United Nations S/PV.9668

Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

Provisional

9668th meeting
Tuesday, 25 June 2024, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Sangjin Kim	(Republic of Korea)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mrs. Barba Bustos
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique	Mr. Irachande Gouveia
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Sowa
	Slovenia	Mr. Ponikvar
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

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, 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: Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy 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 Ms. Rochdi.

Ms. Rochdi: It is an honour to brief the Security Council again. Over the past months, I have met hundreds of Syrians — men and women of all backgrounds — who differ on many things but who share a common concern for the future of their country. Their suffering is increasing, not decreasing. They fear Syria is in danger of being forgotten. And so today, on behalf of Special Envoy Pedersen, my message to members is simple: Syria is in grave crisis, and none of its myriad problems can be sustainably addressed without a political solution. The voices of Syrians inside and outside need not only to be heard but heeded.

Many Syrians are living in a climate of fear because of the security situation, which continues to be tense and violent. We saw many serious escalatory incidents and dynamics this past month, including the following.

First, further airstrikes attributed to Israel in Aleppo and in southern Syria, killing Syrian Government soldiers and what Iranian State media said was a military adviser from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Second, missile strikes attributed to pro-Government forces in the north-west, where there were also regular exchanges of missile and drone strikes across front lines and where Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham continues to face significant protest movements in Idlib against their de facto rule.

Third, drone strikes attributed to Türkiye in north-east Syria, alongside multiple exchanges of front-line fire between among opposition groups, the Syrian Democratic Forces and Government forces.

Fourth, three Russian airstrikes near Al-Tanf, with the Russian Reconciliation Centre claiming that the strikes targeted terrorist bases in the vicinity.

Fifth, significant security instability in Dara'a, with multiple assassinations by unknown elements.

Sixth, violent clashes in Suwayda between Government forces and local militias, which saw several injured, as well as rocket attacks on Government security installations. That comes against a backdrop of an almost year-long protest movement and fresh deployments of Government security personnel at new checkpoints.

Seventh, increasing attacks by Security Council-listed terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant across central and northern Syria.

Humanitarian conditions remain in sharp decline, compounded by the profound economic crisis. My colleague Mr. Rajasingham will brief the Council on that in more detail. As I stressed to the humanitarian task force last week in Geneva, we need the generous pledges made last month in Brussels to translate into urgent disbursement, including for early recovery.

Syrians need unimpeded aid access through all modalities — cross-border and cross-line. We are seeing repeated denials for cross-line convoys by parties across all of Syria — depriving communities of life-saving aid, including in the Rukban camp, where the situation is particularly dire. Let me also stress that any adverse effects of sanctions on ordinary Syrians must be mitigated and avoided, in particular by the active engagement of sanctioning States to counter overcompliance.

At the task force meeting, I again urged Member States and relevant authorities to significantly step up efforts to repatriate, in safety and dignity, all citizens who wish to return from Al-Hol and other places of detention in north-east Syria, in line with international law.

We are alarmed by the inhumane conditions and the serious ongoing insecurity and violence, whose impact is felt by thousands of women and children first and foremost. Children must be treated as victims and in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Let me note that many Syrian women and groups are at the forefront of efforts to reintegrate members of their communities returning from Al-Hol through volunteerism, advocacy and networking.

As tomorrow marks the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, let us remember the thousands who perished under torture while in detention and remind ourselves that too many are today still suffering torture across all of Syria. The sheer scale of the missing persons file, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances in Syria is a reminder that no sustainable political solution can move forward without the engagement of all conflict actors to start substantively addressing that tragedy. And no lasting reconciliation is possible without addressing the frozen grief of the families of the missing.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, an additional 174,000 Syrians were displaced within Syria during the past year, and 7.2 million are now internally displaced, alongside 6.4 million refugees. We must recognize the scale and seriousness of the predicament of host countries in the region and support them, while also emphasizing the need to protect Syrian refugees and the end of anti-refugee rhetoric and actions. We must also redouble efforts to assist those who wish to return. But ultimately, we need to intensify our efforts to find a sustainable and durable solution. That means tackling the issues that inhibit safe, dignified and voluntary refugee returns.

Meanwhile, Syrian women are facing perilous conditions. Women activists, particularly those who are publicly critical, report more and more threats to their personal security. Rates of violence against women and girls are increasing enormously, including early and forced marriage. Women are bearing the brunt of the economic crisis and resorting to other negative coping mechanisms that leave them exposed and exploited.

None of those challenges can be sustainably addressed without a meaningful United Nations-facilitated political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015) that realizes the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and restores the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria — a process led and owned by the Syrians and supported by key international actors too.

The Special Envoy and I have continued our engagements this month to advance such a political process. We met with the Syrian Negotiations Commission in Geneva, and I look forward to meeting Syrian Government officials in Damascus next week. And we have continued our engagement with senior interlocutors from key international stakeholders to support a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process with cooperative international diplomacy.

First, we need sustained de-escalation and the maintenance of calm to establish a nationwide ceasefire, along with a cooperative approach to countering terrorism in line with international law.

Secondly, we continue to press for the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. Regretfully, I have nothing new to report on that since last month. The Special Envoy continues to work on resolving the venue issue. In the meantime, we continue to appeal to all parties, as a bridging option, to reconvene in Geneva and prepare substantive proposals.

Thirdly, proposals for confidence-building measures are on the table, including those that could make a marked difference towards creating the kind of safe, calm and neutral environment needed to enable a political process to unfold and to facilitate informed, safe, dignified and voluntary returns for refugees and internally displaced persons.

Fourthly, the Special Envoy continues to prepare the ground for a new comprehensive approach. We continue to explore ideas in that regard and seek the constructive engagement of the Syrian parties and key stakeholders. That is a tall order, given the complexity of the file and the challenging international environment. But it is a necessary task if legitimate Syrian aspirations are to be realized; if the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria are to be restored — and if relevant concerns in the region and beyond are to be addressed.

Fifthly, we will continue to engage the Syrian people. Without them, a political process is not possible. We continue to be impressed by their resilience and their commitment. I look forward to upcoming Civil Society Support Room engagements, including in Geneva, where I hope to hear the vital perspectives of Syrians.

Likewise, I will continue my engagement with Syrian women from all backgrounds, including through the Women's Advisory Board. Women's inclusion matters. The conflict creates unique burdens for women, who are sustaining households and communities in the absence of men. Syrian women are also a rich and energetic source of expert insight. I continue to receive multiple studies, ideas and proposals from Syrian individuals and networks of Syrian women on critical topics, such as education, decentralization, economic recovery, violence against women and girls and peacebuilding.

