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New York

President:	Mr. Žbogar/Mrs. Blokar Drobič	(Slovenia)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan	Mrs. Shino
	Malta	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique	Mr. Kumanga
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. George
	Switzerland	Mrs. Chanda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Eckersley
	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: 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 the 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 repeatedly warned of the risks of regional spillover and regional escalation dragging Syria into even deeper conflict. This week has seen a major escalation of regional tensions. I share the Secretary-General's deep alarm at the reports of a large number of communication devices exploding across Lebanon, as well as in Syria, on 17 and 18 September, resulting in casualties, including children, and subsequent Israeli air strikes on Lebanon and Hizbullah rocket fire into Israel. I understand that the Council will be discussing that in more detail this afternoon. And indeed, there are reports just in of an attack this morning on a vehicle at Damascus International Airport.

Let me repeat the Secretary-General's strong appeal for maximum restraint at this extremely dangerous moment for the entire region. And let me add that this latest escalation followed an earlier significant attack on a military site in Syria — not acknowledged by Israel but widely attributed as such — which reportedly caused one of the largest number of casualties in many months.

There is a clear and present danger of a wider regional war that drags the Syrian people into its crosshairs — and this at a time when, within the Syrian conflict itself, violence remains very high. This past month once again saw tragic barrages of drone strikes, artillery, rocket and sniper fire and skirmishes across front lines. We have seen attacks attributed to pro-Government drones on markets west of Aleppo, resulting in civilian casualties, including children.

Listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham launched cross-line attacks, killing ostensibly the highest number of Government soldiers this year. Meanwhile, the north-east and south-west continue to see serious tension and violence. And the threat of the listed terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Syria continues to grow, with the group increasing its attacks in quantity and gravity, including their first publicized beheading in several years.

The utmost need of the hour is for de-escalation, now, across the region — including a ceasefire in Gaza. In Syria itself, we also need de-escalation amid a nationwide calm towards a nationwide ceasefire, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015), alongside a cooperative approach to combating Security Council-listed terrorist groups in accordance with international law. In all situations, all parties must fully comply with international humanitarian law and their obligations to protect civilians.

As violence and instability continue, Syrians also grapple with skyrocketing humanitarian needs, a broken economy dramatically affecting all Syrians and their livelihoods, damaged and destroyed infrastructure, degraded or closing school and medical facilities, the worst displacement crises of this century and a crisis of the detained and missing that is entirely unresolved.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will update members on the humanitarian crisis, but I remind the Council that millions of children will not be in school this year in Syria. And the World Food Programme reports that the Syrian minimum wage covers only 11 per cent of the minimum expenditure basket, and only 17 per cent of the food component. Unimpeded aid access through all modalities is needed, both cross-border and cross-line. The financial pledges made in Brussels must be urgently disbursed, including for early recovery in all parts of Syria. And let me once again stress the need to mitigate and avoid any adverse effects of sanctions. Constructive engagement by sanctioning States to counter overcompliance is imperative.

Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and ill-treatment and torture in detention continue to be reported across all areas of Syria — including cases

of individuals dying in custody. The economic crisis further creates perverse incentives for the misuse of power — including arrests to extract bribes for release. I met with the families of detained and missing persons last month on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. They are following and engaging closely with the newly established Independent Institution for Missing Persons. In that regard, let me note the importance of cooperating with the Institution as a direct way to contribute to alleviating the suffering of the families.

The situation for refugees and the displaced, across Syria and the region, remains alarming. Syrians must be protected wherever they are, including in host countries. Anti-refugee rhetoric and actions must cease. Refugees who return voluntarily need every support to do so. But voluntary returns remain small in number, and people are continuing to leave Syria at the same time.

According to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees perception surveys of the refugees — and notwithstanding certain Syrian Government announcements on some issues that we continue to follow closely — concerns about safety and security inside Syria remain the key obstacle to return, while a lack of livelihood is an increasingly important factor influencing refugees' decision-making about return. To break that dynamic would require efforts of a kind we have not seen to date to address those obstacles — protection concerns regarding safety, security and mandatory military conscription, as well as housing, land and property rights, on which we urge the Government to act; and livelihood concerns — including access to essential basic services, including health care, water, electricity and inadequate housing — on which we urge donors to be forward-leaning.

What is needed in Syria is genuine progress towards a safe, calm and neutral environment, which is also the kind of environment needed for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee return. To achieve that, there are absolutely no short-cuts. Without a credible process for a political solution, the downward spiral of trends on Syria will likely continue.

