resumption of Constitutional Committee meetings and that addresses the full range of aspirations and concerns: the political process, sovereignty, security, economic conditions and sanctions, the detained and the missing, the refugees and the displaced. Those ideas are more, not less, relevant following the events of this week. I urge all parties to engage not only on

containing the crisis, but also on resolving the conflict. That is what is needed now.

There is no military solution to the conflict. If we do not see de-escalation and a rapid move to a serious political process, involving the Syrian parties and the key international players, then I fear we will see a deepening of the crisis. Syria will be in grave danger of further division, deterioration and destruction. The consequences for the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and for the well-being and aspirations of the Syrian people could be grave indeed. That should be in no one's interest.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Al Saleh.

Mr. Al Saleh (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to brief the Security Council and for your precious time.

Almost 10 years ago, I addressed the Council about the horror of barrel bombs, forced displacement, forced disappearance, siege and other war crimes. I urged the Council to end those crimes against the Syrian people. In the past 10 years, much has changed, but those crimes have not stopped. Instead, the world has started to ignore the tragedy of the Syrians.

Today I am addressing the Council with the same demands and reiterating my call on its members to put an end to those crimes and establish peace. I hesitated before calling on the Council to do so again, but my responsibility towards Syria compels me to stand here once again.

For six days now, as the map of military control has changed on the ground, brutal attacks launched by the Syrian regime, Russia and Iranian cross-border militias on Syrians have escalated, especially in areas outside their control in northern Syria. The White Helmets have responded to 275 attacks. Those attacks have killed 100 civilians at least, wounded 360 others and displaced tens of thousands of residents, most of whom are women and children. Those attacks deliberately targeted civilians and vital infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and camps of internally displaced persons.

Who would expect that a Member State of the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council would take part in such a heinous crime by crossing thousands of kilometres with its aircraft to launch deadly attacks on the population and destroy hospitals and vital facilities?

The State of Russia, whose representative is participating in this Council meeting, yesterday launched brutal air strikes that put four hospitals in the city of Idlib out of service, including a maternity hospital, in violation of international laws and norms. Imagine what happened to the patients there. I will tell the Council. Among the cases that we documented were two patients inside the hospital's intensive care unit who died after their ventilators were destroyed by the air strikes. We have all the documents and evidence of that brutal, deliberate attack.

Yesterday was one of the bloodiest days in years. The Al-Assad regime and Russia killed 25 civilians, most of them children, and wounded 66 others. It is a day I will never forget. I will never forget the faces of the children and the looks in their eyes after the Syrian regime's warplanes targeted their tents in a camp near Idlib. One could wonder why a warplane would target a cloth tent and kill seven children and their mother? The answer is simply to kill and nothing else. The children were waiting anxiously to say goodbye to the tents and to return to their village in the Hama countryside — a village that they know by name only. But they left, and their dreams left with them. When their father saw what happened, he went insane. He lost his entire family. He lost them and was left alone, carrying their memories and what remained of their blood-soaked clothes.

Aleppo, a city of history and civilization, has also had its share of Syrian-Russian death and destruction. After the balance of power changed on the ground, Aleppo and the surrounding area have no longer been under the control of the Syrian regime and Iranian militias. Once again, the residents are paying the price due to the Syrian regime's strategy of imposing a military solution instead of adopting a political solution. Today we remember the early days of our work in Aleppo in 2013, when barrels bombs were raining down on civilians. Today we are again witnessing that scorched-earth policy, the collective punishment that the Syrian regime and its allies are pursuing. Over the past few days, we responded to air strikes that targeted the university hospital, a church, residential areas in the city and public squares, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

I say to our people in Aleppo that we are with them and by their side. We share their fear of further military

escalation, and we seek to support them and heal their wounds. My Aleppo colleagues were able to return to their city and help its people after they were forcibly displaced from it by the Al-Assad regime a few years ago. We have dispatched ambulances and specialized teams to work alongside humanitarian partners and emergency services in the city, and we are constantly assessing the situation to adapt our actions to the situation and our capabilities.

Since our formation, the White Helmets have been unwavering in our mission to support all the Syrian people. We are from the people and for the people. Tragically, it has become impossible for us to continue to provide our services in areas that came under the control of the Syrian regime. Over the years, we have lost 313 volunteers, the majority due to deliberate military attacks by the regime and Russia that targeted our personnel, vehicles and centres.

I am deeply concerned about the lives of every Syrian man, woman and child because of the possibility of the Syrian regime once again using chemical weapons. The regime has a long record of violations of using chemical weapons for military gain, such as in Douma in the Damascus countryside in 2018, and in many other places. According to a report of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the regime has admitted to continuing production and development of chemical weapons. That is a very dangerous indicator and a clear violation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention. The failure to hold the Syrian regime accountable for violating the resolution and the Convention puts civilians at risk of using such weapons at any moment.

It is no secret for us as Syrians that Russia has been involved in obstructing international resolutions and efforts aimed at addressing the problem of chemical weapons. We call on Russia to end its support and protection of the Syrian regime through its veto of international resolutions and to stop its misleading approach that targets the White Helmets and international investigation teams at every opportunity. We also call on Russia to halt its obstruction of the path to justice and accountability.

The scale of the crisis requires immediate and decisive measures. Concrete steps must be taken to protect civilians and end attacks on the residents, vital facilities, humanitarian workers and first responders. The continued violations of international humanitarian law, including the looming threat of chemical attacks, must end now.

It is also necessary to work with all local and regional parties to ensure that all parties to the conflict adhere to international humanitarian law, refrain from targeting humanitarian workers and respect the human rights of all civilians, regardless of their affiliation or the identity of the forces controlling their areas. There is no justification for the deliberate targeting of civilians, their infrastructure or their dignity. This escalation comes at a time when only 30 per cent of the Syrian humanitarian response plan has been funded. This represents the plan's lowest level of funding since the start of the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Despite the difficult circumstances, non-governmental organizations are leading the humanitarian response. Immediate funding and aid are required for the millions of affected civilians, and I urge the Council to safeguard cross-border access so that aid continues to reach those in need.

The Syrian people have appealed to the Council to take immediate measures to end those crimes and ensure peace, a core responsibility of the Council. However, in recent years, Council members have not only failed to heed those calls, but many of their Governments have also chosen to ignore the Syrian tragedy altogether. The international community has failed both humanly and politically. Syria was a testing ground for impunity, and the failure to hold the perpetrators accountable has had catastrophic repercussions far beyond our borders, emboldening perpetrators to commit more crimes in Ukraine, the Sudan and Gaza.

At its roots, the current crisis is political, not humanitarian. Syrians need a clear timeline for a political solution that will ensure the protection of civilians and for a transition period that will lead to free elections, the dismantling of the networks for producing and smuggling drugs and the expulsion of cross-border militias. It is important that the Council accelerate efforts to push for a political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) in order to ensure an end to attacks against Syrians and lasting peace.

For over 13 years, the Council has failed the Syrian people. I hope that today my words will not fall on deaf ears again. My final message to the Council and to the whole world: Syrians in Damascus, Aleppo, Dar'a, Suwayda, Idlib, the coast, Gezira, Homs and

Hama still long for freedom, change and a dignified, peaceful homeland, united as Syrians under a national identity. They will never stop calling for justice and accountability for criminals.

The President: I thank Mr. Al Salah for his briefing.

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

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

At the outset, the A3+ would like to thank Mr. Pedersen for his valuable briefing. We also listened carefully to the representatives of civil society. The A3+ thanks the United States presidency of the Security Council for convening this meeting promptly at our request.