Let me finish by echoing the voices of the hundreds of Syrian men, women and youth with whom I have met these past months. Yes, they differ on many things, but they are united by their love of country, by a shared sense that Syrians themselves must determine their own future and by a pragmatic realization that compromise and accommodation are moral and political necessities. They agree on the urgent need to preserve and restore Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, especially as divisions are entrenched and Syria risks drifting apart. They share concrete and immediate priorities too, including the need to protect civilians, civilian infrastructure and civic space; to address the detainee file; to foster conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary returns; to provide children and youth with educational opportunities; and to reduce war economies and promote an inclusive economy. They want to break through lines of separation and reconnect the country, and in doing so to reconnect the Syrian people. They are also united by a shared sense that all of that requires a credible political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

I hope that I can get back to them and tell them that the Council not only listened to them but indeed heard them. Rest assured that the United Nations will leave no stone unturned to facilitate that process and to build a better future for all Syrians.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: Last week, the Muslim world marked Eid al-Adha. However, for people in Syria, celebrations were marred by the ongoing economic crisis, in which already high prices for food and other key items have further doubled in the past year. A recent report by the World Bank underscores the devastating effects of years of conflict on the welfare of Syria's households. The economy, which shrank by an estimated 1.2 per cent last year, is projected to contract by an additional 1.5 per cent this year. Nearly 13 million people — more than half the population — are already facing high levels of acute food insecurity. More than 650,000 children under the age of five show signs of stunting owing to severe malnutrition, and a third of the country's children live in food poverty — consuming just two or fewer food groups a day.

The economic crisis, coupled with the ongoing impacts of conflict in Syria and the wider region, is a key reason why the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme (WFP) identifies Syria as a situation of very high concern for worsening food insecurity in the coming five months.

While humanitarian assistance cannot reverse the crisis, it can save lives and alleviate some of the worst suffering. Halfway through the year, though, the United Nations humanitarian appeal remains less than 13 per cent funded. That is the lowest level of funding of all 10 of our largest global country appeals.

We very much welcome the pledges made at the Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region last month. It is vital that those are disbursed as quickly as possible. As I said at the Conference, if the funding situation does not change, the impact on the people of Syria will be dire.

Although the United Nations and its partners have so far this year managed to provide critical assistance to some 2.7 million people across Syria each month, that is a substantial reduction from the previous year. The provision of safe water and sanitation services has been disrupted in parts of northern Syria, increasing exposure to health risks in the hot summer months. Health services have had to be scaled back, and dozens of health facilities risk closure in the coming weeks unless they receive additional funding.

It is to be welcomed that last month the World Food Programme resumed deliveries of emergency food assistance after months of suspension due to funding deficits. But I am concerned that, at the current funding levels, the WFP will be able to assist only one third of the 3.1 million people who are severely food insecure.

As we have repeatedly emphasized, making the most of limited resources requires being able to deliver assistance via all possible modalities. The cross-border operation from Türkiye remains a lifeline for millions

in the north-west. In the past month, we were able to move 98 trucks of critical food, health, shelter and other supplies. The availability of the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings has also enabled more than 190 United Nations staff visits to north-west Syria this year. Those have been critical for monitoring and assessing humanitarian projects and ensuring that aid is efficiently reaching those who need it. That includes projects such as a wastewater treatment project in Idlib, implemented by UNICEF and partners and supported by the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund, which has enabled regular access to clean water for 250,000 people. We welcome the Government of Syria's consent for the continued use of those routes. We hope it will extend its consent for the use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing — through which the majority of assistance flows — beyond 13 July, and indeed for as long as prevailing humanitarian needs persist.

The need for cross-line deliveries of assistance is no less critical. Engagement continues on long-delayed missions to Idlib and to the Ras Al-Ayn and Tel Abyad areas in northern Syria and on expanding the availability of routes through Deir ez-Zor governorate to ensure the more efficient movement of aid.

Syria is facing its highest levels of humanitarian need since the start of the 13-year crisis, and the situation only continues to deteriorate as each month passes. The need for conditions more conducive to an efficient humanitarian response has never been greater. That requires absolute respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and unhindered humanitarian access. It also requires sufficient resources so we can continue to provide critical assistance to the millions of people who need it.

But if we are to start reversing the growing needs in Syria, conditions must also include expanding investment in early recovery efforts across the country to help build resilience and lay the groundwork for people to rebuild their lives and livelihoods and restore some resilience. However, as we have said repeatedly, any hope for a durable path out of the humanitarian crisis and towards development depends on a political solution to the conflict. We once again join Special Envoy Pedersen's call to all parties to fully commit to the process set out in resolution 2254 (2015) and urge the Security Council and its members to support progress towards an end to the crisis.

The President: 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. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

Switzerland remains very concerned about by the fragmentation of Syria into several conflict zones. Living conditions and the protection of civilians are steadily deteriorating, and there is a palpable risk of Syria becoming a failed State. We are calling for a ceasefire that is respected by all parties and that covers the entire Syria territory. It is essential that the situation not deteriorate further in the wake of the Middle East conflict.

Only a lasting and comprehensive political settlement of the conflict through a Syrian-led process under United Nations auspices can counter those trends. That is why we fully support the Special Envoy's efforts to find a political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We call for the restoration of trust and dialogue between Syrians and all the other parties concerned. Geneva remains available to host any initiatives or peace talks under the aegis of the United Nations, including with a view to further meetings of the Constitutional Committee.

In the absence of a genuine commitment to a negotiated political solution, serious violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, are likely to continue in Syria. In that respect, it should be noted that, with more than 1,500 verified cases in 2023, grave violations against children continue at an alarming rate, as noted by the Secretary-General in his most recent report on the situation of children and armed conflict (S/2024/384). The development and implementation of action plans by parties to conflict is vital for the sustainable protection of children throughout the country. Switzerland welcomes the recent signing of a new action plan. We encourage all relevant actors, including those on the Secretary-General's list, to work constructively with the United Nations and implement without delay their obligations under international law to protect civilians, including children. To that end, Switzerland supports the efforts of the various United Nations institutions

and civil society to work with all the Syrian players concerned. There will be no lasting peace in Syria without justice and accountability for all the serious violations of international law committed since 2011.

I would now like to turn to humanitarian issues.

After 13 years of crisis, 16.7 million people are in need, and the humanitarian situation continues to worsen. The Syrian population includes the largest number of internally displaced people in the world. Of the 7.2 million internally displaced people in Syria, more than 2 million — mainly women and children — are living in camps and temporary emergency shelters. That situation is unsustainable, and it is clear that longer-term resilience programmes and early recovery projects are needed to alleviate the suffering of displaced Syrians.

