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New York

President:	Mr. Polyanskiy	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Remaoun
	China	Ms. Xu Hui
	Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Ms. Benn
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Dix
	United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

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

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: I have four key messages for the Security Council today.

My first message is a reminder that Syria remains in a state of profound conflict, complexity and division. Syria is riddled with armed actors, listed terrorist groups, foreign armies and front lines. Civilians are still victims of violence and subject to extensive human rights abuses, a protracted state of displacement and dire humanitarian conditions. We have seen further indications of the monumental scale of the crisis this month.

The threat of regional conflict cascading over Syria has not abated, particularly with an uptick in Israeli strikes on Syria. Last week, Israel carried out strikes that the Syrian Government said hit military sites in southern Syria and a residential building in Damascus. Israel said its strikes were in response to the launch of two drones from Syria towards Israel. Further Israeli strikes were reported in Tartous, Damascus, rural Damascus and near the Lebanese border. There is a profound risk of this dynamic escalating further, particularly if the situation in Lebanon worsens.

The threat of escalation within Syria's own borders remains undiminished, with hostilities over front lines across all of the north, resulting in civilian casualties. That has included clashes involving Syrian Government forces and aligned militias, the armed opposition, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), tribal elements and the listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, alongside pro-Government, Russian and Turkish air and drone strikes. The south has seen clashes erupt in Dara'a, displacing civilians. The need for de-escalation, leading towards a nationwide ceasefire remains as acute as ever. And the threat of listed terrorist groups is resurging, with attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on track to double this year, according to some counts, demanding cooperative action.

With the conflict continuing over more than 13 years, people are still taking to the streets to express grievances, often facing repressive action. In Government-controlled areas, a nearly year-long protest movement in Suwayda continues, voicing economic and political demands. Some protesters smashed ballot boxes for parliamentary elections this month, and there were reports of Government forces firing on a crowd and wounding one civilian, along with the assassination of a protest and armed faction leader. Some protesters also took to the streets in Jeramana, Damascus, protesting economic conditions. Meanwhile, outside of Government-controlled areas, a months-long protest movement in Idlib continues against listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. New protests also erupted across many locations in north-west Syria after attacks on refugees in Türkiye, Turkish statements on Syria and the brief opening of a commercial crossing with Syrian Government-controlled areas. Protesters were fired on, resulting in some fatalities. And parents in SDF-controlled Qamishli are holding sit-ins to demand the release of their children.

Meanwhile, repressive practices, including arbitrary arrests, torture in detention and disappearances, continue in all areas of Syria. Such practices also contribute to a generalized reality of lawlessness, fear and violence. So too does drug production, use and smuggling, which continue to be a source of concern for Syrians and the region. More and more Syrians are struggling to sustain themselves amid humanitarian and economic crises of epic proportions. My colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will no doubt say more on that, including the welcome news of the Syrian Government's extension of the authorization of cross-border access via Bab Al-Hawa. I reiterate the messages I always emphasize

on access, funding and sanctions when it comes to the humanitarian situation.

My second message today is related to the situation of refugees. Syrians outside of Syria are facing worrisome developments. Tensions in host countries reached new heights this month, with alarming reports of attacks on Syrian refugees sparking significant violence. Refugees are worried at the prospect of being forcibly returned or pushed to return through increasingly restrictive measures. We fully recognize the tremendous predicament that host countries face, and we strongly call for them to be supported even more. We also continue to stress the importance of supporting Syrians who choose to return voluntarily. At the same time, we also call for anti-refugee rhetoric and actions to end. Syrians must be protected wherever they are, and efforts must continue to create the conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified returns.

There is continued dialogue between the Government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, including on access inside Syria. We also take further note of communications and announcements by the Syrian Government related to military service, which we are following closely. The key is for work to develop into action on the range of concrete and verifiable steps needed to address the fears that refugees themselves express, both on the protection and livelihoods side — the latter also requiring the actions of donors too.

Given the scale and complexity of the conflict, there is no easy or quick-fix solution. The path to peace will be long and arduous, which is why we must start to walk it with purpose. I continue to explore ideas on how to prepare the ground for a new and comprehensive approach. At the same time, I continue to push for urgent de-escalation towards a nationwide ceasefire, for breaking the deadlock on reconvening the Constitutional Committee and on confidence-building measures, moving forward step-for-step.

That brings me to my third message today: we need a Syrian-led and -owned process facilitated by the United Nations. That is essential. That is the path described in resolution 2254 (2015), and it remains the only internationally agreed way forward. A process to implement it needs to be led and owned by the Syrians and to address the concerns of all Syrians. Syrians remain profoundly divided, politically and territorially, with millions still living outside of Government control. Bringing them back together and reconciling their visions is possible only through a negotiated political solution. The conflict is ultimately a political one, which can be resolved only when the Syrian parties are able to realize their legitimate aspirations and Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity are respected and restored.

I appreciated the recent engagement of the Syrian parties with us. My deputy was recently in Damascus, and I look forward to my next visit. I also look forward to my next engagement with the Syrian Negotiations Commission as well.

We note that, on 15 July, the Government of Syria organized parliamentary elections in line with the current constitutional and legislative arrangements. As I have said previously, such elections are not a substitute for the political process established by resolution 2254 (2015), which envisages the holding of credible and inclusive elections pursuant to a new constitution and administered under United Nations supervision.

That leads me to my fourth and final message: all major international stakeholders must be involved, and their relevant concerns would need to be addressed within the framework of a comprehensive approach to implementing resolution 2254 (2015). An approach is needed that does not exclude any of the military, political or economic actors — many of whom hold essential keys to the solution, or means to spoil it — and that addresses the full range of issues that continue to drive the conflict or are directly relevant to its resolution.

This month we have heard new statements from the Governments of Syria and Türkiye on the potential for renewed diplomatic contacts between them, as well as statements from the Governments of Russia and Iraq on their efforts to support that. Discussions also continue on the next stage of work of the Arab contact group. We continue to engage all partners who seek to participate in the efforts to move issues forward. And we continue to appeal to all players, whether they have contacts or not with Syrian parties, to act in a manner that contributes to unlocking the long-stalled effort to implement resolution 2254 (2015). We believe it is in the common interest of all and in the overriding interest of the Syrian people for all to work with the United Nations towards a broader set of coordinated actions that move us towards a new and comprehensive approach to resolving the conflict. A Syrian-led and -owned effort cannot succeed without cooperative international

diplomacy among key stakeholders in support of the United Nations-facilitated political process.

I share the deep frustrations of many Syrians at the lack of progress towards their legitimate aspirations and the restoration of their country. Those concerns were also voiced very strongly to me last week by members of the Women's Advisory Board, who met in Geneva. To be sustainable and fruitful, a solution must address the aspirations, grievances and security concerns of the Syrian sides and the broader spectrum of the Syrian people. I also share the frustrations of regional and international stakeholders, particularly host countries, who feel that the status quo is dangerous and unsustainable and that there is waning interest in Syria in some quarters. I stress the importance of overcoming obstacles and of finding ways forward. That can be done, and it requires the contributions of the Syrian parties and, as I said, of outside stakeholders. My appeal to all is to engage with the United Nations in a spirit of pragmatism, realism, frankness and compromise, to move forward the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: Syria continues to suffer its worst humanitarian crisis since the start of the conflict more than 13 years ago. Across the country, over 16 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, the vast majority of them women and children. Some 7.2 million people remain displaced from their homes following years of conflict, while hostilities continue to harm civilians and disrupt their access to essential services.