Let us remember that Syria remains in a profound state of high conflict and territorial division. There are millions of Syrians living under Government control, but many millions still living outside Government control or abroad. There are four or more areas divided by active front lines; an array of Syrian armed actors; Security Council-listed terrorist groups; six foreign armies involved in active conflict, some at the invitation of the Government; and a regional crisis that is in perpetual danger of crashing over Syria.

Let us be honest: those divisions are not just military and territorial, but societal too. Social trust is in very short supply. We, as the United Nations, are among the very few who can directly engage with Syrians from all sides of the conflict — not just the political actors but civil society too, including women, whom we bring to Geneva from all corners of the country and from the diaspora. That includes the work of the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, with whom I met in Geneva earlier this week. There are many things that unite them, most obviously their desire to see the conflict end and preserve one Syria. But equally, we should be frank — the drivers of conflict continue, grievances are real and enduring and there remain very different visions of a post-conflict Syria.

In the light of those realities — the grievances and territorial divisions — it is unrealistic to think that stability can be achieved without a political process, among the warring Syrian sides themselves, facilitated by the United Nations. And, of course, such a process requires the constructive and coherent support of all international players too. Otherwise, the fundamental drivers at the heart of the conflict will continue and the country will remain divided territorially, plagued by violence and radiating instability across the region.

Faced with those sobering realities, but determined to find ways we can work constructively, I look forward to meeting with the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and the President of the Syrian Negotiations Commission next week in New York. I will also see Arab ministers, the ministers working in the Astana format and senior officials from other States, including donor countries. My message to all will be the same — we need to move the United Nations-facilitated political process forward on three specific fronts.

First, on the Constitutional Committee, the Committee was the product of painstaking negotiations among the Syrians themselves, enjoys the backing of all key international players on Syria and could have been — and yet still could be — a door-opener to a genuine political process. Regrettably, we have lost more than two years over what should be a secondary issue — the venue. As members know, Geneva remains the venue that was formally agreed when the Committee was launched and remains ready to host. But at the same time, we continue to seek agreement by both

Syrian parties and a host on an alternative consensus venue, and it needs to be a consensus venue. I have also suggested over a prolonged period that the delegations, in the meantime, prepare for future discussions by developing drafts of constitutional texts and discussing those with the United Nations — that also has so far not found favour. We need to break that deadlock.

Secondly, the other door-opener could still be genuine confidence-building measures in order to build trust and open up movement on issues in resolution 2254 (2015), step-for-step. There is no shortage of ideas in that regard. I believe it should be in the common interest of all concerned to engage and seize this opportunity to make some progress.

Thirdly, door openers are not enough. We need to work together on a new and comprehensive approach. I believe it is highly necessary and extremely difficult, yet definitely possible to develop a clear path that can deliver the Syrian people the restoration of their country and the realization of their aspirations to live in peace and dignity, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). I believe that this path can be developed in manner that is credible, balanced and realistic, and one that respects the core interests and concerns of all concerned, and that involves genuine compromise from all parties. I am also convinced that it is possible for all key players to be able to see how their respective steps and efforts could link up to a comprehensive approach.

I recognize that the players needed to resolve the conflict are not — at this time — able to be convened in a single format. That is precisely why I am inviting all key players to work with the United Nations on this. Because the reality is — and I hear no one contesting this — that no actor or existing group of actors can determine the outcome of this tragic conflict — not the Government or the opposition or any other Syrian actor, not any State in the region or beyond, and not the Astana, Arab or Western groupings either. Moreover, existing piecemeal diplomacy is plainly struggling to make progress even on small measures, in part because critical actors are excluded in many cases.

In conclusion, let me say this: there is no military solution to the conflict, and there is no piecemeal diplomatic solution either. I therefore appeal to all to all stakeholders to engage with the United Nations.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

Mr. Rajasingham: Today, 13 years since the start of the conflict, more than 16 million people across Syria remain in need of humanitarian aid. No segment of the population is untouched by this crisis. And, as is often the case in conflicts, the impact on children, who account for almost half those in need in Syria, is particularly devastating.

This month, as the school year resumes, we should remind ourselves that more than a third of school-aged children — around 2.5 million — will not be rejoining their peers in the classroom this year. We must ask the question — what does that mean for the future of Syria? A further 1.6 million children are at high risk of dropping out during the year. Children who have been displaced and those with disabilities are particularly at risk. It is the increased pressures on families that often force them out of school, such as the deepening economic crisis and rising prices following years of conflict and debilitating shortfalls in humanitarian and development funding. These pressures often push families into adopting negative coping strategies, including sending young children — especially boys — out to work and pushing more adolescent and underage children into child or forced marriage.