The Bab Al-Hawa cross-border crossing remains a vital lifeline for more than 4 million men, women and children in Syria. For aid to reach those in need as directly and efficiently as possible, humanitarian actors must be able to use all modalities, including cross-border corridors and across front lines. It is important that this access remains available for as long as necessary. We urge all parties to allow and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout Syria and to allow rapid, safe, sustainable and unhindered access to all civilians in need in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We welcome the continued efforts of the United Nations to enable assistance across the front lines. Those operations remain essential, although they cannot currently replace United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations.

We must continue to show our collective solidarity with the Syrian people.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): Let me start by thanking Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Director Rajasingham for their briefings. We commend their dedication to ensuring that United Nations operations remain consistent with humanitarian principles despite the actions taken by the regime for more than a decade to block their efforts.

The United States remains committed to the Organization's provision of humanitarian assistance through all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line. The Al-Assad regime does not. We see this in south-eastern Syria, where the regime's actions — fully and shamefully backed by Russia — have sparked a humanitarian crisis. For four years, the regime has denied United Nations access to thousands of civilians in the Rukban camp, leaving them at the edge of disaster.

Today we mark two months since the regime blocked commercial access. That disaster appears closer than ever. Now, food and medical supplies are scarce — risking disease outbreak, malnutrition, food insecurity or worse for thousands of civilians.

The United States calls on the Al-Assad regime to cooperate with United Nations requests to open commercial access to Rukban and provide cross-line humanitarian assistance to its civilians. We urge our allies and partners to join this call. There is no justification for the obstruction and cruelty that is being carried out.

Furthermore, just days from now, the regime's arrangement with the United Nations regarding cross-border access through Bab Al-Hawa, in the north-west, is set to expire. And we call on them to cooperate with the United Nations to both renew that access now and ensure long-term humanitarian access. It is cruel to force Syrians in the north-west to wonder, every few months, whether they will be able to access food and other life-saving goods. Besides, guaranteed access is essential to providing the predictability and efficiency needed by donors and United Nations partners.

With regard to the political situation, we reiterate our call for the regime to take concrete actions to implement all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). In the face of unending regime obstruction, the Syrian opposition continues to seek real solutions and a better future for the Syrian people, consistent with the resolution. We appreciate the opposition's good-faith engagements with Special Envoy Pedersen, and its efforts to ensure inclusivity and responsiveness to Syrians across the country — just as we saw at the recent Syrian National Council General Assembly in Geneva.

As we look ahead to Special Envoy Pedersen's trip to Moscow this month, we urge Russia and the Al-Assad regime to stop the stalling and the excuses, and instead engage productively in the Constitutional Committee — and with other aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

For years, we have known that a lack of progress towards a solution in Syria would exacerbate conflict risk in the wider region. Now, that risk has become a

reality. Iran and its proxies and partners increasingly use Syrian territory to threaten Israel and traffic dangerous weapons.

Regardless of the talking points the Al-Assad regime deploys in the Chamber, Syrians themselves know that Iran's militant proxies and partners seek only to advance their own destabilizing agenda — and not to help the Syrian people. In this dangerous moment, it is important that we all work to reduce tensions and prevent escalation in Syria and neighbouring countries. The United States will continue to work with our diplomatic partners towards that end.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their overview of the political and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Russian Federation has consistently and invariably argued that there is no alternative to promoting a Syrian-led and -owned political settlement in Syria, mediated by the United Nations, in strict accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and with respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of this country. We remain convinced of the need to continue direct inter-Syrian dialogue, the main platform for which remains the Constitutional Committee. Despite the ongoing questions about the resumption of the Constitutional Committee's meetings, we believe that a fundamental decision on the modalities of its further work, including selecting the venue for the next rounds of consultations, should be made by the Syrians themselves, without external interference. At the same time, we are convinced that it would be wise to relaunch the constitutional track, even on a one-time basis, in a new location, bearing in mind that Switzerland lost its neutral status when it joined the anti-Syrian and anti-Russian illegal unilateral sanctions. The Syrians themselves must identify such a platform, in cooperation with Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria.

Progress on the Syrian political track is now particularly necessary given the persistent extremely turbulent atmosphere in the region, against the backdrop of the ongoing hostilities in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the high risk of neighbouring countries becoming involved. At the same time, there is growing concern regarding the humanitarian situation in Syria due, primarily, to the destructive actions of Israel, which continues to carry out arbitrary strikes on Syrian infrastructure, as well as to periodic clashes between armed groups and the United States military. A high level of tension also remains in the territories not controlled by Damascus, with hotbeds of terrorism in Idlib, the area beyond the Euphrates and the zones of Turkish operations.

In that regard, we express our solidarity with the legitimate demands of the Syrian authorities to withdraw all military contingents illegally present on the territory of this country. We believe that achieving sustainable stabilization in Syria is possible only through an end to the foreign military presence, in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and the unconditional cessation of the regular air strikes carried out by the Israeli Air Force.

In these difficult circumstances, the economic situation continues to deteriorate. It is alarming that, according to the latest World Bank estimates, inflation in Syria in 2023 stood at 93 per cent, and almost a third of the population — 5.7 million people — are living below the poverty line. At the same time, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over the past year the number of Syrians in need of assistance increased by 1.4 million to 16.7 million people, of whom 12.9 million, according to the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates, already need food assistance.

Incidentally, we welcome information that the WFP has resumed its main food distribution programme among Syrians. That is a positive development. We very much hope that the WFP will be able to mobilize sufficient resources to feed the more than 3 million people who are severely food insecure.

We note the active efforts of the Government of Syria to ensure broad and unimpeded humanitarian access to Syrians living in areas not controlled by Damascus. In that context, we welcome the decision to extend the United Nations authorization to operate the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai cross-border checkpoints for another three months, until 13 August. The temporary authorization for the use of the Bab Al-Hawa checkpoint expires in July. We leave the decision on its fate to the sovereign discretion of Damascus and caution third parties against interfering in the relevant dialogue between the Syrian Government and the United Nations.

The main obstacles to comprehensive and adequate humanitarian assistance to Syria remain the politicized stances of Western countries of increasing sanctions pressure, blocking reconstruction projects and failing to fulfil their own donor pledges.

We once again draw attention to the harmful nature of the new United States bill, entitled the Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act, which not only stipulates the extension of the illegal unilateral extraterritorial restrictions until 2032, to replace the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, but also provides legal grounds for the imposition of secondary sanctions against United Nations entities. In that regard we underscore the long-standing lack of a report on the negative impact of sanctions on humanitarian activities. That is a clear example of the inability of the United Nations to fulfil its direct obligations. An assessment by the United Nations of the consequences of sanctions is crucial to achieving any progress in talks on the humanitarian situation and, accordingly, to increase assistance to ordinary Syrians who desperately need it.