The impact of the conflict, alongside associated economic hardship, pressures from climate change, severely reduced humanitarian funding and the absence of development programming for basic services, is never starker than during these hottest months of the year. Earlier this month, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Mr. Adam Abdelmoula, visited the north-eastern governorate of Al-Hasakah, where temperatures were exceeding 40 degrees. Many of the people there have seen a significant reduction in the humanitarian assistance they had relied on, owing to significant funding cuts. People's access to water has been curtailed owing to decreased rainfall, compounded by the impact of conflict and the economic crisis on water and electricity infrastructure. Now they must also contend with water-borne diseases, many of which could have been prevented with basic water and sanitation infrastructure. Pregnant women, breastfeeding women, young children, people with disabilities and adolescent girls are disproportionately affected. Coupled with overcrowding and lack of privacy, water scarcity directly affects women's ability to safely manage their hygiene, including their menstrual hygiene, thereby increasing the risk of contracting waterborne diseases. Amina, a woman who has been living in the detention-like Al-Hol camp with her three children for the past two years, told Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Abdelmoula,

> "We often go days without enough clean water for drinking, cooking or washing. The high temperatures make the situation even worse. My children are constantly thirsty, and it is heartbreaking to see them suffer."

The United Nations and our partners are doing what we can to help people meet their most basic water needs. In Al-Hasakah, partner organizations have installed 16 water-treatment stations, each serving thousands of people. Following the cross-line assessment mission last month, planning continues for the repair of the Allouk water station, which serves upwards of 600,000 people in Al-Hasakah. And with support from the Syria Humanitarian Fund, work is ongoing to repair the Ayn Al-Bayda water station that supplies the Al-Bab area in Aleppo. In Quneitra, the World Food Programme has rehabilitated irrigation systems to support local agriculture. And across the country, more than 3.5 million people received water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in the first quarter of the year.

But funding shortfalls are seriously constraining our ability to maintain, let alone scale up those activities. More than halfway through the year, the humanitarian response plan is barely 20 per cent funded. To give an example of the implications, our partners in north-west Syria tell us that more than 900,000 people, more than half of them children, are not getting the critical water and sanitation support they need. As climate change makes heatwaves ever more frequent, those challenges will only grow. And as we have shown, the United Nations and partners have the right capacity, expertise and reach to scale up programming as soon as more funding is available. I therefore urge donors to provide

the funding we need to support the people of Syria as they face crisis upon crisis, year after year.

For the millions of people in north-western Syria now enduring extreme heat on top of years of conflict and displacement, the cross-border operation from Türkiye remains a critical lifeline. We welcome the Government of Syria's decision to extend permission for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point to deliver humanitarian assistance for an additional six months, until 13 January 2025. That is the second such extension for Bab Al-Hawa since February 2023, when the Government first permitted the United Nations to conduct cross-border operations into north-west Syria. Over the past year, nearly 2,000 trucks carrying United Nations aid have crossed from Türkiye to north-west Syria through the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings. They have also allowed United Nations staff to make regular visits to north-west Syria to ensure that our programmes are effectively meeting people's needs. Despite an overall reduction in aid due to underfunding, the border crossings have been instrumental in enabling critical assistance and protection services to be provided to more than 1 million vulnerable people every month.

Given the scale of the needs, it will also remain critical to continue efforts to scale up the use of cross-line assistance. In that regard, we remain concerned about the ongoing delays in planned missions in the north-west and north-east — a reminder of the challenges that unresolved conflicts pose to the predictable flow of aid. We are nevertheless hopeful that a cross-line mission to Idlib, the first in more than a year, will go ahead next month, and that planned movements to Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad, including the Allouk water station, can also proceed soon.

The deep vulnerabilities exposed by the extreme summer temperatures in Syria emphasize just how important it is to ensure the flow of humanitarian assistance to people in need. That requires unhindered humanitarian access and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. It also requires more funding. Those vulnerabilities also demonstrate the critical need to increase investment in early-recovery efforts across the country. Without improvements in the overall situation, we may well see many of the Syrians who represent the future of the country choosing to leave, adding to the millions of refugees in the region and beyond. More than anything, those vulnerabilities yet again underscore the need for urgent progress on a political solution to the conflict. I once again urge the Security Council to support the parties and Special Envoy Pedersen in securing a definitive end to the crisis.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing.

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

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

Despite the best efforts of the Special Envoy and his office, another month has passed without any breakthroughs on convening the Constitutional Committee or achieving progress on a political process or on any other facet of resolution 2254 (2015). As Russia and the Syrian regime continue their unrelenting campaign of obstruction, the Syrian opposition continues to seek real solutions and a better future for the Syrian people. We applaud the Syrian Negotiation Commission's continued good-faith engagement with the United Nations, including its visit to New York this month, and we reiterate our past calls for the regime to also engage in the political process. Let us be clear. The United States will not normalize relations with the Syrian regime or lift sanctions in the absence of an authentic and enduring political solution. We reiterate our call for the regime to take concrete action to implement all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

We denounce the sham parliamentary elections of 15 July orchestrated by the Syrian regime. The so-called elections lacked even a pretence of freedom or fairness. They were merely a rubber stamp for Bashar Al-Assad's continued dictatorship. No country should be fooled by that pathetic exercise. The Syrian people certainly were not. Elections in Syria must be free, fair, transparent and inclusive, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015). We will not legitimize electoral manipulation designed to create a facade of legitimacy and normalcy. It has been 13 years since the Syrian revolution began, and the regime continues to use violence to suppress peaceful, legitimate, popular demands for freedom and democracy. We reject the notion that it is time for the Security Council to move on. We condemn the violence that the regime recently used against peaceful protesters in Suwayda, killing one person.

On the humanitarian front, the United States notes the recent arrangement between the United Nations

and the Syrian regime for maintaining United Nations humanitarian access through Bab Al-Hawa for a further six months. While we are relieved that the lifeline remains open, it is unfortunate that United Nations humanitarian access is put in question every six months, when Syrians' needs are so dire. We commend OCHA's commitment to ensuring the cross-border and cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance, consistent with humanitarian principles. In that regard, the United States reiterates its call for the Syrian regime to cooperate with United Nations requests to provide cross-line humanitarian assistance to civilians in Rukban and to reopen commercial access to Rukban, and we urge our allies and partners to join the call. We reiterate the call in the Council's recently adopted resolution 2730 (2024) urging all parties to conflicts to allow and facilitate humanitarian access to all civilians in need, and the residents of Rukban are no exception.

We also remain focused on the situation at Al-Hol camp and detention centres in north-east Syria, which require additional international support, owing to the fact that the international response is significantly underfunded. Ultimately, the only long-term, durable solution to those challenges is through the repatriation or return of displaced and detained persons to their areas or countries of origin so they can be effectively reintegrated into their communities and be held accountable for their conduct, where appropriate.