The A3+ is gravely alarmed and deeply concerned about the recent escalation of hostilities in Syria that began on 27 November. The attacks, including those perpetrated by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, a group that the Security Council itself has designated a terrorist organization, have led to a tragic loss of innocent civilian lives, including of women and children, as well as significant damage to civilian infrastructure and the suspension of critical services. The A3+ has consistently warned about a resurgence of terrorism in Syria. Regrettably, that has now been realized. The tragic escalation is a stark reminder of the fragility and severity of the situation in Syria, nearly 14 years after the onset of the crisis. It also underscores the pressing need for enhanced coordination to effectively combat terrorism. The time for mere conflict management has passed. We must prioritize finding a durable solution. It is clear to all that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The only viable path forward is a political settlement that preserves Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

In that regard, the A3+ reiterates its firm belief that inclusive dialogue among Syrians, supported by the international community, remains the only sustainable and just path to resolving the protracted crisis. We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy and urge all parties to engage constructively with his initiatives to break the current deadlock. The A3+ also underscores the importance of reconvening the Constitutional Committee and revitalizing the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Syrians must rise to meet the challenges threatening their country. They must set aside their differences and unite to shape a better future for Syria — a future that is free from terrorism and in which Syrians can realize their legitimate aspirations, a future built on peace, dignity and hope for all Syrians.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, for his report on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is facing a terrorist attack such as we have not seen since 2022 by fighters from the Council-listed Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, formerly known as Jabhat Al-Nusra, and the illegal armed groups that have joined them. We find it regrettable that the Special Envoy, like other United Nations representatives, could not muster the courage to call things by their real names and condemn the terrorist attack on the Syrian Arab Republic. We share the concerns and assessments expressed in the letter of 1 December from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Council.

We have gathered here because on 27 November, the former Jabhat Al-Nusra forces launched a large-scale offensive in north-western Syria, violating the agreements reached through mediation in 2020 on establishing a cessation of hostilities in Idlib. Several thousand militants are fighting on their side. The terrorists have overrun much of Aleppo and are shelling the western, south-western and central parts of the city. At least 30 civilians have already perished in the militants' offensive. Two staff members from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are known to have been killed.

We categorically condemn the coordinated advance by the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists, who are in control of Idlib. The attack is destabilizing the already tense situation on Syrian soil. We have repeatedly warned against flirting with the international terrorists who are entrenched in the immediate vicinity of Aleppo. However, our Western colleagues, driven by their hatred of the legitimate authorities in Syria, have continued to coordinate with them. And this is the result. The militants, biding their time, have capitalized on the dire situation in the country, especially in the Golan Heights and on the border with Lebanon, to

stab the Syrians in the back. The crisis that has been festering in the Middle East since October 2023 has now taken on a new dimension, a Syrian one.

From the first day of the terrorist attack, the Armed Forces of the Syrian Arab Republic, supported by the Russian Air Force and other allies acting at the request of the legitimate Syrian authorities, have been repelling the militants. Fighter planes, artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems are carrying out precision-guided and calibrated strikes on the positions of the terrorists and the fighters who have joined them. Approximately 400 terrorists have been eliminated and more than 600 wounded since the operation began. The enemy will be defeated, regardless of the support it receives from external forces. And undoubtedly there are such forces. According to the information available, whatever the level of the support for the terrorists is coming chiefly from the Americans and their allies. We believe that it would be in the Western countries' interests to dispel any suspicions about their role in this terrorist operation.

In that connection, we want to draw particular attention to the discernible hand of Ukraine's Defence Intelligence Directorate in the organization of the militants' operations and the supply of weapons to the fighters in north-western Syria. Including in this Chamber, we have repeatedly spoken about the presence in Idlib governorate of Ukrainian military instructors from the Intelligence Directorate who have been giving fighters from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham combat training. There has been continuing cooperation between Ukrainian and Syrian terrorists, driven by hatred of Russia and Syria, with a view to recruiting fighters into the Armed Forces of Ukraine and to mounting attacks on Russian and Syrian troops in Syria. There were reports just today that Ukrainian specialists, accompanied by terrorists from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, were seen in a scientific centre in Aleppo governorate. Not only are the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militants not concealing the support they receive from Ukraine, but they are bragging openly about it. We have also shared information that Defence Directorate officers from Ukraine are arming fighters in Idlib, including with drones and coded GPS modules. Experts, including in the West, were sceptical about the information at the time, but the events of 27 November have confirmed the reliability of our data. Not to mention that it has become ever-clearer that, under the Western-backed regime in Kyiv, Ukraine has become a hotbed of international terrorism and an open threat to international peace and security, as evidenced in particular by its actions in the Sahel and Syria, as well as its terrorist attacks on Russian territory.

The recent events in Syria clearly demonstrate the perniciousness of the policy of the United States and its allies — which have had an illegal presence in Syria since 2014 on the pretext of fighting terrorism — aimed at undermining the statehood of this Middle Eastern country, including by the illegal presence of American contingents in the area east of the Euphrates and in Al-Tanf. Washington's ambition of cementing its de facto occupation of areas rich in oil, gas and agricultural resources in north-eastern Syria is also playing a significant and destructive role. The United States and its allies are exploiting every opportunity to sow chaos in the country, applying sanctions to strangle the economy and supporting Idlib-based terrorists and the extremist underground in Syria.

At the same time, they have no hesitation in whitewashing Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, portraying it as the supposedly moderate Syrian opposition. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham has just demonstrated its so-called moderate nature. Such double standards are unacceptable, and it is clear that the fight against international terrorist groups designated as such by the Security Council must continue. We hope that Washington and its satellites today will categorically condemn the actions of the former Jabhat Al-Nusra Front affiliates and express support for the legitimate Syrian Government — which has been attacked by terrorists — as Syria's neighbours and the members of the League of Arab States have done. As practice has shown, the use of terrorists for the advancement of parochial geopolitical interests always backfires against their own patrons.

For our part, we are maintaining intensive contacts with our partners under the Astana format. We are engaged in contact with our colleagues from Iran and Türkiye at various levels, who have reaffirmed our shared concern about the military escalation in Aleppo and Idlib and the need to coordinate joint efforts to stabilize the situation in Syria, primarily by drawing on the potential of the Astana format. We have consistently and unwaveringly advocated a return to the implementation of the agreement of March 2020 on the cessation of hostilities in Idlib. We firmly believe that stabilization on the ground and the restoration of lasting peace and security in the Syrian Arab Republic is possible only by ending the illegal foreign military

presence there, which is maintained in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, and by stopping the air strikes on Syrian territory.

Mrs. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing. We also noted the briefing by Mr. Raed Al Saleh, Director of the White Helmets.

The intensifying hostilities in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo in recent days have been very worrisome. That new escalation could gravely affect the prospects for achieving peace and security in the country and throughout the region. It must stop immediately. Switzerland condemns the fact that the large-scale attack by armed opposition groups led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and the retaliatory strikes carried out by the Syrian Government and its allies have targeted civilian objects, killed dozens of civilians and forcibly displaced tens of thousands of people, including many children. We join the Special Envoy in calling on the parties to urgently put an end to that spiral of violence and respect their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. That includes the strict application of the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities in order to spare civilians and guarantee protection to particularly vulnerable groups.