As for donor pledges, including those made at the famous Brussels meeting on 27 May, we see no signs of their being honoured. The humanitarian plan remains extremely underfunded: only 12 per cent of funds have been mobilized since the beginning of the year, even though it was initially optimized and devised so as to cover the most basic needs. It is still not clear to us for what purposes those contributions were pledged; the lion's share of them are "loans" of some kind, which cannot ever be considered in the context of humanitarian aid.

We would like to underscore that the policy of the United States and the European Union of assistance for facilitating the repatriation of Syrian refugees is instead creating obstacles for those refugees and storing up problems for the future in the long run. Funding should not be directed to helping refugees settle further in the host countries, as the €1 billion aid package pledged by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to keep Syrians in Lebanon does, but towards encouraging their return to their home country. That should be the precise focus of international aid programmes. We believe that it is necessary to ensure the fundamental right of refugees to return, as set out in resolution 2254 (2015), subject to the strict condition that such efforts be coordinated with Damascus.

At the same time, unfortunately, our Western colleagues, occupying the trans-Euphrates area and Al-Tanf and plundering Syrian resources, show scant regard for the population living in those regions. According to a report by Amnesty International, there are 56,000 people from 74 countries, including the United States, in the network of prisons and camps created beyond the Euphrates region by the Americans and serviced by the Kurds. The United States is not even in any hurry to repatriate its own citizens: United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced the so-called largest evacuation of American citizens from camps for internally displaced persons in the north-east of Syria, but only 11 were actually evacuated. Since 2016, the United States has repatriated 51 people in total.

Russia will continue to provide support and humanitarian aid to the Syrian population. Over the past three years alone, the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has carried out more than 800 humanitarian and charitable operations, reaching almost 300,000 families in need. Aid is distributed regularly, the most recent distribution being in June when medical supplies were delivered on 19 June and food was delivered on 23 June.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Rajasingham for their briefings today. I will make three points.

First, I want to underline the critical importance of sustainable and effective aid access into Syria. Needs are higher than ever. Humanitarian organizations must be able to deliver life-saving assistance through the most efficient and effective means, in line with humanitarian principles. In less than 20 days' time, the current authorization for the United Nations to use the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing will again expire. The cross-border response is a lifeline for 4.2 million Syrians in the north-west of Syria in need of urgent assistance. We have heard time and time again from humanitarians, including in the Security Council, that it provides the most efficient, effective, predictable routes to people in need. We call for access to be granted for as long as is needed, without arbitrary deadlines and without conditions, in line with international humanitarian law.

Secondly, the impact of Syria's conflict extends beyond its borders. In the light of World Refugee Day last week, I want to recognize the devastating reality for many Syrians who currently cannot return home, as well as the ongoing generosity of the Governments of Jordan,

Lebanon and Türkiye in hosting Syrian refugees. The sad reality is that Syrians are still fleeing the country, whether due to violence or the desperate humanitarian situation. Our hope is that one day Syrian refugees will be able to voluntarily return home. However, the actions of the Al-Assad regime have so far meant that they are unable to do so. A report released last week highlighted that more than 4,700 refugee returnees were detained by regime forces since 2014. If returning refugees are not safe, others will not return.

Thirdly, progress on the political process is essential. The enduring humanitarian crisis and continued displacement of Syrians will be resolved only through a comprehensive political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015). This month, the Syrian opposition demonstrated their commitment to resolution 2254 (2015) during their annual conference, and civil society organizations have continued to offer creative solutions in overcoming the current impasse. We call on the regime to also engage constructively with the United Nations-facilitated political process, which remains the only viable route to lasting peace in Syria.

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

We thank Ms. Najat Rochdi and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham for their detailed briefings and for their efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

The A3+ is concerned about the lack of progress in arriving at a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We believe that resolution 2254 (2015) should form the basis of any political solution and emphasize that that can be achieved only through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process under the auspices of the United Nations. We regret the fact that, after 13 years of this devastating crisis, the relevant parties are still not in a position to end the stalemate and the suffering of the Syrian people, even as Syrians' living conditions continue to deteriorate, including those of Syrian refugees abroad.

This uncomfortable stalemate and increasing regional tension risk reversing all the progress made to date and may lead to total collapse. Amid regional escalation, it is crucial to increase efforts along the political track. It is also crucial for the international community to work towards a viable solution to ensure Syria's unity, Syria's sovereignty and Syria's territorial integrity. The A3+ wishes to emphasize the following key points.

First, we strongly urge Syrians to put aside their differences so as to resume the meetings of the Constitutional Committee under United Nations facilitation and to engage constructively in the political process for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Secondly, we call for a nationwide ceasefire to maintain calm across Syria and prevent a further escalation of violence, which would further destabilize the already precarious security situation.

Thirdly, combating terrorism in Syria is crucial for the stability of the country and the region as a whole. Coordinating efforts in countering terrorism is vital to achieving that goal. For the Syrian people and the region to achieve peace, the looming threat of terrorism should be eliminated.

Fourthly, we call on all countries to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to avoid any actions that could worsen tensions.

The A3+ has further reasons to express grave concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria, which, as Ms. Rochdi and Mr. Rajasingham mentioned, remains dire and fragile. The A3+ urges donors to honour their commitments to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. A staggering 13 million Syrians currently face acute food insecurity — 55 per cent of the entire population. There is an urgent need to increase funding for this year's humanitarian response plan, which is currently only 13 per cent funded. We also emphasize the need to explore all humanitarian paths, including cross-line and cross-border mechanisms, to ensure full, timely and unhindered humanitarian access. In that context, we look forward to the Syrian Government's decision on extending the use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing next month.

The A3+ calls for creating appropriate conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced person. To achieve that goal, it is crucial to support early-recovery projects in the areas of health, education, water, electricity and housing. In addition, the recovery of the Syrian economy is vital to improving living conditions and access to essential services, With 17 million people in need, more than half of whom are women, Syria cannot rely solely on humanitarian assistance. The A3+ calls for the lifting of unilateral sanctions on Syria in order to give the country a chance for the recovery of its economy and to improve the living conditions of its people.

In conclusion, the A3+ firmly believes that the future of Syrians lies in their hands and that Syria will be rebuilt by the efforts of all Syrians. The international community must set aside its divergent interests and must unite and work together to support a better future for the Syrian people.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Director Rajasingham for their valuable briefings.

The Syrian crisis, now in its fourteenth year, has left more than 90 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. Both the humanitarian and economic situations are at their worst. The number of refugees and displaced persons from the conflict is the largest since the Second World War. The issue of detainees and missing persons remains of grave concern. We cannot allow for a lost generation of Syrians to be the conflict's legacy. On that basis, I would like to make three points today.