A huge number of children are also suffering the harmful effects of food insecurity. Levels of acute maternal and child malnutrition have grown threefold in the past five years. More than half a million children will require life-saving treatment for malnutrition this year.

Meanwhile, hostilities and explosive remnants of war continue to exact a devastating toll on children. Since June, nearly a third of the 105 civilian deaths verified by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have been children. Earlier this month, six children were among the 13 injured when a drone attack hit a market in western Aleppo. Thousands of schools have been damaged during the conflict, and schools continue to be used by parties to the conflict and attacked. Many other schools have had to be repurposed to host displaced families. Overall, one in three schools cannot be used for educational purposes.

Some 2.5 million children remain displaced across the country, including nearly 1 million living in camps. Many have never known any other kind of life. In camps and other temporary sites, children face a heightened risk of sexual violence and other forms of abuse, particularly those separated from their families. Tens of thousands of children with suspected family ties to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant fighters continue

to be detained in Al-Hol and other camps in the north-east. And let us not forget that half of the 6 million Syrian refugees still hosted by neighbouring countries are children.

The United Nations and partners continue to do what we can to provide people with the vital assistance they need, reaching 4.4 million people throughout Syria each month, out of 10.8 million targeted. But due to funding shortfalls, this aid is reaching 2 million people a month less than last year, even as needs have grown. With only three months left in the year, the humanitarian appeal remains less than 26 per cent funded.

So far this year, 1 million people have received food baskets — leaving two-thirds of the severely food insecure without essential support. Some 1.5 million children and women, out of 3.4 million targeted, have received critical nutrition services; 800,000 children and teachers, out of 4.3 million targeted, have received education assistance; and nearly 200,000 children and parents, out of 2.9 million targeted, have received child protection support.

These persistent and harmful shortfalls in humanitarian funding only heighten the importance of providing predictable and sufficient funds for humanitarian response, while also supporting early-recovery projects. Early-recovery support is particularly needed to rehabilitate and secure energy supplies for water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, schools and health centres across Syria.

Given the scale of needs and the scarcity of funding, it also remains critical that all available modalities be used to deliver humanitarian assistance. The cross-border operation from Türkiye remains vital for getting assistance to more than 2.5 million people in need in north-west Syria, half of whom, again, are children. And cross-line missions are also critical for reaching underserved areas in other parts of the country. For the first time, earlier this month, the United Nations was able to carry out a cross-line assessment mission to Al-Kassreh district, on the eastern side of the Euphrates river in Deir ez-Zor — a place where more than 85 per cent of the population needs humanitarian assistance, including more than 22,000 people living in displacement sites. We continue to engage to find ways to further improve the sustainability and efficiency of access to this area.

Since 13 September, humanitarian teams have also conducted a series of cross-line missions to assess and begin repairs on the Allouk water station. Restoration of the station, which has been out of service since October, is essential for providing water to more than 600,000 people living in Al-Hasakah governorate.

Meanwhile, our partners are making progress on repairs to the Ayn Al-Bayda water station, which delivers water to some 200,000 people in Al-Bab. Unfortunately, however, we face challenges in carrying out other planned cross-line missions, including to Idlib, Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad and Rukban.

Thirteen years of conflict and hardship have pushed the people of Syria well beyond the limits of ordinary endurance. It is a generational crisis, in which many children have had the innocence of youth snatched away and in which many others have grown up never knowing a life without insecurity, instability and deprivation. They deserve better.

As a minimum, we demand respect for international humanitarian law in order to ensure the protection of children and other civilians and to ensure they have access to the essentials they need, including humanitarian support. And we need sustained attention on the crisis and humanitarian funding to allow us to maintain presence and operations at the scale required. Critically, we need investment in early-recovery efforts to start expanding the opportunities for families to rebuild their lives and livelihoods and to enable a brighter future for the children. Finally, as Special Envoy Pedersen just reiterated, we need the parties to make progress on securing a resolution to the conflict. Meaningful change will come for the people of Syria only when it is underpinned by peace.

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. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Geir Pedersen, and the Director of the Coordination Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ramesh Rajasingham, for the overview of the political and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The escalation of hostilities in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone is complicating the already difficult situation on Syrian soil. Having launched its bloody military operation in the occupied Palestinian territory,

Israel is, at the same time, continuing to carry out strikes on sovereign Syria, including its capital, on an almost weekly basis, involving the unauthorized use of Lebanese airspace and, almost invariably, the loss of human life.