Switzerland is alarmed by the reports that those hostilities are affecting access to water, food and essential services and seriously jeopardizing the delivery of humanitarian aid in the north and north-west of Syria. It is crucial to allow humanitarian actors to rapidly assess the needs of the civilian population. Their safety must also be guaranteed, as stipulated in resolution 2730 (2024), including by allowing them to leave conflict zones unharmed. Switzerland has consistently reiterated that the rapid, safe and unimpeded delivery of assistance to civilians in need is an obligation under international humanitarian law. In order to reach civilians in need, including the newly displaced and those trapped by the fighting, it is crucial to deliver assistance in every way possible, including cross-border assistance through the Bab Al-Hawa, Bal Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossing points and across the front lines, even if the front lines are moving. Civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, water and electricity stations and camps for displaced persons, must never be targeted. We recall that Aleppo airport receives goods transported via the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service and call for the protection of that critical operation.

Finally, we stress the importance of ensuring that funding for humanitarian assistance be robust, predictable and commensurate with the growing needs of the given population, wherever it is situated. Nearly 17 million people — virtually the entire Syrian population — are in need of assistance today. That also includes the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled hostilities in neighbouring Lebanon.

The intensifying hostilities in Syria today are the result of the political vacuum and the absence of a political process for many years in the country. Switzerland urges the Syrian parties and those with influence over them, including the guarantor States of the Astana process and other influential States, to encourage dialogue and diplomacy. We call on them to coordinate their efforts with those of the Special Envoy to achieve a national ceasefire and a credible peace process. In that regard, Switzerland will continue its commitment and remains ready to make Geneva available for any initiatives or peace talks under the aegis of the United Nations. Only a political solution in line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) can put an end to this terrible conflict.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and comprehensive update on what is a fast-moving situation. I am also grateful to Mr. Al Saleh for his briefing. I will make three points today.

First, today's Security Council meeting serves as a sobering reminder that Syria remains as dangerous as ever. We are deeply concerned about the potential for further escalation, particularly for large-scale attacks by the regime or Russia against civilians. We have seen the lengths that the Al-Assad regime will go to when challenged. Until Syria fully declares and destroys its chemical weapons, the Council should remain focused on that ongoing threat to the peace and security of Syria and the international community. We strongly urge de-escalation and call on all the parties to act in accordance with international humanitarian law. That includes implementing measures to protect civilian lives and infrastructure such as health facilities and schools. Further escalation will lead only to more displacement of vulnerable people, disrupted humanitarian assistance access and ultimately more suffering. Growing instability will only reduce prospects for recovery or

for refugees to return home in a safe, dignified and voluntary manner.

Secondly, the humanitarian crisis in Syria, especially in the north-west, was already dire before the current escalation, with 4.2 million people requiring assistance. Further conflict, alongside harsh winter conditions, will only exacerbate the suffering of those in need. We therefore urge all actors to ensure continuous and uninterrupted humanitarian assistance and access across the whole of Syria.

Thirdly, the current fighting is a stark reminder that the situation in Syria is unsustainable. A frozen conflict is not peace. Only a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political solution will resolve the conflict and bring about much-needed security and stability for Syrians. The Al-Assad regime, along with its Russian and Iranian backers, has created the conditions for instability and the current escalation through its ongoing refusal to engage in the political process. While the trajectory of the current escalation is uncertain, it is once again clear that, after 13 years of conflict, no side has or can win decisively through force. The regime and all actors in Syria's conflict must support and engage constructively with negotiations, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I too would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Al Saleh for sharing their insights today on the urgent and escalating security situation in Syria.

Over the past seven days, we have witnessed a significant military offensive, led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and launched from Idlib. That offensive rapidly seized control of several areas in Aleppo, with forces reportedly advancing to the outskirts of Hama following the withdrawal of the Syrian army. Within the city, reports indicate that hospitals are being overrun and civilians are fleeing, in fear of being caught in the crossfire. Subsequent air strikes in support of both the Syrian Government and opposition forces have compounded the situation and resulted in multiple casualties.

While we have received reports of intensified shelling in Idlib and of air strikes hitting displacement camps, the full extent of those developments in Syria's north-west remain unclear. The new front line between Hama and Aleppo is being fortified, raising fears of urban warfare involving air power and explosive weapons. Such acts could bring devastation reminiscent of the horrors witnessed in Aleppo in 2016. The immediate developments in the crisis are now of critical concern, not only to the people of Syria but to the wider region and the world.

Malta reiterates the calls of Special Envoy Pedersen for all parties to now exercise maximum restraint and stringently uphold their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. The steps taken by all parties in the coming days will set the course of this crisis. We must avoid the sole reliance on military firepower seen elsewhere in Syria. We remain deeply concerned about the potential mobilization and heavy fighting in north-eastern Syria and the resurgence of violent extremist groups. Regrettably, the United Nations humanitarian response is already severely constrained. In the face of further violence and displacement, humanitarian actors will not be able to scale up and address what remains a deeply political problem. We are reminded once again that determined political efforts are needed to address humanitarian problems.

For years, we have been warned of the consequences of failing to prioritize true conflict resolution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). In Malta's view, we must transition from what the Special Envoy termed conflict management in Syria to a strategy that effectively promotes conflict resolution. Great Power politics have resulted in untold misery and suffering for millions across Syria and the region. No actor is without blame, and neither are their backers. This is not the moment for States to redraw borders through force. Instead, we must amplify genuine diplomacy, see through the spin and forced narratives and work collectively to prevent further carnage. We must restore respect for the norms and laws of warfare and uphold the resolutions of the Council, for the sake of the countless civilians trapped in conflict.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): Since this is my first statement in the month of December, I would like to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom, led by Ambassador Woodward, for its leadership in November and wish every success to the United States in steering our work this month. I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing, and I thank Mr. Al Saleh, Director of the White Helmets, for his valuable contribution.

In recent days, we have seen a significant shift in Syria, which has again turned into an active war zone. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham is a terrorist group and has been recognized as such by the Security Council. Its recent escalation has already taken human lives and continues

to pose severe risk to civilians. Its actions have serious implications for regional and international peace and security.

Slovenia urges all parties to immediately de-escalate. There is no military solution to the conflict. We call on all actors to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. The protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is of the utmost importance. All efforts should be accompanied by steps to prevent further displacement and disruption of humanitarian access. The reignition of a wider conflict in Syria would also have a devastating impact on the region, jeopardizing the recent progress in Lebanon and causing the already precarious situation of refugees and internally displaced persons to deteriorate further. Over the past months, Special Envoy Pedersen has repeatedly warned us of the risks of escalation and the fact that no Syrian party or existing grouping of actors can resolve the Syrian conflict via military means. The recent events should be a wake-up call to the Syrian Government and key international stakeholders on the urgent need to find a political way out of the conflict, which has gone on for nearly 14 years. We cannot allow the recent resurgence of violence to add more fuel to the fire, which will further extend the conflict. Slovenia underscores the urgency for a Syrian-led political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The people of Syria do not need another violent conflict. They have suffered more than enough. What they need is a genuine and inclusive political process that will give them hope and finally chart their way towards lasting peace. Slovenia will continue to support the Special Envoy's efforts to that end.

Mr. Mikanagi (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Raed Al Saleh for their briefings.

The situation is extremely fluid, but I would like to say a few words. According to media reports, rebel armed groups led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham have advanced to large parts of Aleppo. Additionally, we understand that there is information that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham has taken control of some villages in central Syria. It has been reported that the Al-Assad regime is intensifying its air strikes against the rebels. The increase of hostilities has already resulted in the loss of innocent civilian lives, including women and children.