First, a political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is the only way to achieve a lasting solution. The Constitutional Committee was supposed to serve as the entry point for resolving the Syrian crisis and drafting a new constitution, but it has remained suspended for more than two years. The Syrian Government and the opposition should agree as soon as possible on a path towards an early resumption, rather than remaining stuck on disputes over the venue. Japan also values confidence-building measures through the Arab initiative. Concrete engagement by the Syrian Government based on the Amman and Cairo communiqués by the Arab contact group is needed, and we strongly encourage the early holding of the next meeting.

Secondly, the United Nations now faces its most significant funding gap since the beginning of the conflict, which has already led to a reduction in its activities and those of other humanitarian agencies. Even with no political resolution in sight, early recovery and resilience assistance could have a long-term and sustainable impact on the health, education and livelihoods of ordinary Syrians and, consequently, could contribute to reducing the risk of instability in Syria and beyond. Recently, Japan decided to provide approximately $6.5 million for additional early recovery assistance through the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. In that vein, we commend the United Nations for launching the early recovery strategy and the early recovery trust fund concept. That issue should be addressed not only by traditional donors, including Japan, but also by the international community as a whole. At the same time, in addition to early recovery, it is essential to continue cross-border assistance for as long as humanitarian needs exist, and we hope that the consent of the Syrian Government for the use of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing will be extended beyond 13 July as well.

Thirdly, Japan will continue to provide assistance not only to Syria but also to neighbouring refugee host countries. As High Commissioner Grandi stressed in Brussels, we should not underestimate the scale and severity of the hardships faced by host countries, and it is our responsibility to redouble our support for them. At the same time, the current situation in Syria is not conducive to a safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. We believe that economic, security and legal obstacles stand in the way. The international community must do more to promote early recovery projects and resilience support, and the Syrian Government must address security concerns, including protection for refugees.

Lastly, achieving a solution in Syria requires pragmatism from all parties. While stressing the need for de-escalation throughout Syria and the region, we urge all major stakeholders to make serious commitments to step-for-step confidence-building measures led by the Special Envoy. As a responsible Council member, Japan will engage with all relevant countries, including the Syrian Government, to achieve a political solution that can realize the Syrian people's desire for peace.

Mr. Ponikvar (Slovenia): I would like to begin by thanking Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

First of all, Slovenia remains deeply concerned about the ongoing spiral of violence. The situation is destabilizing the region, and Syria is also not immune to the spillover effects of regional escalations, in particular from Gaza. Such a situation is unsustainable; with each passing day, it is becoming more dangerous and unpredictable. We regret that another month has passed with no progress towards a political solution. We reiterate our call on the Government of Syria to act in good faith and to engage substantively, without delay or excuse, with the Special Envoy to relaunch a much-needed Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

Secondly, Slovenia is greatly concerned about the plight of Syrian refugees in the region. We commend Syria's neighbouring countries for hosting large numbers

of Syrian refugees for more than a decade and call on them to uphold the principle of non-refoulement. We reiterate that the conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees are not yet in place. The Syrian authorities must ensure the protection of all returnees. It is important to continue to support the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to prompt the Government of Syria to create the conditions for such a return and alleviate the burden on host countries.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation is at its worst, and it continues to deteriorate. Particularly alarming are the reports of severe human rights violations and abuses against refugees and internally displaced persons. The protection of the most vulnerable and those in vulnerable situations should be of the utmost importance. The high number of grave violations against children in Syria mentioned in the recent report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) is simply unacceptable. All parties should immediately end such practices and do everything to prevent them from happening ever again. We would like to remind all parties concerned about their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The humanitarian needs in Syria remain dire. Syria needs sustainable, predictable and efficient aid flows, including cross-border aid and cross-line aid, throughout the country for as long as needed. Humanitarian actors need greater predictability to plan their activities; they must also be able to work in safety and security. That can be achieved only if all parties comply with international humanitarian law.

Finally, the only long-term solution to ending this conflict 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 to deliver a lasting political settlement in Syria. In that regard, let us also recall the importance of the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of Syrian women.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Rajasingham for their briefings. In view of the current situation, I would like to make three comments.

First, Israel's continued air strikes on Syria constitute violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, about which China expresses deep concerns. Against the overall backdrop of protracted conflicts in Gaza, the parties concerned must exercise maximum restraint and avoid any actions that might escalate or expand tensions. Major Powers outside the region should play a constructive role in de-escalation and work in good faith towards lasting peace and stability in the region.

Secondly, China remains firmly committed to finding a political solution to the Syrian issue and to advancing the political process under the Syrian-led and Syria-owned principle. We welcome Special Envoy Pedersen's continued efforts on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and hope that the League of Arab States and the relevant countries in the region will maintain communication and cooperation with the Syrian Government. Terrorism poses a long-term threat to the political process in Syria. China lends unwavering support to 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 in tandem to combat terrorism in Syria with zero tolerance.

Thirdly, the international community must work in synergy to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. Donors must honour in earnest their pledges regarding Syria and ensure adequate funding for humanitarian relief throughout its territory. Economic recovery and development represent a fundamental path for Syria to put an end to the humanitarian crisis. The countries concerned must scale up their support to early-recovery and reconstruction projects and cease immediately their unilateral sanctions and their illegal plundering of resources, with a view to creating an enabling environment for economic recovery and development in Syria. We also hope that the United Nations humanitarian agencies can give more briefings to the Council on the adverse effects of unilateral coercive measures on the humanitarian situation in the country. Last but not least, China once again calls for an end to the illegal military presence of foreign military forces in Syria.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Rochdi and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings.

Only a political solution based on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), in all its aspects, will make it possible to achieve a just and lasting peace in Syria. The continued increase in tensions, the resurgence of Da'esh and the boom in Captagon trafficking make reaching such a solution all the more urgent. It is regrettable that the Damascus

regime continues to block any progress in the political process. It is in that context that the international community would stand ready to explore a return to stability in Syria. In that respect, we support the efforts of Mr. Geir Pedersen. The sanctions can be lifted, and we can consider reconstruction on the condition that tangible progress is made on the political front.

The situation of Syrian refugees in the region is a matter of concern. We know what it means to host those millions of refugees for neighbouring countries, in particular for Lebanon. At the eighth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region on 27 May, France announced a new contribution of €150 million for 2024. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is not the problem, the Syrian regime is. The reluctance of Syrian refugees to go home is above all due to security-related and political reasons. France is therefore continuing its work with the UNHCR and its partners so that the Syrian regime creates the conditions for the safe return of refugees, in compliance with international law.

The humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate. The European Union is the largest contributor of aid to the 17 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. It is essential to ensure the delivery of assistance through all possible routes, across borders and front lines.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I thank Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings.