News to that effect, unfortunately, is perceived by the Council as just routine. We see no willingness to discuss those numerous incidents in separate meetings of the Council, even though a gross violation of international law is at issue. Our Western colleagues would certainly not tolerate a similar state of affairs in relation to other regional contexts. I am certain that none of them will now remember, for example, that on 8 September the Israeli Air Force launched a series of strikes on the province of Hama, killing 16 people and knocking out a water supply system and power lines that serve a number of water substations in the town of Salhab. According to media reports, one person was killed and another was injured in an Israeli strike on a car near Damascus airport today. I will not touch upon the tragic events of the past three days in Syria and Lebanon, as we will address them in detail during this evening's meeting of the Council. All I will say is that, amid mounting regional tensions, such unlawful and irresponsible actions are fraught with the possibility of a major war in the Middle East. We categorically condemn them.

The situation in Syria is further compounded by the actions of the United States and its allies, who are adding fuel to the fire by using their illegal military presence in certain regions of the trans-Euphrates and Al-Tanf to have terrorists destabilize the domestic, political and socioeconomic situation in the country. Idlib is another hotbed of terrorism, where militants from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham have become entrenched under the patronage of Western members of the Council. In that connection, I would like to draw attention to the extremely disturbing information coming from various sources, according to which the main intelligence directorate of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry is training and recruiting those terrorists for further transfer to Ukraine. We warn that, through their unbridled support, the Western masters of the Kyiv regime are nurturing a new hotbed of terrorist threat in Europe. And now that regime is reaching out to the likes of it, namely, the listed terrorists entrenched in Idlib.

A stable Syria is a crucial factor in improving the overall situation in the Middle East. Sustainable stabilization in that country can be achieved only when the illegal foreign military presence, which violates its sovereignty and territorial integrity, finally ends, along with the provocative strikes on Syrian territory. Our support in solidarity requires a direct Syrian-led inter-Syrian dialogue conducted within the framework of the Constitutional Committee and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), with United Nations mediation and free from external interference. The Syrians themselves should also decide the venue for the subsequent sessions of the Constitutional Committee that they think best provides the conditions for the that process.

Much can be said about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. Millions of citizens in that country continue to suffer from food shortages. The number of people experiencing food insecurity has tripled in the past five years. Health care and decent sanitation remain a challenge. Amid rising prices, many Syrians simply cannot afford basic goods and necessities. Particularly hard hit are the millions of children who continue to lack access to education and to suffer from malnutrition and a lack of health care.

However, the ongoing hostilities are far from being the only cause of the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian civilian population. For 14 years now, the collective West, led by the United States, has been depriving the Syrian people of their right to development and to lead a dignified life, in its bid to undermine and, ideally, topple a "regime", as they call it, that is inconvenient for them. In addition to military interventions, all manner of political and economic pressure is being exerted, including in the form of unbridled sanctions, the obstruction of the Bashar Al-Assad Government's actions and blocking the efforts to secure the return of the refugees to their homeland.

To this sorry litany must be added the West's plundering of Syrian assets, oil and grain — at issue are billions of dollars that could have kept the country's economy at a healthy level. Unlawful Western unilateral sanctions imposed in violation of the Charter of the United Nations are a stranglehold, a noose around the necks of ordinary Syrians.

No matter how much Western counterparts claim otherwise, that conclusion has been confirmed on paper, including in the recently published report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the effects of unilateral sanctions. It is worth recalling the report (A/HRC/54/23/Add.1) by the Special Rapporteur on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on human rights, Alena Douhan, after her visit to Syria in 2023, in which she came to the unequivocal conclusion that the unilateral restrictions had to be lifted.

Contrary to the blatant facts, the Western delegations today will no doubt again hypocritically argue that those sanctions are calibrated and balanced and supposedly have no impact on the population. The Western colonial mindset regards the lives of Syrians and those of other inhabitants of the global South as collateral damage in its geopolitical intrigues. Hence such dismissal of international experts' findings on the subject.

Unfortunately, OCHA officials are, willingly or unwillingly, playing along with Western hypocrites by making no comment whatsoever on the ESCWA report or the one presented by Ms. Douhan. It is as if those publications did not exist, even though they directly address the humanitarian mandate. We call on the United Nations to give a public, direct and honest assessment of the difficulties that Syrians as well as humanitarian workers carrying out their noble mission are facing on account of the unlawful unilateral sanctions. Silence on that issue undermines not only the foundations of the work of the humanitarian wing of the United Nations, but also the Organization's credibility as a whole.