Finally, we note once again and with growing concern that Iran and its proxies and partners are increasingly using Syrian territory as a platform for malign activity. Iran's militant proxies and partners have brought only death and destruction and do nothing to help the Syrian people. The regime must act to curb their malign activities and end that threat to regional security.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In my capacity as President of the Security Council, I am obliged to thank the representative of the United States for his statement.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Director Ramesh Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

Switzerland welcomes the efforts undertaken by Mr. Pedersen within the framework of his mandate under resolution 2254 (2015). We call on the Syrian parties, the Arab contact group and the participants in the Astana process, as well as international partners, to relaunch their mutual dialogue and cooperate with the Special Envoy within the comprehensive framework provided by the resolution, in order to reach a lasting political solution in Syria. The resolution defines the main parameters of a political process led and implemented by Syrians. Renewed cooperation with the United Nations on the part of all the Syrian and international parties should make it possible to identify the common denominators needed to break the deadlock in that process. In that respect, relaunching the activities of the Constitutional Committee, whose meetings Geneva stands ready to host, would send an important message of support for the quest for a concerted approach to peace. The participation of civil society, including women and displaced persons and refugees, in the search for a political solution is vital. In Geneva, the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board are essential conduits for the voices of Syrians in the peace efforts under United Nations auspices.

Switzerland would like to emphasize that civilian populations and property are protected under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. The establishment of a nationwide ceasefire, as advocated by resolution 2254 (2015), is key. Any spread of the conflict in the Middle East to the wider region must be avoided at all costs.

Finally, the fight against impunity for the abuses committed in the country since 2011 is a sine qua non for achieving lasting peace. In that regard, conflict-related violence, including arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and the targeting of women human rights defenders, must stop. To that end, we support the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. There can be no lasting peace in Syria without justice.

The humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate. The combination of an ongoing conflict, destructive earthquakes, increasingly frequent droughts and a worsening economic situation is having a devastating impact on the Syrian population. Malnutrition is wreaking havoc, while almost half the population face hampered access to basic services and resources as

vital as drinking water. As a result, almost 17 million people, many of them children, are dependent on humanitarian aid at a time when humanitarian actors are facing significant budget cuts.

Humanitarian exemptions from sanctions are important to facilitating humanitarian activities, particularly in the areas of health, education and food security. Switzerland therefore welcomes the renewal of authorization for the delivery of humanitarian aid by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the north-west through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months. Switzerland regards that authorization as an encouraging sign of increased collaboration with the United Nations on all aspects of the conflict. All forms of access to beneficiaries — cross-line, cross-border and within Syria — remain necessary to meet the enormous needs of the population. In that connection, we emphasize that authorizing and facilitating the rapid, safe and unhindered passage of humanitarian aid is an obligation under international humanitarian law. Open-ended authorizations, including for the two other crossing points of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai next month, continue to be essential in order to ensure greater predictability and the effective funding and planning of humanitarian operations and early-recovery activities. The multidimensional crises that Syria is facing require an appropriate and united response from the international community, and Switzerland will continue to work for that goal.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

Malta remains deeply concerned about the perilous situation in Syria. Economic calamity, air strikes, shelling and the impact of an underfunded humanitarian response are a stark reflection of the fragile situation that Syrians are facing. Furthermore, in the past month we have witnessed renewed clashes and violence along the north-west border with Türkiye and numerous incidents of civilians trapped in conflict in the north-east and the south.

Against that backdrop, we welcome the decision brokered by the United Nations and Damascus on the reauthorization of access via the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months. Bab Al-Hawa continues to be a critical pipeline for enabling humanitarian assistance to reach the millions who are trapped in the north-west. We again call for the authorization and functioning of all crossings for as long as the humanitarian need persists. We reiterate our support for all aid modalities that deliver assistance via the most direct routes, including cross-line. While we are pleased to see an increase in the funding for the United Nations humanitarian response plan, we regret that it remains only 18.7 per cent funded. Greater resources are needed. That would ensure that attention is given to gender equality, early recovery, resilience and livelihood programming in order to support sustained and dignified living for Syrians. Such action would have positive, compounding effects and would help break the cycle of a perpetual emergency response.

The continued stalling of the resumption of the Constitutional Committee only widens the gap between Syria's crisis and any semblance of a just and lasting peace. Malta once again calls on all the parties, especially Damascus, to return to the table in good faith to work for the future of the people of Syria. There is no alternative pathway to credible and real progress apart from the one outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). Greater engagement with the Special Envoy and his good offices is vital in that regard, including faithful engagement on his step-for-step initiative. We insist that women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation be ensured at every stage of the political process.

We remain especially concerned about the persistently high number of grave violations committed against children. We urge all parties in Syria to meaningfully engage with the United Nations on ending and preventing such violations, and to abide by their obligations under international law.

A defining feature of the brutal conflict in Syria has been the issue of the missing, disappeared and arbitrarily detained. Progress and cooperation on that issue would give closure to hundreds of thousands of grieving family members and indicate a genuine will to account for the crimes that have been committed. In that regard, Malta once again reiterates its support for the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and urges that its mandate be implemented in a gender-responsive and survivor-centred manner. For Syrian refugees who wish to return, we again state that all returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified. We are concerned about recent reports of forced returns to Syria from the region and note the responsibility of Damascus to ensure that the rights, safety and security of all returnees are respected.

In conclusion, Malta emphasizes once again that it is critical for all parties to this conflict and for their international backers to reach a compromise. Leadership and vision are needed to bridge the divide more than ever.

Ms. Dix (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings this morning.

I will make three points today.

First, as they have made clear, the humanitarian situation across Syria remains dire, borne out of over a decade of conflict and the actions of the regime, including its recent decision to blockade aid into the Rukban camp, which has led to severe food scarcity. We call on the regime to permit commercial access into the Rukban camp and ensure all routes for humanitarian access, including into north-west Syria, are sustained and predictable. Short-term, last-minute decisions are not appropriate, as the United Nations continues to make clear. Access should be granted for as long as humanitarian need demands it.

Secondly, in the light of the United Nations sanctions report published last week, I wanted to underscore that our sanctions against the Al-Assad regime have a clear purpose — they are designed to hold to account those responsible for committing abhorrent atrocities over the past 14 years, including perpetrators of serious human rights violations and chemical-weapons use. We have taken clear steps to ensure that sanctions and any tools aimed at holding the Al-Assad regime accountable do not impact the wider Syrian population or the delivery of humanitarian support. We resolutely support those affected by the ongoing devastating conflict.

Thirdly, the only route out of the current crisis is via a comprehensive and sustainable political settlement. This month's parliamentary elections in Syria were held with the aim of sustaining Al-Assad's dictatorship and giving a semblance of popular legitimacy to his unreformed and undemocratic regime. In response, we have seen protesters inside Syria boycott the elections and demand a fairer and more transparent process. Legitimate elections in Syria can only be a product of a genuine political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which allows for the participation of all eligible Syrians, including members of the diaspora.

I end by recalling that it is in Al-Assad's power to end this intolerable conflict and to take responsibility for the human rights violations and abuses that Syrians have endured. It is time to deliver on the legitimate demands of the Syrian people and to make a genuine commitment to peace, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In my capacity as President of the Security Council, I am under obligation to thank the representative of the United Kingdom for her statement.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I, too, thank Special Envoy Pedersen and the Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rajasingham, for their briefings.

The Middle East has remained extremely volatile since 7 October. The broader region is in danger of conflict escalation. One weak point in that regard is Syria, which has been embroiled in an ongoing conflict for the past 14 years. Any miscalculation could plunge not only Syria, but also the broader region, further into the abyss. We must therefore continue our tireless work in furtherance of our commitment to resolve this long-lasting conflict.