The Syrian crisis continues to deepen on our watch. The humanitarian consequences of this 14-year conflict and its aftershocks continue to compound human suffering. The continued lack of political progress risks committing further generations of Syrian men, women and children to lives devoid of education, employment and hope. Malta remains especially concerned about the continued high number of grave violations committed against children in this armed conflict. 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.

Malta welcomes the holding of the eighth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region last month and the pledges made on that occasion. As outlined by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, sustained and increased resourcing for the humanitarian response is critical, especially in the absence of genuine political progress. Regrettably, the United Nations 2024 humanitarian response plan for Syria remains only 12.7 per cent funded. The World Food Programme has noted a dramatic shortfall in funding for the year, which is negatively affecting its operational planning. That comes at a time when approximately 13 million people are food insecure, with 3.1 million of them facing acute hunger. Adequate resourcing and humanitarian access are critical to ensure that the most vulnerable in Syria are not left behind. In that regard, and ahead of the expiration of the authorization of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing next month, Malta reiterates its call for authorization for that crossing to be extended by Damascus. All — and especially the most direct — humanitarian access routes should remain open as long as they are needed.

We regret the lack of progress to date on the delivery of cross-line aid, and we hope that a breakthrough can be made in the days and weeks ahead. Malta also stresses the need to expand programming to promote early recovery, resilience and livelihoods in Syria. Such programming provides dignified and lasting support to communities.

Turning to the political situation, Malta regrets the lack of progress in resuming the Constitutional Committee and the absence of faithful engagement with the Special Envoy's step-for-step initiative and comprehensive package. As mentioned by the Special Envoy, forthcoming elections in Damascus-controlled areas are no substitute for an inclusive political process leading to a new Syrian constitution. Only progress on the political track, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), can lead to stability in Syria. We commend the Special Envoy for his tireless work in that regard and implore the parties to make use of his good offices.

We once again call on the parties, particularly Damascus, to faithfully engage with the Committee and to agree to its resumption. Progress there will be key in achieving a just and lasting peace. It will also support the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, we recognize and appreciate the efforts of neighbouring countries in hosting refugees. Furthermore, addressing the issue of the missing and those arbitrarily detained will demonstrate goodwill and a genuine effort to resolve the conflict.

As we state each month, it is critical for all parties in this conflict, as well as their international backers, to find compromise. Only that can ensure that Syria

does not completely fragment. Only genuine political courage can avert the course that awaits the millions facing yet another decade of poverty, insecurity and hopelessness.

Mrs. Barba Bustos (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the valuable information provided by the Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, Ms. Rochdi, and by the Director of Coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rajasingham. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Iran, Syria and Türkiye in the Chamber.

The lack of progress on the diplomatic and political fronts discourages the international community and has a direct impact on the Syrian civilian population, which continues to suffer the effects of this protracted conflict. In order to achieve a sustainable peace in Syria and the region, building mutual trust between the parties in order to revive dialogue and exercising maximum restraint are vital, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Outbreaks of violence have increased in recent months against the backdrop of the sensitive security situation, making the threats of terrorism and violent extremism more acute. The humanitarian situation in Syria is complex and is deteriorating. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance to survive is growing, as is the funding gap to meet the most urgent needs.

Donors must renew their commitments to funding the humanitarian response plan and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, which, as of last May, was funded at less than 13 per cent. Guaranteeing unconditional humanitarian access through the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, which expire next July and August, is crucial to sustaining the humanitarian operation in north-west Syria.

Peace can be achieved only through reconciliation processes that promote social cohesion in Syria. In that regard, it is necessary to discover the whereabouts of the more than 100,000 people who have disappeared or been arbitrarily detained.

Ecuador is a country that has experienced every aspect of human mobility. That is why it is sensitive to the vulnerable situation of women, girls, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly who are forced to flee the violence in Syria, as it is they who face the greatest risks when displaced, particularly to third countries.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that Ecuador will continue to support the work of Special Envoy Pedersen, represented today by Ms. Rochdi, to reach a sustainable solution to the crisis in Syria through an inclusive political process, with a view to reconvening the meetings of the Constitutional Committee and the step-for-step negotiation strategy.

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

I start by also thanking Deputy Special Envoy Rochdi and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

Syria remains a live conflict with an ensuing and entrenched humanitarian crisis for the past 14 years now. I want to lay out three points that the Council should meaningfully focus on to better the situation of the people of Syria.

First, regarding the context of the broader region, at this current, fragile moment there are ongoing exchanges of fire between Syrian territory and the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan and Israel. Deeply concerning tensions are surging in neighbouring Lebanon, tensions that are inherently interconnected with Syria's security. At the same time, armed actors within Syria elicit grave concern for the region. Sanctioned terrorists, such as Da'esh and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, are a danger in Syria and beyond. All parties must show restraint. Regional escalation serves no one's interest.

Secondly, with regard to internal dynamics, nearly a decade and a half of suffering shows that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. The road map to end this conflict can be found in resolution 2254 (2015): a nationwide ceasefire, free and fair elections in line with the new constitution and the release of those arbitrarily detained. Korea reaffirms its firm support for an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process under United Nations auspices and in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The Syrian parties, including the Government, the opposition and civil society, in addition to all key international stakeholders, including the Security Council, should come together to build confidence for the ceasefire. We reiterate our support for the Special Envoy's tireless efforts in that regard.

Thirdly, with regard to the humanitarian situation, 16.7 million people in Syria are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Women, girls and children

continue to fear for their safety. We call for addressing the needs-based demands of the people, in addition to ensuring unhindered humanitarian access, including by authorizing vital aid crossings. We also urge enhanced efficiency through a refined humanitarian carveout, as affirmed in resolution 2664 (2022), without any unintentional loss in flow. For its part, Korea pledged $26 million for Syria and neighbouring countries at the Brussels conference last month.

The current status quo is simply not an option anymore. We call on the Syrian Government to engage faithfully to break the deadlock and move forward, and resolution 2254 (2015) is the requisite path in that direction. As such, the Council should remain united on the route ahead.

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*): The Arab region is experiencing a new stage of instability and facing the dangers of a downwards spiral towards an all-out escalation as a result of the brutal crimes that the Israeli occupation continues to perpetrate in Gaza and the West Bank, its threats to launch a military operation against Lebanon and its continued attacks on my country, Syria, which have recently reached the outskirts of the governorates of Dara'a and Qunaytirah in the south of the country.

Instead of seeking to contain that escalation and working to ease the tensions and adopting a constructive approach to achieving stability in the region, the United States and a number of its allies have prioritized the interest of the Israeli occupation entity over international law, international humanitarian law, the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and human rights instruments. They have provided all forms of political, military, financial and media support to the Israeli war criminals, giving them enough time to continue their genocide against the Palestinian people while they continue their attacks on the countries of the region. As has been the case for decades, the United States and its allies have prevented the Security Council from shouldering its responsibilities to maintain international peace and security and implementing its relevant resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict to put an end to the occupation, which has been and continues to be the root cause and real basis of all crises that our region has experienced along with the suffering of its peoples.