The issue of humanitarian access in Syria continues to represent an acute problem. Out of concern for its citizens, the Syrian Government has again voluntarily renewed authorization to use the Bab Al-Salam, Al-Rai and Bab Al-Hawa border crossings to bring in aid from Türkiye. However, the humanitarian situation, especially in the territories outside of Syrian Arab Republic control, remains dire. Of the 16 million Syrians in need of assistance, the United Nations is reaching no more than 4.5 million every month. At the same time, there are still no cross-line deliveries. That state of affairs is unacceptable. It is important to coordinate closely with the official authorities in order to harness all possible humanitarian routes, including those from Damascus-controlled territory. A situation in which access to the northern parts of the country is cut off for any reason is intolerable. The example of the temporary closure of crossings on the border with Türkiye in July due to the escalation of hostilities highlights the possible risks.

We welcome the resumption of work on the Allouk water station. Sustainable cross-line access will be necessary for it to be fully restored. Russian military personnel are involved in ensuring security for that work to be done. We expect that the efforts will continue beyond the United Nations inspection mission, and the Allouk water station will soon be able to supply water to nearby farms and villages.

Another crucial issue that must be resolved is the funding gap for humanitarian needs. Donors are simply not fulfilling their pledges. The humanitarian appeal is funded at a record low of 25 per cent. I would like to ask the United Nations representatives who every year attend the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region: what is the benefit of that public relations exercise if the pledged contributions are not paid? I would like to remind Council members that, in May, the donors announced that they were prepared to contribute together €5 billion in grants and more than €2.3 billion in loans. How is it that less than $1 billion dollars has been transferred to the fund to date?

We are convinced that the Secretariat leadership needs to work further with the donors that flaunt their plans but have not implemented them yet. We also expect the United Nations to send a clear message to Western donors on the need to lift the unilateral and illegal sanctions and to actively support long-term reconstruction and development projects in Syria so that the Syrian people can build their future without external interference.

It is important that the Security Council meet to discuss the situation in Syria not just to tick a box and so that Western delegations can report that they are keeping the Syrian dossier afloat in the United Nations. Our work should enable us to discuss in good faith concrete ways to improve the situation of Syrians without a hidden agenda and to promote political and humanitarian efforts that benefit them. We call on Council members to keep that in mind and to leave their geopolitical grievances outside this Chamber.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for speaking truth about the grim reality of the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

The international community must stand firm against the Syrian regime's continued atrocities and abuses.

The recently released report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86) contains horrifying accounts of arbitrary detention and torture, including rape and gender-based violence, committed by Syrian regime actors and regime-supported militias over the first half of the year. Those acts led the Commission to report the regime's "continuing patterns of crimes against humanity and war crimes" (*A/HRC/57/86, para. 28*).

The Commission of Inquiry's report provides yet more evidence that the Syrian regime is not being truthful when it claims the country is now safe — whether for the millions still living in fear under regime control or for the millions of Syrian refugees around the world. The report confirms the regime has not changed and is conducting business as usual, with horrific consequences for Syrian civilians.

The report is also a reminder of why accountability must remain at the heart of our approach to Syria. Unless there is accountability for regime officials responsible for atrocities and other abuses — from the bottom of the chain of command all the way up — the systematic brutality will not end. We urge all Council members to stand with us in demanding justice and dignity for the Syrian people.

We must also keep an international spotlight on efforts to ensure justice and accountability for victims of crimes against humanity committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), including genocide against the Yazidis. The United States stands with the survivors and will continue to support efforts in the Security Council to ensure accountability for the perpetrators. That includes supporting Council efforts to preserve evidence collected by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to ensure third countries have the ability to effectively investigate and prosecute those crimes.

The United States will also continue to support United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations as they provide protection and assistance to needy Syrians. However, assistance means nothing if it cannot reach the people in need. That is why the regime and all parties in Syria should allow immediate and unhindered humanitarian access across all areas of Syria for as long as needs persist. The United States remains steadfast in its call, not only for cross-border access, but also cross-line, in particular to the Rukban camp in south-east Syria, where the regime and Russia continue to prevent United Nations aid from reaching civilians in need.

As we look ahead to high-level engagement in New York next week, we urge the Syrian regime's representatives and its backers to stop making excuses and work in good faith to implement resolution 2254 (2015). We continue to support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to revitalize the political process and call on the regime to commit not only to a meeting of the Constitutional Committee, but also to commit to meaningful participation regardless of the location.