I would like to highlight several basic points that could improve the Syrian issue.

First, the violent regional backdrop underscores the pressing need for a viable political solution in Syria. Sustained de-escalation towards a nationwide ceasefire is required. In order to build the necessary confidence to achieve that aim, all parties should sit together and reconvene the long-suspended Constitutional Committee. Since neither Geneva nor Baghdad is agreeable to all parties, we encourage a neighbouring country to take a leading role by proposing a third venue. The Republic of Korea notes the Special Envoy's new comprehensive political solution involving all stakeholders, both within and outside Syria, going beyond piecemeal approaches in solving the political impasse. No actor alone can solve this crisis. Constructive international diplomacy with all stakeholders is the correct way to advance a favourable outcome in Syria.

Secondly, the detainee and missing persons crisis is as acute as ever. This month the Syrian Network for Human Rights reported at least 1,236 arbitrary detentions documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June alone. No sustainable political solution can move forward against the backdrop of this immense scale of missing persons, arbitrary detentions

and enforced disappearances. No transitional justice or lasting reconciliation is possible without first addressing the grief of the families of the missing. We note that resolution 2254 (2015) calls for the release of any arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children, in pursuit of a Syrian-led political process facilitated by the United Nations.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation in Syria is dire, in and of itself, but it is also significant in the context of the broader region. In Syria, 16.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that 7.2 million are now internally displaced, alongside the more than 5 million refugees in neighbouring countries. Another six-month extension of Bab Al-Hawa is welcomed, but we insist that cross-border access be granted for as long as humanitarian needs demand across all three crossing points.

Two criteria must be met to ensure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees. The Syrian Government must guarantee their safety, not erect legal barriers, and not force military conscription, regardless of the returnees' geographical origin, sects or political views. In addition, the international community should facilitate their voluntary return by providing resources. The Republic of Korea has therefore contributed $700,000 to the UNHCR's area-based return support project.

We are disappointed that there seems to be no feasible progress in the Syrian situation, and the tensions are high. However, as Special Envoy Pedersen testified today, we must remember that the Syrian conflict is alive. People there are still in agony. More importantly, against the backdrop of the current escalating tensions that have engulfed the wider region since 7 October, we must honour our unwavering commitment to immediate de-escalation and a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the informative briefings of Special Envoy Pedersen and of Director Ramesh Rajasingham, on behalf of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The stalemate in the political negotiation process in Syria has been a constant Security Council concern. It will be impossible to make progress towards sustainable peace in Syria, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015), until key actors demonstrate the necessary political will and commitment to implement confidence-building measures and relaunch a process of multi-stakeholder dialogue. The uptick in violence, especially attacks targeting residential areas and critical infrastructure, only compounds the precarious socioeconomic conditions and the growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism.

My delegation reiterates its support for Special Envoy Pedersen and hopes that his comprehensive approach on how to achieve a lasting political solution to the crisis in Syria will be reflected in concrete actions, such as resuming the work of the Constitutional Committee and the step-by-step negotiation strategy.

It is regrettable that 70 per cent of the Syrian population requires humanitarian assistance to survive and that funding constraints threaten to limit the implementation of early-recovery projects and other humanitarian aid programmes. In addition, there are lingering concerns about the situation of internally displaced persons, refugees in third countries and the lack of response on the fate of arbitrarily detained and missing persons.

Special Envoy Pedersen stated that peace in Syria is urgent and necessary. Achieving it will require exercising maximum restraint, prioritizing pluralistic and inclusive political dialogue and addressing terrorist threats through a concerted regional approach.

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

Only a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) can make it possible to achieve a just peace in Syria. France supports Mr. Pedersen's efforts and his step-for-step approach. The regime must cease its persistent obstruction of the political process. The international community stands ready to join Mr. Pedersen in exploring every possible avenue for restoring stability to Syria. Nothing but tangible progress on the political front will make it possible to lift the sanctions and finance reconstruction.

France continues to support the millions of Syrian refugees in the region, as well as the countries that take them in. The reluctance of refugees to return to their country is not just economic. It is founded primarily on security and political concerns. France is continuing its work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to ensure that the regime

creates the conditions for a safe return. We call on the regime to commit in good faith to providing all the necessary guarantees, and we fully support High Commissioner Grandi's efforts in that area. France calls on the Damascus regime and all parties to the conflict to clarify the situation of people who are missing and to release those who have been arbitrarily detained. The systematic use of torture and sexual violence must not go unpunished.

The humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate and barely 21 per cent of the response plan has been funded. We must therefore mobilize, particularly in the water and sanitation sectors. The European Union is the leading contributor to this effort, and French aid will total €50 million in 2024. We encourage all members of the Council to contribute. The delivery of aid must be guaranteed by all possible means, both across borders and across lines. In that respect, we welcome the extension to January 2025 of the opening of the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing. That route must remain open as long as necessary.

Finally, France is concerned about the situation in Lebanon and the violence on the border with Israel. We call on the parties to show restraint and respect resolution 1701 (2006). We remain committed to avoiding a conflagration in the wider region, on the basis of the proposals we have made to both parties.

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

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Director Ramesh Rajasingham for their valuable briefings and acknowledge the presence and participation in today's meeting of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye.

The A3+ regrets that no significant progress has been made on the political track and expresses its concern about the fact that no breakthrough has been made in the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. We want to emphasize to the relevant parties the importance of offering Syrians a glimmer of hope and of restoring their confidence in the future of their country. We reiterate our support for the work of Special Envoy Pedersen and urge the relevant parties to engage positively with his efforts to revive and establish a Syrian-owned and -led peace process. Those efforts must seek to resolve the crisis, which has so far cast a dark shadow over the lives of millions of Syrians. In that regard, the A3+ stresses the importance of accelerating the peace process as a matter of urgency and of fully implementing resolution 2254 (2015).

Recent events have exposed the fragility of peace and security in Syria, and the situation is on the verge of further escalation. The A3+ calls for a nationwide ceasefire and for every effort to be made to avoid an escalation of tensions within Syria and in the wider region. The resurgence of terrorist activities in the country highlights the possibility that Syria could return to a dangerous level of threat. Combating terrorism is a collective duty that requires concerted international efforts and decisive action. We would also like to underscore that violations of Syrian sovereignty threaten a further deterioration in the security situation both in the country and in the wider region, which could have devastating consequences. The A3+ therefore renews its call for full respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and urges all parties to exercise maximum restraint and work diligently to achieve the objectives set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

Civilians, especially children and women, bear the brunt of wars and crises, and Syria is no exception. Today's briefings paint a grim picture of immense suffering. Unfortunately, the international community's efforts have fallen short of meeting the funding target set in the 2024 humanitarian needs and response plan. The already dire humanitarian situation will only worsen with the current funding shortage, at a meagre 21 per cent — a significant drop of 35 per cent compared to last year. Moreover, with 13.6 million people desperately needing water, sanitation and hygiene services, the relevant sector is unfortunately only 13 per cent funded. The A3+ calls on donors to provide adequate, flexible and non-earmarked funding for the Syrian people. We welcome the Syrian Government's renewal of the authorization for the United Nations to deliver aid through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing until 13 January 2025 and look forward to the renewal of the authorizations for Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai next month. The A3+ emphasizes the critical importance of using all available pathways to provide humanitarian assistance, including both cross-border and cross-line mechanisms.