For many years, the United States and its allies have employed slogans of human rights, democracy, good governance and others to interfere in the internal affairs of my country and many United Nations Member States, to destabilize their security and stability and try to forcibly change legitimate Governments. Not only that, but those States have also used United Nations organs and other international organizations to target my country, as demonstrated by the issuance of politicized reports that opened the door for the adoption of non-consensual resolutions and the establishment of a number of investigation committees and teams to assign responsibilities and establish accountability mechanisms. The common denominator of those mechanisms has always been their lack of legitimacy, the politicized nature of their work and the fact that they lack professionalism, objectivity and credibility.

The crimes committed by the Israeli occupation and its sponsors in Gaza have revealed once again the extent of the hypocrisy of some Western States that have proclaimed themselves guardians of human rights while their Governments have remained absolutely silent without any mention of their alleged humanitarian concern. They have not attempted to establish any United Nations mechanisms to document the actual crimes that are being publicly committed by the Israeli occupation authorities, nor have they taken steps to ensure accountability for them and prevent impunity. On the contrary, they have defended the occupying authorities, the genocide, the war crimes and the crimes against humanity perpetrated by those authorities. Furthermore, they have threatened the judicial mechanisms they themselves created to target specific countries and sought to muzzle all those who demanded an end to those crimes. Their position confirms the validity of the calls we have made for years to Western countries to reconsider their policies that undermine the multilateral international system and the international organizations that were established by the will of our peoples.

All Syrians continue to suffer as a result of the unilateral coercive measures whose destructive impact have affected all aspects of their daily lives and have severely damaged all vital sectors of society, including those which Security Council humanitarian resolutions have called for their support, such as health, water, housing, education and electricity. The fact that those unilateral coercive measures have continued to target the sectors that meet the needs of Syrians and ensure

their enjoyment of their basic rights, similar to all peoples of the world, exposes the fake claims of the States that impose such inhumane and illegal measures. How can imposing a siege, starving peoples and depriving them of medical supplies and medicine be in their interest and in the interest of their security and stability? How can a genuine improvement in the humanitarian situation and livelihood of those peoples be reached without providing them with electricity, for example, as that is the backbone of economic life and a basic necessity for Syrians to go about their daily life and earn a living? The issue is not about building electric power plants, but simply about providing those plants with the necessary spare parts and maintenance, which manufacturers refuse to provide out of fear of being subjected to unjust United States sanctions. Despite our repeated calls, some countries insist on letting Syrians live in the dark for many hours a day after Syrians have defeated the darkness that terrorist organizations tried to impose on them.

My delegation reaffirms the need for the Secretariat to issue a report as soon as possible on the impact of coercive measures on humanitarian work in Syria and on the Syrian people. We call on the United Nations to step up its efforts to support Syrians, urge donors to stop politicizing humanitarian and development work in Syria, provide the necessary funding for humanitarian aid and early recovery projects and support the efforts to achieve the development goals. As all Council members have heard, the humanitarian response plan has received only 12 per cent of its funding, and the year is already past its midpoint. That will negatively affect the lives of Syrians and will push more of them to migrate in search of job opportunities and will hinder our efforts to provide the conditions conducive to their dignified return. We condemn the fact that some have discouraged donors from supporting humanitarian work and deliberately prolonged the suffering of Syrians, with a view to achieving concessions that are not aligned with the interest of Syria and Syrians.

While all relevant United Nations resolutions affirm the need for full respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the United States and Turkish forces continue to be illegally present on Syrian territory and continue their practices of destabilizing security and stability. In that regard, we note the suffering of more than 1 million Syrians in the city of Hasakah and its outskirts in north-eastern Syria due to their ongoing deprivation of water for more than 10 months as a result of the attacks on the Allouk water station launched by the Turkish forces and the militias that are working for the United States occupation. Those aggressive practices must be immediately put to an end.

In conclusion, the Syrian State is working diligently to meet the national constitutional requirements within the constitutional deadline in a way that strengthens the role of State institutions and preserves the sovereignty, security and stability of the country. In that context, preparations are currently under way for elections to the People's Assembly, in which approximately 9,000 candidates are competing for the 250 seats in the Assembly. Syria reiterates its commitment to a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process without any external interference and with full respect for its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. We look forward to the success of the Special Envoy's efforts to hold the ninth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad.

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

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

The Syrian people continue to suffer from humanitarian crises, aggression, foreign occupation and terrorism. Through unlawful occupation, inhumane sanctions, politicizing the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and preventing international support for Syria's reconstruction, certain Western countries are responsible for the prolongation of the conflict as they attempt to impose their own will on the Syrian people. Such attempts are unlawful and immoral and serve only to prolong the crisis and worsen the suffering endured by the Syrian people.

The international community must not leave the Syrian people alone in their struggle against terrorism, foreign occupation and the economic terrorism caused by unlawful sanctions. The sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all, as mandated by the relevant Security Council resolutions. Any separatist agendas or illegitimate self-rule initiatives must be rejected, and all foreign forces whose presence is illegal in the territory of Syria, as determined by the Syrian Government, must withdraw from Syria.

In that context, the full, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal of United States forces from Syria is essential for the peace and stability of Syria. Instead of combating terrorism, those forces continue to support United Nations-designated terrorist groups such as Al-Nusra Front and to loot the oil and wealth of the Syrian people.

Combating terrorists in Syria must continue until their threat is fully removed. That must be done with the utmost care for the lives of civilians. Terrorists must not be allowed to continue to take a large number of civilians as hostages and turn places like Idlib into a safe haven.

We strongly condemn Israel's continued aggressions against Syria's sovereignty, targeting civilians and vital infrastructure. The occupation of the Syrian Golan by that occupying regime is unlawful.

Iran remains committed to a political resolution of the situation in Syria and will continue supporting a truly Syrian-led and -owned, United Nations-facilitated political process. The resumption of the meetings of the Constitutional Committee as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process is necessary. It must operate without any external interference or pressure and without an artificial deadline for it to conclude its work.

We continue to support the efforts of the United Nations and Special Envoy Pedersen to reach a political settlement of the Syrian crisis. Iran will spare no efforts to that end. In that context, we support the Special Envoy's efforts to resume the ninth round of constitutional discussions in Baghdad as a viable option that has received support from most parties involved. Along with our Astana format partners, we are committed to working towards long-term and sustainable normalization in and around Syria.