We have said it before, but it bears repeating: the United States will not fund regime-led reconstruction and United States sanctions will remain in place until there is, at a minimum, authentic and sustained progress towards a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

And I might close by just reminding the Council: the United States presence in Syria has been to fight ISIS, which remains a serious threat to peace and security in the region.

Mrs. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Director of Coordination at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham for their statements.

I would like to highlight three points.

With regard to the security situation, Switzerland remains very concerned about the potential for escalation of military hostilities in Syria. The strikes on the Masyaf region on 9 September, which, according to the authorities, killed at least 18 people, including civilians, are a further illustration of that. Switzerland calls on all parties, including the States in the region, to exercise restraint. Furthermore, it is imperative to implement a nationwide ceasefire, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015). Respect for international humanitarian law by all parties and a return to dialogue are essential means of prevention to avoid further escalation in Syria.

The current military hostilities in Syria and the political solution are intimately linked. Switzerland supports the Special Envoy's calls for an end to armed violence and substantial progress towards a political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Five years ago this month, the Constitutional Committee was created. We continue to call for its early reconvening and remain ready to support and host further meetings in Geneva under United Nations auspices. We also take note of the recent meeting between the Arab liaison committee and Syria in Cairo. We encourage the countries of the region to continue their commitment to a political solution and their good coordination with the United Nations.

For Switzerland, the inclusion of civil society, and in particular women, in efforts towards a political solution is essential. We encourage close collaboration between the Office of the Special Envoy and the Civil Society Support Room, a platform that ensures the broad participation of civil society and currently includes 43 per cent women. The Support Room ensures that the priorities and realities of Syrian men and women are taken into account on the ground and in the political process. The Council must listen to their voices, such as, for example, the voice of Ayoush, a farmer and single mother living in Idlib, who confides:

> "My only wish is to return to a normal life, so that my children can have a regular job, a stable income and a loving family — a life without the daily suffering I have endured."

That brings me to the humanitarian situation, which continues to deteriorate, with almost 17 million Syrians dependent on humanitarian aid. Switzerland reiterates that all forms of access to beneficiaries, including across the front lines and across Syrian borders, are necessary to address ever-increasing needs. We repeat: the funding gap for the humanitarian response in Syria is particularly worrisome. It is severely hampering the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide essential services and life-saving assistance to people affected by the crisis. Switzerland remains committed to supporting not only the people in the country but also those in the wider region. We are therefore maintaining our contributions at a stable level and have pledged more than $65 million for the current year.

Lastly, September marks the start of a new school year in many countries around the world, including Syria. Yet 13 years after the crisis began, education — a key element in young people's futures — is seriously compromised. The disastrous humanitarian and economic situation, combined with violence, increases the risk of children dropping out of school and resorting to negative coping mechanisms. Some families are forced to choose between feeding themselves and sending their children to school, marrying off their daughters too young or resorting to child labour. Their children are thereby exposed to increased protection risks. Entire generations of children who have known nothing but war are at risk.

After so many years of conflict, and in order to avoid new cycles of conflict, the Syrian people must regain a sense of normality and hope. The Council must commit to ensuring that Ayoush's wish finally comes true. It must commit to giving a whole generation of children the opportunity to build the Syria of tomorrow in peace. Switzerland will continue its commitment to that end.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): It is an honour for me to deliver this statement on behalf of the African members of the Security Council plus one (A3+), namely, Guyana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and my own country, Algeria. The A3+ thanks Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Rajasingham for their briefings.

We are meeting today amid a perfect storm that threatens to further destabilize the Middle East — a region already plagued by instability. Recent developments will serve only to exacerbate the situation. The A3+ warns against further escalation and calls on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, while avoiding actions that might intensify the crisis in Syria. Furthermore, the continued violations of Syrian sovereignty threaten to undo the fragile stability in the country and risk plunging Syria back into a dark period of violence.

The A3+ is also deeply concerned about the resurgence of violence in certain areas of Syria and reiterates its call for a nationwide ceasefire. The precarious security situation in Syria, compounded by the political stalemate and economic strife, has left the Syrian people in a state of profound despair. The A3+ emphasizes the urgent need for all parties in Syria to refocus on a credible political process and to engage constructively with the Special Envoy and support his efforts. In that regard, we recall that resolution 2254 (2015) remains the cornerstone of any political solution in Syria. We reaffirm our steadfast commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and political independence. The A3+ also urges all Syrians to overcome their differences and recommit to a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led political process to resolve the crisis that has afflicted their country for more than 13 years. We also underscore the need for the full and meaningful participation of all Syrians, particularly women and youth, in shaping the future of their country.