The escalation of the conflict must be avoided, as it would further destroy the country, which has already been devastated by nearly 14 years of conflict. We are closely monitoring the situation, and we urge all parties concerned to de-escalate and protect the civilian population and civilian infrastructure in order to avoid further deterioration of the humanitarian situation, respecting international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Japan reiterates its position that the only solution to the political stalemate in Syria is to advance the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process consistent with resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we echo the Special Envoy's call for urgent and serious political engagement to prevent further bloodshed and focus on a political solution.

Despite those challenging circumstances, we must not give up on promoting the political process. Japan calls on all stakeholders to commit to engaging in dialogue to bring one of the worst humanitarian crises of the century to an end. It is our sincere hope that the current developments will not lead to another phase of confrontation and tragedy. Japan will continue to make diplomatic efforts, in close coordination with the international community, and to persistently call on all parties to take constructive steps to advance the process towards a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I think Special Envoy Pedersen for the objective information he has provided. I take note of the statement by the representative of civil society, and I recognize the presence of the representatives of Lebanon, Syria and Türkiye.

The escalation of violent incidents in Syria compounds the fragile security situation in the region and increases threats to international peace and security. The consequences of this prolonged war have been borne by the civilian population, which has become a prisoner of violence and instability. Mr Pedersen's references to the operation of a group that has been designated as a terrorist group by the Security Council is alarming. In that connection, Ecuador unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, whatever its origin. The parties involved in the new phase of the conflict must observe maximum restraint to ensure the protection of civilians and critical infrastructure in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

We have witnessed the efforts deployed by Special Envoy Pedersen to renew confidence; to promote the

engagement of the countries of the region and others with influence; and to privilege the political dialogue led by Syria and facilitated by the United Nations as the only viable tool for the resolution of the conflict, strictly in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Ecuador expresses its support for the tireless work of the United Nations team in Syria. Today more than ever, the joint actions of the international community must be aimed at achieving a genuine political negotiation that will lead to a definitive cessation of hostilities and the establishment of sustainable peace.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Al Saleh for their contributions.

France is intently following the latest developments in Syria, particularly in the north-west. All parties must respect international humanitarian law. France has repeatedly stressed that a credible political process remains the only way to achieve a lasting peace and that any further escalation would be to the detriment of the population, who have already paid a heavy price after 13 years of civil war. In recent days, the regime and its allies have resumed targeting densely populated areas and civilian infrastructure in Aleppo and Idlib. No effort must be spared to avoid the disruption of humanitarian access and further population displacement.

The recent hostilities are taking place in a humanitarian context that has greatly deteriorated, while winter is on the horizon. It is vital to keep all humanitarian access routes open across the borders and the front lines as they evolve. The fighting we have seen in recent days illustrates the weakness of the regime and is simply the result of its constant refusal to commit to a political process.

That process is the only way to bring about the peace to which the Syrian people aspire. It is time for Damascus to seize the opportunity. France therefore reiterates its full support for Mr. Pedersen and for the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) in all its aspects. We call for collective action to ensure that the regime respects its obligations and shows the Syrian people a way forward.

The recent developments demonstrate the need to resume the meetings of the Constitutional Committee under the auspices of the United Nations without delay. Subject to tangible and verifiable progress in that process, we are ready to begin lifting sanctions and consider financing reconstruction.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to state our position on the procedural vote before the start of today's meeting. We regret that the rotating presidency imposed, without any consultation, the participation of a representative of the White Helmets as a briefer.

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and welcome the presence of the representatives of Syria, Iran, Lebanon and Türkiye at this meeting.

The large-scale attacks on Aleppo, Idlib and other places by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other terrorist forces have undermined the largely calm situation maintained over the past few years. A few years ago, fighting in Aleppo and other places caused heavy casualties and destruction. The ferocity of the fighting is still fresh in our minds. The ongoing conflict will undoubtedly bring new suffering to ordinary people, which is a source of deep concern and worry for China. Armed forces have also seized the Iranian Consulate in Aleppo, which is a deplorable act that violates international law. China condemns such acts.

I wish to reiterate that terrorism is the common enemy of the international community. China supports Syria's efforts to combat terrorism and safeguard national security and stability. The international community should adhere to a unified standard and adopt a zero-tolerance approach in supporting and assisting the Syrian Government in eliminating the threat posed by terrorist forces on its territory. China calls on all countries to strengthen coordination and take measures to cut off terrorists' routes of movement and their channels for obtaining weapons and other materials so as to prevent them from creating further turmoil.

The Syrian issue has continued to drag on as a result of a combination of multiple factors. It is China's consistent view that a political settlement is the only way out. The international community should earnestly respect Syria's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity. Foreign forces must end their illegal military presence in Syria. The relevant countries should immediately lift the unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria.

China once again calls on the international community to remain firmly committed to the general

direction of a political settlement and to support the advancement of a Syrian political process that is Syrian- led and Syrian-owned, thereby allowing the Syrian people to decide on the future of their country for themselves, free from foreign interference.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. I also appreciate Director Al Saleh's briefing from the ground.

The Republic of Korea expresses its grave concern over the escalating instability and power vacuum in Syria. The advances of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other non-State actors have significantly and abruptly destabilized the security situation in and around Aleppo, Idlib and Hama, marking an unprecedented shift not seen in a decade. The involvement of regional stakeholders and non-State actors in the conflict is further exacerbating the volatile situation, creating conditions that risk igniting a mutually reinforcing cycle of violence. In that regard, I would like to make three points.

First, we urge all parties to cease hostilities and recommit to the political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Once labelled a frozen conflict, the situation in Syria demonstrates that a permafrost deadlock is not a solution at all. Without meaningful dialogue, the ice will thaw and only chaos will return. To avoid a serious relapse into the total chaos of the past, we reiterate our call for all parties to recommit to the political process, which is the only sustainable way forward in this long-standing yet quickly reheating crisis.

Secondly, we call on all foreign Powers to strictly refrain from escalating the conflict and to create a conducive environment for the Syrian-led dialogue. Neither support for extremist rebels by foreign States nor assistance to Government forces attacking their own people can be justified under international law. In that regard, we are greatly concerned about reports of attacks launched by armed factions, as well as air strikes targeting the Syrian people, including at healthcare facilities and schools, in Aleppo and Idlib. Such actions only exacerbate the suffering of innocent civilians and prolong the conflict, and we deplore any attempt by regional Powers to exploit the current turmoil for parochial interests. Instead, the focus must shift towards meaningful and constructive international engagement. Key international stakeholders should collaborate with Special Envoy Pedersen to reinvigorate diplomatic efforts and lay the path for a viable and inclusive political solution.

Thirdly, we urge all parties to uphold civilians' rights under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Reports of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure, as well as forced conscriptions, suggest potential violations. Accountability must extend to all violators, regardless of their affiliation — be it with the Government, foreign forces, rebel groups or terrorist organizations. We simply cannot allow impunity to reign. In particular, the right to life, the freedom of expression and worship and protection against forced recruitment must be upheld without exception. Ethnic and religious minorities must never face persecution on the basis of their identity under any circumstances.

From Gaza to Lebanon to Syria, the Middle East is experiencing one of its darkest periods of turmoil ever. The recent ceasefire across the Blue Line, albeit fragile, stands as one glimmer of positivity that could illuminate the beginning of the end to this crisis. The Republic of Korea, as a Council member and a steadfast friend to all Middle Eastern States, hopes that the year 2025 will bring signs of de-escalation and progress towards lasting peace.