We stress the urgent need to address the plight of Syrian refugees, which has taken on dangerous dimensions that may become a factor of instability

for the region. The increase in irregular migration is a priority issue that should be addressed within the parameters and safeguards of international law. The A3+ calls on all the parties to create a safe environment that enables the dignified, voluntary and safe return of Syrian refugees to their homes, including through the funding of early-recovery projects. That is a collective responsibility that we must fulfil.

The A3+ takes note of the report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Western Asia entitled *Dynamics and unintended effects of unilateral coercive measures against the Syrian Arab Republic*, released on 12 July. It sheds light on the unintended consequences of sanctions for those delivering humanitarian aid, which in turn affect the lives and livelihoods of the Syrian people. We also take note of its recommendations, which aim to help policymakers find innovative and sustainable ways to meet growing humanitarian needs despite the sanctions currently in place. We reiterate our call for lifting the sanctions, as appropriate, to facilitate economic recovery in Syria.

In conclusion, the Security Council must translate its continued successive meetings into tangible results for the Syrian people, who yearn for a political solution to end the crisis that has devastated their country and displaced millions. The A3+ calls for a political solution that guarantees Syrian unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty and fulfils the aspirations of its people. That must be our goal, free from other interests and considerations. Our priority must be the interests of the Syrian people.

Ms. Xu Hui (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings. In view of the current situation, I would like to make three points.

First, against the overall background of the Gaza conflict, all the parties concerned must exercise maximum restraint and make sincere efforts to maintain stability in the countries of the region, including Syria, in order to prevent a further spread of the conflict. China reiterates that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected. We urge Israel to stop its air strikes against Syria and foreign forces to end their illegal military presence there. The major Powers outside the region should play a constructive role in de-escalating the situation.

Secondly, we must always stick to the fundamental approach of seeking a political solution to the Syrian issue. China supports the efforts made by Special Envoy Pedersen to that end by following the principle of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned solution. We also expect that the League of Arab States and countries in the region will maintain communication and cooperation with the Syrian Government. Terrorism is a long-term threat to the political process of Syria. China firmly supports the Syrian Government's counter-terrorism efforts and calls on the international community to observe international law and Security Council resolutions, reject double standards and work together to combat terrorist forces in Syria, with a zero-tolerance approach.

Thirdly, we must create an enabling environment for Syria to resume its economic development and ultimately improve its humanitarian situation. We call on donors to effectively honour their pledges to Syria in order to ensure adequate funding support for all humanitarian projects throughout Syria.

Thanks to the joint efforts by the Syrian Government and the United Nations, border crossings for aid delivery are now operating continuously and effectively. The parties concerned should actively cooperate to facilitate progress in cross-line aid delivery.

Unilateral sanctions imposed by some countries have resulted in huge economic losses for Syria and seriously weakened its capacity for economic recovery and social development. Unilateral sanctions against Syria and the illegal plundering of its resources must cease immediately.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director of Coordination for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Rajasingham for their briefings.

Slovenia reiterates its call to defuse and de-escalate the situation in Syria, and it urges all actors in the region to exert the utmost restraint. In the light of the regional escalation of violence, it is even more important that the situation in Syria not deteriorate further. That underscores the immediate urgency of reaching a viable political solution through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process under the auspices of the United Nations, in which full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of Syrian women is essential. Slovenia fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts to find a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We also urge all major stakeholders to make serious commitments to confidence-building measures led by the Special Envoy. We call for the restoration of dialogue among Syrians, starting with agreeing to reconvene the Constitutional Committee meetings without any further delay.

In the light of that, I would like to make the following points.

First, given the continued conduct of hostilities, insecurity and instability, millions of Syrians continue to live in a climate of fear. Millions of people are still internally displaced, and there are millions of refugees. Syrians are still fleeing the country, whether owing to the violent conflict, oppression and the economic crisis or the desperate humanitarian situation. We are very concerned about the increasing reports of severe human rights violations and abuses against Syrian refugees in the region, including about violations of the principle of non-refoulement. That is unacceptable and must stop. We reiterate that conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees are not met yet.

Secondly, thousands of Syrians perished under torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including sexual and gender-based violence, while in detention, and too many are still suffering from torture today across all of Syria. Slovenia reiterates its call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure compliance with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice. The sheer scale of the file of missing persons, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances in Syria is a stark reminder that no lasting reconciliation is possible without addressing the grief of the families of the missing. Children continue to suffer from grave violations of their rights, including recruitment. Accountability is imperative for obtaining justice for survivors. We continue to support efforts to gather and preserve evidence with a view to future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

Thirdly, as we heard today, women in Syria are facing particularly perilous conditions. We are alarmed by the reports of the enormous increase in violence against women and girls, including early and forced marriage. Women are bearing the brunt of the economic and humanitarian crisis, forcing them to resort to negative coping mechanisms that leave them exposed and exploited.

Fourthly, without the prospect of a political solution, the humanitarian situation in Syria will continue to deteriorate. The humanitarian needs are at an all-time high, driven by overlapping crises, including multiple conflicts around the country, a severe water crisis, food insecurity and health emergencies, as well as by the consequences of other crises in the region. The Syrian people need sustainable, predictable and efficient aid flows — including cross-border aid and cross-line aid — across the whole country for as long as needed. We recall that all parties must ensure the unimpeded, rapid and safe passage of humanitarian aid to and through areas under their control.

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

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

The Syrian crisis remains unresolved with no end in sight. The humanitarian situation has never been worse. The economy is in a free fall. Ninety per cent of Syrians are in poverty. That is clearly unsustainable.

Given the lack of political momentum or will with regard to Syria, there is serious concern that the international community is shifting its focus to other crises around the world. But as the Special Envoy stated, we must not forget the Syrian people, nor the instability in the region caused by the continuation of their plight.

Japan is engaging with the Syrian Government on a variety of issues, including on the political track, early recovery, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and relations with the broader international community.

Today I would like to focus on three points.

First, while the political stalemate unfortunately persists, Japan firmly believes that only a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can pave the way towards a stable and peaceful Syria. Japan therefore reiterates its call for the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee and for finding a suitable venue without delay. Japan strongly supports Special Envoy Pedersen and his team's tireless efforts to that end, and it urges all parties to engage with him in good faith. We further value the ongoing Arab initiative, in particular the work of the Arab contact group, and hope to see an early holding of the ministerial meeting in Baghdad.

Secondly, turning to the humanitarian file, it is deeply concerning that even as needs continue to increase, funding for the humanitarian response plan remains insufficient. More than half of the population face high levels of acute food insecurity; safe water and sanitation services have been disrupted in northern Syria; and a third of the country's children live in food poverty. The United Nations cross-border operation remains a lifeline for millions of people in north-west Syria. Japan therefore welcomes the Syrian Government's decision to extend the use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months. Early-recovery and resilience assistance will complement the humanitarian relief efforts. Japan has already given $65 million this year across a range of early-recovery assistance projects to help Syrians rebuild their lives, including the recent restoration of the Aleppo children's hospital, in close cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization.

Thirdly, on the security front, violence and instability continue to deepen and spread across the region. Tensions in the Golan Heights, the sharp increase of attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and alleged air strikes by Israel targeting sites in Syria all give cause for concern. De-escalation is urgently needed on all fronts to prevent further civilian casualties and volatility. Let us not forget that the growing security tensions are having a negative effect on the conditions required for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. The Syrian people have already suffered through 14 years of conflict and deserve to live prosperous lives. Japan will spare no effort to that end.