The Syrian people are silently enduring one of the most severe humanitarian crises of our time. The figures are staggering. In total, 13 million people are food insecure, of whom 3 million are in severe food insecurity, with the number of malnourished having tripled in the past five years. Approximately 7.5 million children are in need, of whom 2.5 million are internally displaced, 1 million are living in camps and 2.4 million

are out of school. More than 70 per cent of the Syrian population is in need.

And yet the humanitarian response plan is only 26 per cent funded, despite a 20 per cent reduction in the appeal this year. That is unsustainable and places immense pressure on humanitarian actors, who are forced to prioritize their response. The lack of funding also means that efforts are concentrated on emergency assistance, at the cost of investments in early-recovery projects. The A3+ calls on donors to honour their commitments and ensure adequate funding for the humanitarian response plan and recovery projects in Syria. Failure to do so will have a lasting intergenerational impact. While children around the world are returning to school this month, millions of children in Syria remain out of school, and a further 1.6 million are at risk of leaving the education system, or even more given that one in three schools are not being used for education. What future can Syria have when its children are growing up in refugee camps and camps for internally displaced persons, malnourished and impoverished? What future can those children possibly have? And what can the international community say to them? Education must be our priority.

The A3+ advocates a comprehensive early-recovery strategy to improve the livelihoods of Syrians and facilitate the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced Syrians to their homes. We believe that early-recovery projects and economic growth are also vital for the Syrian people, who cannot rely solely on the generosity of donors. It is also imperative to help Syria's economic recovery, including by lifting unilateral sanctions.

In conclusion, the international community bears responsibility for creating an environment conducive to resolving the Syrian crisis. We must rise to that responsibility. We must not let the Syrian people down. They are pinning their hopes on us.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I appreciate and value the information provided by the briefers.

Ecuador reiterates its call for all parties to exercise maximum restraint and for the de-escalation of violence in Syria, in an unstable regional environment where further tensions would only bring unpredictable consequences.

The settlement of the political situation in Syria must continue. Therefore, reactivating the negotiation channels proposed by Special Envoy Pedersen, engaging the actors involved and promoting confidence-building measures are strategies that will make it possible to break the deadlock and make progress on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). It is essential to restart the Syrian-led political dialogue under United Nations auspices. We support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to continue talks on a new consensual venue for meetings of the Constitutional Committee.

The main victims of the violence are civilians, many of them women, children, persons with disabilities and persons in displacement and refugee situations, who also face higher levels of vulnerability, as Director Rajasingham reminded us. Also, as we have heard, the humanitarian situation in Syria is dire, and funding is limited. Donors must honour their commitments to support the humanitarian response plan and alleviate the needs of the population requiring humanitarian assistance. The Syrian Government must ensure that cross-border and cross-line access remains open to facilitate the passage of humanitarian aid. It must also provide answers to the families of missing and arbitrarily detained persons.

I conclude by reiterating support for the committed work of Special Envoy Pedersen and the United Nations teams on the ground, who have not flagged in their effort to bring peace and security to Syria and the region. The Security Council must do its part and contribute to a sustainable solution that involves the commitment of all parties.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for their informative briefings.

As we just heard from the briefers, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, and the political process remains deadlocked. The cost of living is rising. Despair is deepening. Meanwhile, the regional security situation is escalating, making a political resolution increasingly difficult. Let us consider the humanitarian and political situations in turn.

First, on the humanitarian front, the briefing by OCHA reminds us of the misery that the population is still enduring after more than 13 years of conflict. Millions of children are internally displaced persons and refugees and are not in school. They are the future of Syria. They must have access to safety, basic necessities and education. They should know a life without fear.

More than 70 per cent of Syrians are in need. They urgently require humanitarian aid, but they also need to be able to rebuild their lives. In that regard, Japan stresses the importance of the efficient operationalization of all possible modalities for aid deliveries, including cross-border and cross-line. We appreciate the ongoing efforts to expand cross-line deliveries and welcome the first cross-line mission to Deir ez-Zor. However, it is regrettable that the humanitarian response plan for Syria remains severely underfunded, with a larger funding gap now than there was at this time last year. We urge donors to contribute whatever they can to meet the desperate needs of Syrians. It is also imperative to invest in early recovery and resilience, so that Syria can have a strong foundation on which to build a stable and safer country.