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

Let me first thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Al Saleh for their briefings. I wish to especially thank Mr. Al Saleh for his and the White Helmets efforts to bring to the attention of the world the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own people. It is essential that he is here today.

The United States is closely monitoring the situation in Syria. For many years, the Syrian Government has been engaged in a civil war backed by Iran, Russia and Hizbullah. All three of those actors have recently been distracted and weakened by conflicts elsewhere, and so it is no surprise that we have seen actors in Syria try to take advantage of that over the past several days. Indeed, the Al-Assad regime's ongoing refusal to engage in the political process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), and its reliance on Russia and Iran, created the conditions now unfolding, including the collapse of the Al-Assad regime lines in north-west Syria. At the same time, the recent rebel offensive, which the United States had nothing to do with, is led by a group, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is a United States- and United Nations-

designated terrorist organization. We obviously have concerns about that group. We will continue to fully defend and protect United States personnel and United States military positions, which remain essential to ensuring that Da'esh can never again resurge in Syria.

Diplomatically, we have been in contact over the past several days with regional leaders, many of whom have joined us in urging de-escalation. We are also urging the protection of all civilians, including members of minority groups; the protection of civilian infrastructure; and unhindered humanitarian access to all those in need. We reiterate our call on all parties to commit to the principles of freedom, dignity and safety of all Syrians. We are hopeful that the Syrian opposition can play a role in ensuring those principles. It is important that areas affected by recent fighting resume daily activities safely and as soon as possible. To that end, humanitarian access must be maintained so that aid can reach all people in need. The United Nations, which is working alongside non-governmental organizations responding on the ground, has an important role to play. We encourage strong support for its efforts, including to address the needs of internally displaced persons fleeing the fighting.

We further encourage all parties to cooperate with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, including to ascertain the fate and whereabouts of regime prisoners released from prisons in southern Aleppo. Some of those prisoners included wrongfully held political detainees. We must continue to stand with victims, families and survivors who seek our support and, equally important, accountability.

The fact that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations does not justify the further atrocities by the Al-Assad regime and its Russian backers. Since 27 November, those atrocities have included attacks by the regime and its Russian backers on schools and hospitals in both Idlib and Aleppo, causing civilian casualties. The Council must speak with one voice in demanding that all parties cease brutal aerial attacks and adhere to international law. We must also renew the Council's demand that the regime not launch a chemical weapons attack, as it has done more than 50 times over the course of this conflict. And we must continue to hold the regime and its backers to account for those heinous actions. For far too long, the Al-Assad regime has lent out its own country to Hizbullah and other Iran-backed militant groups, instead of sitting down with the opposition. Russia has supported Al-Assad's intransigence, repeatedly blocking venues for United Nations-mediated talks. Recent events serve as a stark reminder that Syria will never be at peace until Al-Assad accepts a settlement that gives all Syrians a voice in the country's future.

Again, the United States will defend and protect United States personnel and United States military positions in north-east Syria, which remain essential to ensuring that Da'esh can never resurge. We will continue coordinating closely with our partners in the region to de-escalate tensions. And we will continue to support the full implementation of Security Council resolutions that could bring a measure of peace and stability to Syria and protection to civilians, including religious minorities.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country's delegation finds it strange that the United States has failed at the beginning of its presidency of the Security Council for this month to respect the Council's working criteria and working procedures. It uses the Council to serve its own agenda and attempts to harm a United Nations Member State. Its objectives are well known and are demonstrated by the United States continued support for, and investment in, the terrorism that my country is confronting as manifested in the terrorist organizations Da'esh and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham/Jabhat Al-Nusra. The United States provides cover for them and furthers its hostile approach towards my country. Furthermore, the United States attempts to divert attention from its unlimited support both, within and outside the Council, to the Israeli occupation entity and its brutal crimes. That position removes any credibility for the United States with respect to human rights issues.

We reject the absenting of the real representatives of Syrian civil society and Syrian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We have over 1,400 licensed Syrian NGOs that the United States does not allow to attend the Council, despite the fact that they work diligently and effectively on the ground in partnership with the Syrian Government, the United Nations and humanitarian partners to improve the humanitarian and living conditions of the Syrian people. They would be better able to give the Council an impression of their

humanitarian work and the grave challenges they are facing in a professional, objective and factual manner, free from the political agendas, disinformation and lies that we have repeatedly heard in the Council.

Heroes like the Syrian Arab civil defence teams are doing their best and endangering their lives to protect Syrians. We have seen their heroism throughout the terrorist war against Syria, following the earthquake and, recently, in confronting the forest fires. Those are the true representatives of the Syrian civil defence, not others. There are also the heroes of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, who have lost 66 martyrs, including most recently just a few days ago when one member was martyred at a border crossing by an Israeli air strike as they were helping displaced persons coming in from brotherly Lebanon. Those are the representatives of the civil society. They are the true heroes. There are also many Syrian volunteers involved in charity and humanitarian work who are working under an unjust siege imposed by the United States Administration, not to mention the unjust unilateral coercive measures.

Bringing into the Council Chamber an organization linked to Jabhat Al-Nusra, which operates under it, is an insult to the Council and its Member States. It does not offend my country, but rather the United States presidency of the Council. If members have any doubts about what I am saying, then I refer them to the statement by the former spokesperson of the United States Department of State, Mr. Mark Toner, who answered questions from journalists on 27 April 2016 and stated that the group that was invited today is linked to extremist groups that pose a threat to the United States. That was said by one of your colleagues, Mr. President, and it is available everywhere.

I would also like to refer members to the letters that my country and the Russian Federation have sent to the Council over the years to respond to the lies that are being propagated by that organization and its sponsors. However, it seems that the United States Administration's animosity towards my country might push it to invite whomever it wants to the Council to further its agenda. The United States Administration, which invites to the Council those who try to insult Member States under the pretexts of the freedom of expression and listening to civil society is the very same Administration that has silenced university students and professors in the United States when they came out to demonstrate and call for upholding international law and put an end to Israeli genocide and crimes against the people of Palestine and the countries of the region. What freedom of speech and which voices are they referring to?

I thank the delegations of Algeria, Guyana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, the Russian Federation and China for their appreciated support for our request to convene today's urgent meeting. I also thank the delegations of Russia, China, Algeria and Mozambique for their vote at the beginning of the meeting.

We are meeting here today after Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham/Jabhat Al-Nusra, which is listed by the Security Council as a terrorist organization along with other terrorist entities and groups that are affiliated with it, including thousands of foreign terrorists fighters, launched a large-scale attack from multiple fronts and on multiple areas in northern Syria, especially on the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib, with the aim of seizing control over them and parts of the international highway known as the M5, which connects northern and southern Syria.

The terrorist attack coincides with the influx of terrorists across the northern borders and intensified external support for them, including military equipment, heavy weaponry, vehicles and large numbers of drones and modern communications technologies, in addition to securing military and logistics supply lines. That has enabled the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorist organization and the entities operating under its command to seize control of large areas of the city of Aleppo, after attacking several villages and towns along the roads leading there. The scale and scope of the terrorist attack carried out by those organizations demonstrate unequivocally the extent of the support provided to them by regional and international parties that have used terrorism as a tool to implement their foreign policy, target the Syrian State, destabilize its security and stability and cause its people to suffer. Denying that by some parties does not do any good. Of course, that terrorist attack could not have been carried out without a green light and a joint Turkish-Israeli operational order that was prepared for by Israel's repeated assaults on Syrian territories. Would members accept such a terrorist attack by an organization on the Security Council's list against any of their States or against any United Nations Member State?