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

We thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Coordination Director Ramesh Rajasingham, of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings on the situation in friendly Syria.

The difficult situation on the ground is now also being noticeably exacerbated by the risks and threats resulting from the ongoing bloodshed in the area of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Israel's continuing arbitrary air strikes on Syrian territory are an additional destabilizing factor and a flagrant violation of international law and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that State. There can be no justification whatsoever for West Jerusalem's nefarious practice of so-called "targeted eliminations" in neighbouring countries. On 14 July, two Israeli Air Force tactical fighter jets fired approximately 10 guided aerial bombs from the airspace above the occupied Golan Heights into the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. The strikes targeted a residential building in the capital's Kafr Sousa neighbourhood, a number of objects in the capital's nearby suburbs of Dummar and the Madar site. The air raid also targeted Syrian Arab Army positions in the southern province of Dara'a**.** The attack killed one soldier and wounded three others.

Similar lawlessness is also being perpetrated by the United States and its allies. Such actions could ignite the already highly charged atmosphere in the region. Based on today's statement by the representative of the United States, we can see that interference in the affairs of what they view as undesirable States and attempts to destabilize situations there continue to be a conscious choice of the authorities in Washington. We are now seeing with our own eyes the repercussions of that self-serving policy in the Middle East and elsewhere. In that context, it is regrettable that despite the declared counter-terrorism objectives of the United States' occupation of various parts of Syria, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and terrorist groups affiliated with it retain significant capabilities in the areas where our Western colleagues on the Security Council have an illegal military presence, that is, the trans-Euphrates and Al-Tanf regions. Another hotbed of terrorism is the Idlib de-escalation zone, controlled by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham militants, whom Washington is trying to shield from any criticism. The United States is unfortunately

being openly assisted in that effort by United Nations humanitarian agencies, which continue to maintain direct contacts with the militants and are afraid to call things by their proper names. We have consistently maintained that achieving sustainable stabilization in the Syrian Arab Republic is possible only by ending the foreign military presence in the country, which is a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We also demand an unconditional end to air strikes on Syrian territory by the Israeli Air Force.

It is not surprising that in such turbulent conditions we are not seeing the progress on the Syrian political settlement track within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) that is particularly needed now. For our part, we have steadfastly continued to support a political settlement process in Syria led and implemented by Syrians themselves under United Nations mediation, for which there is no alternative. We have consistently advocated for the importance of maintaining a direct intra-Syrian dialogue, and the Constitutional Committee remains the main platform for that. We are also convinced that decisions on the venue for its next rounds of consultations should be made by the Syrians themselves without external interference, no matter how much anyone else might like to make that choice for them.

Against that backdrop, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate and is extremely worrisome. Millions of citizens are suffering from a lack of food, medical care and decent sanitation, and an extreme heatwave has compounded the existing problems. Water supply problems are affecting 13.6 million Syrians, and more than 1.8 million effectively have no access to clean drinking water, which has naturally resulted in outbreaks of infectious diseases. Despite the loud pledges made during the eighth Brussels get-together, donor countries are apparently in no hurry to hand over their contributions to help Syrians, thereby condemning civilians to starvation and worsening living conditions, owing to the collapse of critical infrastructure and the refusal to rebuild it. Only 21 per cent of the funds required under the United Nations humanitarian appeal have been mobilized, which is 30 per cent less than the figure for the first half of last year. At the same time, some Western States have unhesitatingly continued to plunder and export Syrian natural resources such as oil and grain.

The Western countries' policy on the issue of refugee return is another example of the open politicization of the humanitarian file in Syria. The Brussels conference only served to confirm that the West is continuing its policy of rationing out funds for the support of Syrians in neighbouring countries in dribs and drabs, providing enough only to prevent an influx of migrants into Europe while in principle blocking their repatriation. But it is clear that international assistance programmes must be implemented in Syria itself in order to create the conditions that will encourage refugees to return home. That is the scenario advocated by many Syria's neighbours in the region, but it simply does not fit the self-serving geopolitical plans of the United States and its allies. In that context, we believe it will be useful to maintain contacts between Damascus and other Arab capitals and develop further cooperation in the interests of finding effective solutions to the problems in the region. In that regard, we welcome the initiative on holding a meeting of the Syria contact group of the League of Arab States in Baghdad to discuss a broad agenda, including issues related to repatriation.

The Syrian Government continues to abide by the imperatives of humanity, and not just in words but in action. It is ensuring humanitarian access to the Syrian population, including in areas outside its control. On 10 July it extended the authorization for United Nations entities to use the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing, through which an overwhelming majority of United Nations humanitarian supplies are delivered, until mid-January 2025. Shortly before that, the operation of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings was also extended until 13 August.

We also welcome the holding and outcome of the parliamentary elections to the Syrian People's Assembly held on 15 July, when more than 8,100 polling stations were open around the country, and safe humanitarian corridors for citizens who wished to vote were established in Idlib province in north-west Syria. We regard the elections as a sovereign matter of the Syrian Arab Republic and an important step towards strengthening its internal stability. We are of the view that it is in the interests of all Syrians to ensure the proper functioning of State institutions based on Syrian legislation, particularly in the context of the ongoing armed confrontation with terrorist elements. In that regard, we view some of our colleagues' statements about the illegitimacy of those elections as an example of blatant political pressure on Damascus and yet

another attempt to interfere in Syria's domestic affairs with a view to destabilizing the country. No one has a right to dictate to Syrians when and under what conditions they should elect their country's Parliament.

In conclusion, I would like to mention one more issue. There is not a single serious international expert who continues to doubt that the main obstacle to comprehensive and adequate humanitarian assistance to Syria today is the politicized policies of the collective West aimed at stepping up sanctions pressure and blocking early-recovery projects.

We commend the issuance of a report (E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2023/TP.8) by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the negative impact of unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria. This document effectively breaks through the information blockade on this topic, which our Western colleagues have been working hard to maintain. Despite the occasionally vague narration and timid conclusions, the authors nevertheless clearly describe the significant impact of the sanctions on the humanitarian activities of United Nations agencies and the socioeconomic situation in the country.

According to surveys conducted by the report's authors in different parts of Syria, including in territories outside the control of Damascus, 92 per cent of Syrians are affected by the United States and European Union sanctions. Western restrictions have had a major impact on the pharmaceutical industry, medical care, food security and children's access to quality education. They have also hampered infrastructure reconstruction efforts, not to mention the negative impact on humanitarian actors on the ground. That completely contradicts the narrative of supposedly carefully calibrated sanctions and effective humanitarian exemptions that the United States and its allies are trying to promote in the Syrian context, including in the Security Council.

We hope that the issuance of this report will give rise to a series of objective and public assessments by United Nations representatives regarding the impact of unilateral sanctions on ordinary citizens, whose suffering is only compounded as a result of the illegal restrictions imposed in circumvention of the Security Council. I stress that the report leaves no doubt that Western sanctions are hitting the most vulnerable groups of the population, first and foremost. As such, the sanctions are a direct and flagrant violation of the right of States to development and an infringement of one of the key principles of the Agenda for Sustainable Development — leaving no one behind.