Parallel to the political process, international efforts must continue to facilitate Syria's reconstruction and the safe return of refugees to their original places of residence in Syria. The interest of millions of Syrian refugees must not be held hostage by certain Powers for political gains.

The humanitarian community faces its most challenging funding landscape. The 2024 humanitarian response plan, which requires $4.07 billion, is only 13.4 per cent funded — significantly less funded this year than it was at the same time last year. It is regrettable that Western countries have ignored the dire humanitarian and economic situation on the ground and continue to pursue their political agenda at all costs. We call on donors to fulfil their pledges, and we hope that their support will ensure sufficient and predictable funding. We commend the tireless efforts of United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners in their work towards alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people.

However, preventing the diversion of aid to terrorist organizations in the north-west region and ensuring transparent and non-discriminatory aid distribution are essential aspects that need careful consideration. We emphasize the need for unhindered humanitarian access through cross-line routes and in full coordination with the Syrian Government. As we have said before, providing immediate assistance is crucial, but not a sustainable solution in the long term. Efforts must focus on rebuilding critical infrastructure in order to create conditions for the safe return of refugees and IDPs.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I also thank Deputy Special Envoy Najat Rochdi and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

Unfortunately, the wider Middle East region is engulfed in multiple conflicts that have caused enormous suffering for millions of people.

The 13-year conflict in Syria is one of its most destructive conflicts. The overall situation in Syria has become untenable, with worsening economic, security and humanitarian conditions. The status quo cannot continue. We need a change of attitude from the Syrian regime in order to initiate genuine national consensus dialogue and to re-energize focus on Syria from the international community, especially the key actors, in order to realign positions and strengthen coordination. All sides should see the true gravity of the situation in Syria, as it is, and take genuine steps towards lasting settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The root causes of the Syrian conflict are political. The revitalization of the political process, with the meaningful participation of the opposition as an indispensable part of forging national consensus, is therefore key. Convening the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee, under United Nations facilitation, without further delay, and with the aim

of achieving tangible results, is crucial to that end. I very much appreciate the call by Ms. Rochdi to convene the Committee in Geneva, at the invitation of the Swiss representative.

The comprehensive settlement of the Syrian conflict also requires simultaneous progress in creating the conditions necessary for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. That endeavour is particularly important because, without a national reconciliation process that includes millions of Syrians, refugees and diaspora scattered around the world, Syria will continue to be prone to conflict. While advancing those efforts, maintaining calm on the ground is important and necessary. In that regard, as Türkiye, we will continue our efforts to de-escalate the situation, protect civilians and prevent new waves of displacement in the Idlib de-escalation area, in accordance with the relevant memoranda.

Earlier this month, the United Nations and the Syrian opposition, represented by the Syrian interim Government, signed an action plan to protect children and keep them from harm's way in the Syrian conflict. We welcome the continued commitment of the Syrian opposition to cooperating with the United Nations in taking effective measures to prevent violations against children and afford children greater protection.

As we have repeatedly pointed out in this Chamber, the separatist agendas of terror organizations operating in Syria must be thwarted, as they pose the most significant threat to the territorial integrity and unity of Syria. The attempts by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its offshoots, including the Syrian Democratic Forces, to reorganize so-called local elections in north-east Syria is a clear manifestation of separatist terrorism. Although they have been postponed for the moment, everyone should do their part to take those so-called elections completely off the table, which are contrary to the territorial integrity and unity of Syria and to resolution 2254 (2015).

As the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to drastically deteriorate, it is more important than ever to use all available means to alleviate the suffering of civilians and allocate more resources to United Nations humanitarian operations in the country. In that regard, we expect a resumption of the use of the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing as of 13 July for United Nations aid deliveries, given that most cross-border assistance reaches Syria through that crossing. Indeed, making the aid delivery system more predictable should be our overall priority.

We welcome the pledges by the international community announced at the eighth Brussels conference last month. The swift and complete fulfilment of those commitments will be critically important. Türkiye, for its part, has maintained its close coordination and cooperation with all relevant United Nations agencies to meet the humanitarian needs of Syrians, including by handling water and electricity problems in the country. In that respect, we continue to facilitate United Nations cross-border assistance and will follow up the results of the recent visit by the UNICEF delegation to the Allouk water station. I explained in previous meetings the situation and the reasons in that regard. I would like to take this opportunity to draw members' attention to the severe water shortages affecting residents of Al-Bab city. The restoration work initiated at the Ain Al-Baida water station should be completed as soon as possible.

In conclusion, Türkiye stands ready to support initiatives to find a viable political solution to the conflict in Syria and will continue to cooperate with the relevant stakeholders and use United Nations agencies to address the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Government of Türkiye spoke of his Government's willingness to contribute to restoring peace and stability in Syria. The path to that goal is clear, if only the Turkish regime would recognize it and take serious steps to achieve it. All the Turkish regime has to do is to stop its support for terrorism, which has continued for 13 years, since the very first days of the crisis that it created in Syria. The Turkish regime must take the initiative to stop its policies of Turkification, forced displacement and demographic changes in northern and north-west Syria. The Turkish regime, which has spoken of a United Nations plan agreed by one of the terrorist factions to protect children, must recall that it has been primarily responsible, and remains responsible, for the suffering of thousands or hundreds of thousands of Syrian children who have been subjected to the worst ill-treatment and violations in the refugee camps on Turkish territory, such as forced marriage, under-age marriage, rape, children being delivered to human trafficking networks or even to terrorist networks for recruitment and indoctrination with extremist ideology and regrettably for exploiting them in terrorist operations.

The Turkish regime must change its approach towards the region — an approach that initially entailed no problems with neighbouring countries but that, in recent years, resulted in no relations whatsoever with them. Those Turkish policies have proven to be a total failure. They have been nothing but a destabilizing factor in the region and in Europe. They have sought to exploit the suffering of Syrian refugees in order to make cheap deals with the European Union, whereby Turkish citizens would be exempted from the Schengen visa regime in exchange for Türkiye detaining Syrians on Turkish territory. That is but one example of Turkish practices.

We underscore our good relations with the Turkish people, the neighbouring and brotherly Turkish people, with whom we have strong historic and geographic ties. However, the Turkish Erdoğan regime is harming those relations and must change its behaviour so that the region can live in peace and stability. That regime has manipulated the borders and plundered the antiquities, treasures and wealth of the Syrian people. The path is clear if the Turkish regime wants to address the situation.

The President: The representative of Türkiye has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I will not take much more time, because these statements do not deserve a serious answer. They just show how the Syrian regime is detached from the realities on the ground. It is in no position to preach to Türkiye on this issue. Türkiye has set the gold standard internationally on how to deal with the refugees, how to help neighbours and how to be a constructive actor in numerous international issues, including that of Syria.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.