The terrorist attack has terrified civilians, especially in the city of Aleppo, which has a population of approximately 2.5 million people. It has disrupted

various aspects of life in the city. It has pushed thousands of families to head towards areas controlled by the Syrian State. Meanwhile, those still trapped inside the city are facing dire humanitarian conditions, attacks by terrorist organizations and abuse towards residents and law enforcement personnel. The terrorist attacks have also targeted scientific professionals and the University of Aleppo's student housing, which led to the martyrdom of a number of students and injured others. The rest were forced to leave the city during preparations for university exams. Diplomatic and consular premises in the city have not been spared from attacks by terrorist groups.

The crimes of the terrorist organizations do not stop there. They have even imposed a curfew on the residents of the city. They have stormed prisons. They have released a large number of criminals convicted by criminal court rulings for spreading chaos and undermining security and stability amid rising fears among civilians of the recurrence of practices by terrorist organizations, such as imposing their extremist takfirist ideology, committing murder, torture, detention and forced disappearances, child recruitment and the persecution of women and girls. Those practices, against which the people of Idlib have repeatedly demonstrated, calling to be brought to an end, cannot be accepted, condoned or inflicted on the residents of other Syrian cities. Would you accept such practices, Mr. President?

For many years, we have worked in partnership with the Member States to adopt instruments and resolutions aimed at addressing the threat posed by terrorism in all its forms and manifestations to international peace and security, drying up the sources of its financing and armament, countering violent extremism that leads to terrorism and combating incitements and hate speech. However, the inclination of some States to invest in terrorism has obstructed the achievement of desired outcomes and prolonged the scourge of terrorism.

The problem is a lack of political will on the part of those States whose hostile policies and practices against my country have enabled terrorism to establish a foothold in areas under the control of the illegal foreign military presence on Syrian territory. Today the suffering endured by our people in Aleppo and other Syrian areas infiltrated by terrorist organizations compels us once again to raise our voice and call upon the Council to condemn the terrorist attack and compel the States operating those terrorist organizations to abandon their policies, to prevent the entrenchment of the terrorist reality or to keep civilians hostages by those terrorist organizations. That is the call being made by our people in Aleppo and northern Syria to the Council.

The terrorist attack on northern Syria is a flagrant violation of the United Nations and Security Council resolutions related to combating terrorism, as well as the de-escalation agreements adopted through the Astana process, which reaffirmed, in its final communiqué, Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, as well as continuing efforts to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Those are commitments that the Turkish guarantor failed to fulfil.

The Syrian Arab Republic calls upon the Security Council to issue a clear and unequivocal condemnation of that terrorist attack perpetrated by an organization on the Security Council's list of terrorist entities, which comprises tens of thousands of foreign terrorists. My country firmly rejects all attempts to whitewash the image of those terrorist organizations by adopting alternative names intended to mislead global public opinion.

Syria holds the States supporting the terrorist organization Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and its affiliated entities fully responsible for the attack and its consequences. Syria calls upon the United Nations to compel those States to comply with the obligations established by the relevant Council resolutions on combating terrorism, primarily resolution 2170 (2014) on combating the two terrorist organizations Da'esh and Al Nusrah Front and resolution 2178 (2014) on addressing the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, as well as the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. My country emphasizes the need to include entities and economic, financial, commercial and media institutions that provide funding, supplies and communication services to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and allied entities on the Council's sanctions lists.

Syria — its State, army and people — reaffirms its commitment to exercise its sovereign right and fulfil its constitutional and legal duty to combat terrorist organizations with utmost force and determination. Syria will take all necessary measures to defend its citizens, confront the threat posed by terrorism, liberate its lands from the terrorist presence and restore the authority of the State and the rule of law throughout the entire national territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

That is the legitimate right of every country and it does not only serve Syria but also ensures the stability of the entire region and the security and safety of its peoples and countries. Those who sponsor terrorism in Syria must know that it will turn against them.

Syria has successfully confronted terrorism in all its forms over the past years and is capable of eradicating it and determined to do so. My country looks forward to the support of all Member States that believe in international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations for the efforts undertaken by the Syrian Government to combat terrorism and defend its sovereignty, independence, unity, territorial integrity, security and stability for its people.

In conclusion, in response to the allegations made by some delegations regarding the Syrian Government's position on the political process, we emphasize that the Syrian Government has engaged positively in all the efforts aimed at the betterment of Syria and the interest of its people and has not engaged in efforts in the interest of others. It has engaged in serious and constructive cooperation with the United Nations and its representatives, adopted a policy of national reconciliation and local settlements and taken a wide range of measures aimed at restoring security and stability, improving living conditions, providing basic services and creating the appropriate conditions for the return of refugees and the displaced.

However, Syria has repeatedly emphasized over the past years that the terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council, foremost among them Da'esh and Al Nusrah Front/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham organizations and their affiliated entities, group, institutions and individuals that have adopted terrorism and whose hands are stained with the blood of Syrians, are part of the problem and not part of the solution. No one can imagine a solution or a political process with Da'esh and Al Nusrah Front. We have also emphasized that any de-escalation agreements must not hinder or undermine efforts to combat terrorism, in accordance with international law, Security Council resolutions and the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic.

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

Mrs. Güven (Türkiye): The Syrian conflict, now in its fourteenth year, remains a stark reminder of the costs of political inaction. Its root causes stem from the legitimate, yet unmet, aspirations of the Syrian people. Without a genuine process of national reconciliation, Syria will remain trapped in a cycle of instability and suffering.

The ongoing Israeli attacks across the region further complicate the fragile situation. The spiral of violence must not destabilize Syria further. The painful developments since 7 October 2023 underline an essential truth: when political solutions to root causes are absent, crises inevitably resurface. That must guide our collective approach to addressing the Syrian crisis too. The resurgence of conflicts in Syria reflects the unresolved challenges that have plagued the country for over a decade. The reluctance of Damascus to engage in the political process with the opposition remain critical missteps that created conditions for the unfolding situation. Meanwhile, terrorist organizations exploit instability to further their agendas, posing serious security threats to the region.

We initiated the Astana process to achieve de-escalation on the ground and reached a ceasefire. Since 2017, Türkiye has played a leading role in establishing a de-escalation zone around Idlib through various agreements with Astana partners. That process also created room for confidence-building measures between Damascus and the opposition. Unfortunately, that opportunity was not seized.

Türkiye has consistently prioritized maintaining calm in Idlib, which is at the zero point of our border. We have warned repeatedly that attacks on the Idlib de-escalation zone escalate tensions.

The violations of the Astana agreements and the continued focus on military campaigns, rather than national reconciliation and counter-terrorism, have pushed Syria further into chaos.

In response to allegations, I would like to underscore that Türkiye has neither supported nor consented to the launching of the ongoing operation. On the contrary, we have consistently worked to deter the cycle of violence. And today we once again stress the critical importance of de-escalation amid broader regional instability.

The evolving dynamics on the ground, particularly in north-west Syria, have created a precarious situation. The entire country is profoundly impacted by the shifting lines of control. Significant risks for the period ahead include the threat of further fragmentation. The so-called Syrian Defence Forces (SDF) may seek to consolidate its position in the north-east, while the

resurgence of Da'esh remains a serious possibility. Those dynamics could trigger new waves of migration and displacement, further straining regional stability and aggravating the already critical need for urgent humanitarian assistance.