In that context, we once again call on the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinators and country teams to take an impartial approach to fulfilling the mandate entrusted to them under General Assembly resolution 78/135, on monitoring and reporting on unilateral sanctions. We see the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia report as a good, albeit still timid step in the right direction.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I am taking the floor to restate the rationale for United States sanctions on the Al-Assad regime for those who may not be familiar with United States policy on this issue.

United States sanctions are an important tool to press for accountability from the Al-Assad regime, notably with respect to its appalling record on human rights violations and abuses inflicted upon Syrians. Our commitment to promoting accountability for those responsible for atrocities in Syria, and justice for the victims, is unwavering. Without accountability, the Syrian people will never experience a stable, just and enduring peace.

United States sanctions against the Syrian regime do not target the provision of humanitarian goods, including medicine, medical supplies and food to Syria. Our Syria sanctions programme provides authorizations, exemptions and general licenses for humanitarian assistance.

The United States also spearheaded efforts to adopt resolution 2664 (2022), which created a humanitarian carveout to United Nations sanctions regimes, including those with a nexus to Syria. The Al-Assad regime is the one obstructing humanitarian access to Syrians in need, killing and displacing Syrians and destroying critical civilian infrastructure. As the largest single donor of humanitarian assistance for the Syrian conflict, the United States has provided more than $17 billion for populations inside Syria and for refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In my capacity as President of the Security Council, I am compelled to thank the representative of the United States for his statement.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts and for successfully conducting the work of the Security Council this month.

My country, Syria, believes in the partnership with the United Nations and its Member States. We believe in the promotion of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to support the efforts of the Syrian State to improve the living conditions of the Syrian people and to provide them with basic services.

The Syrian Government continues its constructive and positive engagement while providing support and necessary facilities to our partners in the development and humanitarian fields, including its sovereign decision of renewing the authorization for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for an additional six months, until 13 January 2025, because we believe in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syrian civilians in need in north-western Syria. Furthermore, all our other authorizations with regard to the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings and other cross-line delivery are still valid.

At the same time, the Government continues to make every effort to promote the role of State institutions and ensure their efficiency, as well as to continue its own administrative and economic reform and development. In order to uphold the Constitutional requirements, on 15 July Syrians went to the polls and elected their representatives to the People's Assembly. Elections were held under the supervision of an independent supreme judicial committee that took all necessary measures to ensure credible and transparent elections.

The Syrian Government continues to make every effort to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons. Indeed, hundreds of them have safely returned in recent days from Lebanon amid a comfortable environment, and the necessary facilities were provided to them. That proves once again that the false propaganda spread by the West is anything but credible.

Despite the facilities provided by the Syrian Government, the outcomes of its cooperation with the United Nations are still insufficient. That is due to the hostile positions of some Western States that continue to violate international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations through their illegal military presence, sponsorship of militias and terrorist organizations, looting of our national wealth and imposition of unilateral coercive measures, not to mention their politicization of humanitarian and development work, which they link to political conditions that serve their own interests, at the expense of the security, stability and prosperity of the Syrian people.

Those hostile policies have severely damaged the ability of the United Nations to implement its mandate with regard to maintaining peace and security in the region by putting an end to Israel's aggression, as well as to provide humanitarian assistance, support the resilience of Syrians and implement early-recovery projects in the key sectors indicated in the relevant Council resolutions, namely, health, education, water, electricity and shelter, in addition to demining and explosive device removal. The removal of mines and explosive devices is urgently needed in order to facilitate the return of the displaced people to their homes and land and to ensure the security and safety of the Syrian people.

A few days ago, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia issued its report on the effects of unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian Arab Republic, giving further evidence of the disastrous impact of those illegal measures. It refutes the allegations promoted by those who impose them, such as we heard earlier from the representative of the United States Administration. It is therefore another step in exposing the catastrophic effects of those illegitimate measures while refuting the allegations promoted by those who impose them. And that is despite the fact that the report focused on what it called the unintended effects of those measures or of overcompliance with them, which is only the tip of the iceberg.

The real problem is not overcompliance. It is the imposition of the unilateral coercive measures themselves, and the West's threats to impose sanctions on third States and financial and commercial institutions while terrorizing them, that are the core and root cause of the problem. They constitute a grave violation of international law and of the purposes and principles of the Charter as well as various United Nations resolutions. They are a collective punishment imposed on peoples,

depriving them of a dignified life and denying them basic rights. Ms. Alena Douhan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, confirmed that following her visit to Syria last year. Syria once again calls for the immediate, unconditional and complete lifting of unilateral coercive measures and the provision of sustainable and predictable funding to enable the United Nations to implement the humanitarian response plan, which at only 20 per cent fulfilled is underfunded.

We also call for funding for the projects within the strategic framework regulating the cooperation between the Syrian Government and the United Nations in the area of development. Their financing has been blocked for political reasons related to Western diktats. In that context, we emphasize that it is impossible for us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind as long as we face policies of isolation, blockades and the collective punishment of a people through the imposition of coercive measures. Those who impose such measures are not genuinely committed to development goals and do not respect them.

Syria is committed to dialogue and diplomacy in settling political disagreements, because we believe that constructive dialogue is the cornerstone of international relations. My country has therefore engaged positively with various initiatives to improve its relations with other States. We strongly believe that the interests of States are built on sound relationships and based on specific principles, including mutual respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and the defence of States' security and stability, in order to serve their common interests without interference in their internal affairs or the imposition of foreign diktats and solutions. We emphasize that any initiatives in that regard must be based on clear foundations aimed at ensuring the desired outcomes, first and foremost the withdrawal of illegal forces from Syrian territory and the elimination of terrorist groups, which threaten security in Syria's neighbours as well as in Syria itself. Syria once again reiterates its commitment to a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process, without foreign interference, that fully respects our sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. We stress that we will continue to cooperate and engage in dialogue with the Special Envoy as a facilitator and we look forward to the success of his efforts to convene a ninth round of the Constitutional Committee in Baghdad.

Syria emphasizes that if stability in the region is to be achieved, it is essential that the three Western States that are permanent members of the Security Council cease their destructive policies and adopt constructive approaches. They should fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, end the occupation and illegal foreign military presences on Syrian territory, fight terrorism and put an end to the crimes of the Israeli occupation entity and its repeated attacks on Syrian territory, which are a threat to international and regional peace and security.

In the light of the allegations regarding Syria's parliamentary elections, we reject all attempts to call them into question. Despite the difficult circumstances that Syria has faced in recent years, that important constitutional requirement was respected and held on time. The attempts of some to discredit the election process by linking it to frameworks that have nothing to do with the Syrian Constitution show a lack of respect for Syria's sovereignty and amount to blatant interference in our internal affairs. They are as bad as the activities carried out by terrorist groups and separatist militias aimed at preventing residents in areas under their control from exercising their electoral rights.

The other allegations by the representative of the United States do not even deserve a response. They reflect a desperate attempt by his Administration to distance itself from the results of its hostile policies and violations of international law, which have undermined peace and security in the region and caused suffering to its peoples. He is attempting to provide cover for the crimes of Washington's allies among the Israeli entity, terrorist groups and separatist militias, but those attempts to cover up those crimes and the biased position of his Administration, which violates international law, cannot succeed. In his lies and allegations about the coercive measures imposed on Syria, the representative of the United States Administration says that they do not affect the Syrian people, while in fact they affect all Syrians in their daily lives. They affect all parents trying to provide food for their children and every mother trying to feed her children. They affect the restoration of stability, the achievement of development and the promotion of the economy. His justifications are just like his actions, aimed at covering up violations of the Charter. The coercive measures are a violation of the Charter, of international law and of human rights instruments. They are also a violation of the resolutions on sanctions that we adopt every year in the United

Nations. The coercive measures constitute economic terrorism against countries targeted by Washington and its Administration. They represent the collective punishment of a people, which must end. As for his justifications, they are mere lies.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Coordination Director Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

To begin with, we strongly condemn Israel's continued aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and other nations in the region. Israel's reprehensible acts, together with its recent act of aggression against Yemen, deliberately targeting civilians and critical infrastructure and flagrantly violating international humanitarian law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, are a serious threat to regional peace and security. That regime, which by its nature and essence is based on terror and aggression, is the main source of insecurity and instability in the region and beyond. Regrettably, the international community, and particularly the Security Council, has failed to compel the regime to put an end to its ongoing acts of aggression and terrorist attacks against people and nations of the region, and that is very disturbing. We emphasize the urgent need for swift and decisive action by the Security Council to hold that brutal regime accountable.

As usual, the representative of the United States attempted cynically to deny its responsibility for the current situation in Syria and the broader region by blaming Iran. Yet an undeniable fact remains — the continued illegal presence of the United States occupying forces in Syria violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, international law, the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015). Furthermore, the illegal presence of United States occupying forces in Syria is the main source of instability and insecurity, providing space for terrorist groups to solidify their position and perpetrate further atrocities.

The situation in Syria remains dire, with people suffering from ongoing humanitarian crises, aggression and foreign occupation, as well as the threats posed by the United States-backed terrorist groups. Additionally, inhumane sanctions, the politicization of the returns of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the obstruction of international support for Syria's reconstruction, driven by the United States and its Western allies, have prolonged the conflict and exacerbated the suffering of the Syrian people. Those illegal actions are imposing undue hardship and hindering Syria's path to recovery.

The recent United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia study on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on Syria highlights the severe and widespread effects of those illegal actions on various sectors, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and hindering the delivery of essential services and aid. Focusing on overcompliance, the study found that the unilateral coercive measures have led to inflation, shortages of basic goods and a deteriorating economic and security situation. According to the study, humanitarian exemptions fail to prevent disruptions, with service providers refusing to supply necessary educational, agricultural and medical materials. The nutrition and health impacts of unilateral coercive measures are the most severe out of all the areas studied. Hospitals struggle to import medical items and repair equipment, leading to severe shortages of essential medicines, including cancer treatments and vaccines. Furthermore, the findings of the study expose once more the hypocrisy of the humanitarian claims of the United States and sanctioning countries. We urgently call for the immediate lifting of those inhumane measures.

The provision of impartial and non-politicized humanitarian assistance to all regions of Syria is crucial for saving lives. It is essential to plan humanitarian aid in a way that restores infrastructure, rebuilds the economy and supports sustainable, long-term development in the country. Currently, the funding allocated for the Syrian humanitarian response is severely inadequate, hindering the United Nations ability to provide necessary assistance to those in need. We call on donors to fulfil their pledges, and we hope their support will ensure sufficient and predictable funding.

Iran welcomes the sovereign decision of the Syrian Government to renew the permission granted to the United Nations and its specialized agencies to use the Bab Al-Hawa crossing for an additional six months. Early recovery projects must be prioritized, so as to

offer comprehensive support to those affected and facilitate their path towards recovery and resilience.

Facilitating Syria's reconstruction and the safe return of refugees and IDPs to their original places of residence in Syria need to be part of an overall solution to the current conflict in Syria. The interests of millions of Syrian refugees must not be held hostage for political gains by certain Powers. Delaying their return will only prolong their suffering.

We will continue to support the people and Government of Syria in their struggle to overcome the threats of terrorism and foreign occupation. Terrorism remains a significant threat to Syria and the wider region and must be addressed decisively. However, the fight against terrorism must be carried out in full respect of Syria's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and without using it as a pretext to violate those fundamental principles of international law. Places such as Idlib must not become safe havens for terrorist groups. While every effort should be made to protect civilian lives, the fight against terrorism must continue until those threats are fully eradicated.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to contributing to a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We continue to extend our support to the Special Envoy's sincere efforts and commend his active engagement with all parties involved in the resolution of the Syrian crisis. Iran stands firmly behind the prompt resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings. We are committed to supporting that process.

Moreover, Iran, alongside its partners in the Astana format, Russia and Türkiye, remains steadfast in its commitment to achieving a long-term and sustainable normalization in Syria. In that context, we fully support the resumption of the Syrian-Turkish dialogue, recognizing it as a crucial element in those broader efforts.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I am also grateful to Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian situation in Syria is catastrophic and worsening. There are 16.7 million people in Syria, which is equal to more than 70 per cent of the population, who need humanitarian assistance, and one fourth of them live in the north-west of the country.

The United Nations Syria humanitarian response plan remains alarmingly underfunded, with a staggering 80 per cent gap in the overall funding requirements. The humanitarian situation in the country may have consequences not only for Syria, but also for the region and beyond, with new migration flows. Therefore, adequate and sustainable funding should be urgently allocated. Also, three border crossings must continue to be available for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance to the north-west of Syria as long as the needs persist.

The Syrian people and humanitarian community workers cannot endure further unpredictability. In that regard, we expect the renewal of the use of Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings beyond 13 August without a time limit. Türkiye will continue to facilitate the delivery of the cross-border humanitarian assistance in close cooperation with the United Nations, as it has done so far.

Humanitarian actors can respond to the urgent needs in Syria, but they cannot resolve the political crisis. Against the deteriorating situation in Syria, the international community must grasp the urgency of finding a lasting solution to the conflict and adopt a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses its political, security and humanitarian dimensions. In that context, the political process under the facilitation of the United Nations, which continues to be the bedrock of all international efforts towards a settlement of the conflict, must be revitalized in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Convening the next round of the Constitutional Committee without further delay would be an important step. All Security Council members have a responsibility in that regard.

As part of the overall effort to resolve the conflict, the preservation of the territorial integrity and political unity of Syria is of paramount importance for the future of the country and the region. The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) terrorist organization try to advance their separatist agenda in Syria through all possible means, in contravention of resolution 2254 (2015). The latest example of those attempts is the planning of so-called local elections in the north-east. The international community must collectively oppose any separatist attempt in Syria, including those

so-called elections. Also, terrorist organizations must not be treated as if they were legitimate actors, as they commit grave human rights violations against local people in north-east Syria and deliberately impede the delivery of humanitarian aid to the north of the country.

A Syrian-led political process can be achieved only with the participation of the Syrian people, as that requires creating conditions in Syria for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees. Preventing further displacement in the country is also crucial in that regard. Therefore, in accordance with the relevant memorandums, Türkiye will continue its efforts to ensure that a ceasefire is observed in the Idlib de-escalation area.

In conclusion, a change of attitude and developing a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the crisis in a simultaneous manner is urgently needed to find a lasting political solution to the conflict in Syria. Any meaningful step towards genuine national reconciliation that contributes to the solution of the Syrian conflict and that is in line with the expectations of the entire Syrian people will naturally be part of our solution set. With that understanding, Türkiye will continue to engage constructively with all regional and international stakeholders and to support all initiatives that bring peace and stability to Syria and the region.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.