Türkiye will continue to take all measures to protect its territory, people and interests.

The current stalemate is unsustainable for Syria and the wider region. It is time for a realistic reassessment by all relevant actors. A sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis hinges on achieving a national consensus that aligns with the legitimate expectations of the Syrian people.

The civil war in Syria should not escalate further. The international community must also recalibrate its overall approach to the conflict in order to support this objective at both regional and international levels. That demands that all stakeholders critically review their positions and, where necessary, make paradigm shifts to contribute to lasting peace and stability.

It is imperative to actively engage in mutually reinforcing efforts across the political, security and humanitarian domains. In that respect, the Syrian-led and-owned political process under United Nations facilitation must be revived. The mistake of subcontracting the fight against Da'esh to another terrorist organization, namely the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, must end. That separatist entity is neither Syrian nor democratic. As a matter of fact, it is nothing but the Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG**)** itself.

The agendas of separatist terrorist organizations must be disrupted in order to preserve Syria's unity and territorial integrity. Moreover, creating the necessary conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees must be part and parcel of the settlement process. Those simultaneous steps are essential and can no longer be postponed.

The outlines of a negotiated political solution to the crisis were drawn nine years ago by the Council through its unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). Its provisions must be upheld and implemented. The resolution stresses the undeniable fact that it is the Syrian people who will decide the future of their country. That means all Syrians, including the opposition, those in the diaspora and refugees.

All relevant actors should support, without further delay, the convening of the Constitutional Committee. To that end, Türkiye has deployed extensive efforts to initiate dialogue between Damascus and the opposition. We have also strived to initiate dialogue with Damascus. Unfortunately, those efforts have yet to yield the desired results.

My country shares a 911-kilometre border with Syria. The presence of terrorist organizations within Syria not only undermines the country's unity and territorial integrity, but also poses a direct threat to Türkiye's national security, as well as regional stability.

The Council condemned, in the strongest terms, the 23 October terrorist attack in Ankara. The terrorists infiltrated Türkiye from Syrian territory. The PKK/YPG/SDF terrorist organization continues its attempts to advance its separatist agenda in Syria. I would like to emphasize that Türkiye is entitled to take appropriate measures, in line with its inherent right of self-defence, against a direct and imminent threat posed to its national security by terrorist organizations operating in Syria.

Türkiye continues to work with all relevant actors to prevent escalation and advance the political process. Turkish leaders are engaged in intense diplomatic efforts. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Fidan, has agreed with his Russian and Iranian counterparts to convene an Astana ministerial meeting soon.

The Syrian people deserve peace, stability and a future where their rights and freedoms are upheld. Türkiye remains steadfast in its commitment to Syria's unity and territorial integrity. We urge de-escalation and the protection of civilians and stand ready to work towards a credible political process for a sustainable, peaceful resolution to this enduring crisis.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank the Syrian Arab Republic, Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Guyana for requesting this urgent meeting, as well as China and Russia for ensuring that this critical issue receives the Council's attention. We also thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing.

The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its deep concern about the escalating situation in Syria. Recent developments, particularly the coordinated terrorist operations of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, a designated branch of Al-Qaida, also known as Jabhat Al-Nusra,

have gravely threatened Syria's sovereignty and stability. As stated in the letter dated 1 December from the Permanent Representative of Syria, this terrorist organization has orchestrated large-scale, coordinated attacks on Aleppo and Idlib governorates, resulting in devastating consequences for the region and its people.

During the terrorist attacks on Aleppo, the Iranian consular premises were deliberately targeted by terrorist groups. Attacks on diplomatic and consular premises are a flagrant violation of international law and are strictly prohibited under any circumstances. No individual, group or State has the right to commit or enable such acts. Responsibility for this brazen assault and violation lies with the countries that arm and support these terrorist groups, enabling their continued aggression and violations of international norms.

At the heart of this crisis lies external support and intervention, which have perpetuated terrorism in Syria and undermined its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The scale and sophistication of the operations of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, including advanced weaponry and drones, highlight deliberate external support, with the United States at the forefront, turning terrorism into a foreign policy tool to advance their political agenda. The States responsible for fuelling this conflict must be held accountable for their actions and the devastating consequences they have inflicted on the Syrian people.

This terrorist attack directly undermines the agreements that established the Idlib de-escalation area under the Astana formula process. In the twenty-second Astana format meeting, held on 11 and 12 November, the participating parties voiced grave concern about the presence and activities of terrorist groups that endanger civilians both within and beyond the Idlib de-escalation area.

In the meantime, increased Israeli air strikes targeting civilians and infrastructure in Syria during November and October, combined with the regime's connections to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, indicate a coordinated effort to further destabilize Syria. Israel's relentless strikes on border crossings between Syria and Lebanon have disrupted critical aid deliveries and forced hundreds of thousands to flee.

What happened in Aleppo and Idlib should serve as a wake-up call for the entire region regarding the resurgence of terrorism and extremism. Insecurity and the spread of terrorism and violent extremism in Syria will not remain confined to its borders; their impact will inevitably spill over, threatening the broader region and beyond.

No distinction can or should be made between types of terrorism — there is no such thing as good terrorism and bad terrorism. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, a terrorist group explicitly designated as such by Security Council resolutions, poses a grave threat to the peace and stability of the region. If the international community fails to decisively confront this terrorist group, its growing dominance over parts of Syria could trigger catastrophic consequences for the entire region and pose a serious threat to global peace and security.

The Islamic Republic of Iran remains steadfast in its support for the Syrian Government and its people in their just and determined fight against terrorism. Iran fully recognizes and supports Syria's sovereign right to combat and eliminate terrorist groups like Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which bring widespread destruction, chaos and suffering wherever they operate. We emphasize that all measures to combat terrorism must be undertaken in coordination with, and with the consent of, the Syrian Government, ensuring full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Iran's recent active diplomatic engagements with its partners in the Astana process — Russia, Turkey and Syria — further underscore that commitment. Iran has called for an emergency meeting of the Foreign Ministers in the Astana process to address the recent developments in Syria and work towards a unified strategy to halt terrorist activities in the country.

As stated time and time again, the only sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis is a political solution that is led and owned by the Syrian people and that upholds Syria's sovereignty and independence. That requires ending foreign occupation and interference, stopping the exploitation of Syria's resources, ceasing all support for terrorist groups and encouraging the parties to enter into a dialogue and actively engage in the political process. In addition, the international community must prioritize humanitarian assistance, infrastructure recovery and the safe return of refugees. The Syrian people deserve peace, dignity and the chance to rebuild their nation free from terrorism and external manipulation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative Lebanon.

Mr. Hachem (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, the Arab Group congratulates you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. We thank you for responding to the request to convene this emergency meeting to discuss the grave developments in the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic.

The Arab Group is following with great concern the events that have been unfolding in Syria since 27 November 2024, in particular those in the governorates of Idlib and Aleppo, as a result of the attack led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham/Jabhat Al-Nusra Front, which the Security Council has listed as a terrorist organization. The attack caused a tragic loss of innocent civilian lives, including those of women and children, as well as damage to the civilian infrastructure and a significant wave of displacement. The Arab Group condemns the attack and emphasizes the need to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism. The Group underscores the need to uphold the sovereignty, unity, stability and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and the importance of combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

The Arab Group warns that the developments in the Syrian Arab Republic will have dire consequences for regional and international peace and security. It expresses its support for the Syrian Arab Republic in confronting terrorism in the form of Da'esh and the Jabhat Al-Nusra Front, along with their associated entities and groups and the repeated Israeli aggression against it and the continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan.

The Arab Group further underlines the need to support efforts to restore security and stability throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, alleviate the suffering, step up efforts to de-escalate the situation, avert bloodshed and resume diplomatic and political solutions that would preserve security and prosperity for the Syrian people and create conditions conducive to the return of Syrians to their homeland.

The Arab Group calls for prioritizing the language of reason and for foreign agendas to be repudiated, so that the Syrian national agenda can take precedence. It calls for the withdrawal of all foreign parties that are illegally present in Syria and for efforts to focus on achieving a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution, free from foreign interference, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), so as to preserve Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and the security of its citizens.

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Your statement today, Mr. President was a glaring confirmation of the hypocritical, or rather the unsavoury, nature of the foreign policy being pursued by the outgoing United States Administration. You could not summon the courage to condemn a clear terrorist attack against civilians in Syrian cities, who are struggling to rebuild a peaceful life despite the hundreds of illegal unilateral sanctions imposed by your country. Moreover, you slyly claimed that the attack on Aleppo and north-west Syria was carried out by certain rebels who, in your distorted worldview, are turning into terrorists and extremists and attacking countries that pursue an independent foreign policy that is not in line with United States interests. You failed to even notice how you betrayed yourself by promising to protect not the lives of ordinary Syrians, but only the American troops who are illegally occupying parts of Syria and shamelessly plundering its natural resources.

Today we have seen once again that there are no crimes that the United States is not prepared to sweep under the rug for the sake of profit and gain, be it the slaughter of 45,000 Palestinian civilians or the terrorist attack on peaceful Syrian cities by armed thugs. Given your words, Mr. President, no one now has any illusions that Washington will ever be willing to fight international terrorism honestly and sincerely. And, frankly speaking, we are glad that you and I are on opposite sides of the barricades, since concepts such as honesty, justice and conscience are not the hallmarks of United States foreign policy.

The President: In my national capacity, I would like to make a very brief statement in response to some comments that have been made.

I would submit to our colleague from the Russian Federation that he is in no position to accuse the United States of supporting terrorist groups. The United States has, for decades, fought the scourge of terrorism and will continue to fight the scourge of terrorism. The representative from the Russian Federation is in no

position to lecture us on the issue, particularly when it props up regimes that sponsor terrorism around the world.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Al Saleh has made a request to take the floor to respond to some comments and questions. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Al Saleh (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I would like to express my thanks to the Turkish Government, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and all the countries that support the Syrian people.

The representative of the barrel-bomb regime continues to mislead the international community. I will not respond to the accusations that he has levelled, as they have no credibility.

What I will say to the Council is that the Syrian people deserve to be represented at this table because the representatives of the chemical regime do not belong in the Security Council. They belong in the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice for the crimes they have perpetrated against the Syrian people over the past 14 years. The United Nations is in possession of more than 1 million pieces of evidence of the violations committed over the past 14 years.

As the Director of the Syrian Civil Defence White Helmets, I want to tell the Council that the Syrian Civil Defence is a neutral organization that is independent and transparent, and it serves all segments of the Syrian population, without discrimination, regardless of their ethnicity or doctrine.

Finally, I advise the international community and all States, especially Arab countries, to listen to the Syrian people and to stand by them so that they can achieve their aspirations to build a civilized Syria. Syria is a 7,000-year-old civilization, but the Syrian regime has turned Syria into a corridor for terrorist militias and into a country that manufactures and transits Captagon to all the Arab countries.

The President: I thank Mr. Al Saleh for the clarifications he has provided.

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked to make further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Ten years ago, we sat in this Chamber (see S/PV.7242) and adopted resolution 2170 (2014), on combating the Da'esh and the Jabhat Al-Nusra Front terrorist organizations. A few weeks later, we returned here for a high-level meeting of the Council (see S/PV.7272), during which the Council adopted resolution 2178 (2014), on combating foreign terrorist fighters. During that meeting, we listened to your country's representatives, Mr. President, to your fake promises to combat terrorism and to your promises to help States facing a terrorist risk.

What have the past 10 years revealed to us? They have revealed to us that you have not left a single terrorist without support, or a single terrorist organization without investing in it in order to serve your own agenda. That is unbefitting of you and unbefitting of any State. We are aware that you favour Israel's interests over the interests of the peoples of our region. You attacked the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). You covered up the killing of 249 of UNRWA's personnel and tried to undermine the Agency, just to serve Israel's interests.

What kind of credibility are you therefore talking about when you endow yourself with tools that you have invented and fabricated in order to undermine Syria's security and stability and to create a reality that would enable you to establish what you called — the illegitimate — "international coalition to fight terrorism"? I have never in my life — and I have worked for many years in this Organization — heard of a coalition established outside of the framework of the Charter of the United Nations, without a mandate from the Security Council, that killed innocent civilians, destroyed the city of Raqqa and its inhabitants, targeted the Syrian Arab army — as we witnessed in the famous Jabal Al-Thardah incident — allowed terrorists to take over certain areas and targeted a group of humanitarian volunteers sent to repair the Euphrates Dam years ago to prevent it from being further destroyed by your indiscriminate shelling. You targeted the vehicle that was carrying those volunteers. If you forgot, we do not forget.

The Council has heard a lot from us. It has heard false accusations and allegations against my country, but also heard facts that we have presented over many years. If you want to continue on that path, I reiterate that you are not only betraying the victims of terrorism

in our countries, but also the victims here of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

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

The Al-Assad regime, as we all know, is a known supporter of terrorist groups throughout the Middle East. It has carried out ruthless, brutal attacks against its own people, especially, as I mentioned earlier, through its repeated use of chemical weapons against its own people. The crimes that the regime has committed throughout the war over the past decade and more in Syria will not be forgotten, and the regime will be held accountable for those crimes.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked to make further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Repeating lies will do no good. Repeating wrongful policies will do no good. Continuing to defend crimes and practices and promoting and giving lectures on human rights will do no good. We all know how the United States punishes the Syrian people collectively through unilateral coercive measures. We all know how it is depriving the Syrian people of the basic necessities of life — and plundering their wealth. It is not only punishing the Syrian people but also plundering their wealth. Those are facts.

I have not seen in a single resolution of the United Nations or in the Charter of the United Nations anything that says or even indicates that counter-terrorism can be used as an excuse to steal the wealth of peoples. I have not seen that. If the United States applies international law or a Charter of the United Nations other than the ones that we know and uphold, then let it show them to us.

The situation requires wise policies. It requires wisdom. It requires countering terrorism. It requires not allowing millions of Syrians to be placed under the control of terrorist organizations. It requires guaranteeing the security and stability of the region. The terrorist threat is not in the interest of anyone. We saw how the United States behaved in Afghanistan. It fought there for 20 years, killing, looting and destroying. Then it left the country. Women and girls are still deprived of education and their most basic rights. The United States must learn from the lessons of the past, in addition to following sound policies and staying away from destructive policies.

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

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I will be very brief. I wish to simply state that today, Mr. President, thanks to your unskilful management, we have seen a Security Council meeting on a very serious question morph into a shameful display of political buffoonery as a result of the decision to invite a completely inappropriate briefer and play into his hands. It is also not very clear to us why you gave him the floor again, Mr. President, when you did not even state that he would answer questions from delegations. We view that as an egregious disregard for your duties, and we very much regret that.

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

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

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.