Secondly, the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process has not made progress since our previous meeting (see S/PV.9713). The Constitutional Committee must be convened at the earliest. The international community must maintain its support for the political process outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) and the comprehensive mediation efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen. No effort should be spared to rebuild trust between the parties. Japan will remain actively engaged in diplomacy with the Syrian Government and all other relevant actors to that end.

Without a political resolution, Syria remains at high risk of being dragged into regional hostilities. Nothing could be a greater symbol of that than the recent pager explosions in Lebanon, where many devices reportedly exploded in Syria as well. A possible full-scale Israel-Hizbullah war would not leave Syria unscathed. Regional tensions must be calmed, starting with an immediate ceasefire and the release of hostages in Gaza.

Once again, Syria remains at risk of being forgotten amid the region's many crises. But for the Syrian people, their plight is as real as ever. They need hope for a political resolution, for recovery and for the displaced to be able to return home safely and with dignity, at last. We must not fail them. Japan will continue to stand with them and support them in their pursuit of peace, security and prosperity. They deserve no less.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

First, the United Kingdom is gravely concerned by the ongoing conflict and devastation within Syria and the risks that they present for the stability of the entire region. It must not be forgotten. The regime and its backers continue to exploit that instability for their own gain. In a single attack last week, regime forces injured three innocent children in eastern Aleppo. And since we heard a lot from our Russian colleague about the West today, let me also say that this month also marks nine years since the start of Russia's military intervention in Syria. Since then, Russia has continued to defend and support the perpetrators of terrible attacks against the Syrian people. The violence across Syria continues unabated. This summer has also witnessed a concerning increase in Da'esh attacks across Syria, made possible by the ongoing instability of a country locked in a cycle of conflict, with no resolution in sight. The United Kingdom is dedicated to countering Da'esh's resurgence as a core member of the global coalition. We stand for the safety and freedom of the Syrian people.

Secondly, as we usher in the start of a new academic year, thousands of Syrian children are living in active conflict without access to education, a basic human right. Over 2 million children are out of school, and 1.6 million more are at risk of dropping out. Those children are the future of Syria and deserve access to an equitable education system. That is why the United Kingdom is supporting over 200 schools across north-west Syria through our flagship Syria Education Programme.

Thirdly, despite the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy, the Constitutional Committee has not met since the Al-Assad regime and its backers blocked the meetings in Geneva. The regime has stifled progress towards a sustainable and lasting resolution to this conflict and chosen instead to prolong the suffering of millions. We urgently need a political solution to bring stability to Syria and the region. In that regard, the United Kingdom fully endorses the Special Envoy's efforts to implement resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

We express deep concern over the growing instability in Syria since the previous meeting in August (see S/PV.9713), amid rising tensions, the resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the ongoing conflicts in north-eastern Syria. In that regard, I would like to highlight the following three points.

First, we urge all stakeholders in the region to immediately cease hostilities and recommit to the political process. From the attack on a facility in Syria on 8 September to the wave of explosions throughout Lebanon and Syria this week, we are seeing increasing volatility in the region and the potential for a wider conflict. As Mr. Pedersen has rightly warned, this destructive cycle will persist in Syria without a credible political process, and the conflict will only deepen if not urgently addressed. Genuine engagement in the United Nations-facilitated dialogue, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), is the sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict that addresses the legitimate aspirations and concerns of all Syrians.

Secondly, accountability must be ensured for violations of international humanitarian law, as such violations continue to occur by exploiting the country's political divisions. We are profoundly disturbed by the publicized beheading by ISIL in Syria this month, the first in several years. That brutal act serves as a stark reminder of the past horrors that continue to persist, and it underscores the urgent need for full accountability to prevent such atrocities from recurring.

Also troubling are the ongoing patterns of crimes against humanity and war crimes across the country, as outlined in the latest report (A/HRC/57/86) of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry. Enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings highlight the severity of the situation and the critical need for greater accountability. In that regard, we reiterate our strong support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and call on all Member States to fully cooperate with it to ensure accountability.

Thirdly, all States must urgently scale up humanitarian assistance to address the critical funding gap in Syria. It is deeply concerning that this shortfall is now larger than it was at the same time last year, despite a 20 per cent reduction in the overall appeal and growing needs. We note with alarm that that gap has already forced reductions in key services, including emergency food aid and health care, which are crucial to the survival and well-being of millions of Syrians. In that challenging environment, the dedication of humanitarian aid workers is more vital than ever, and we deeply commend their selfless efforts. Their sacrifices are evident, as they continue to operate under extremely difficult conditions. We also commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its courageous and tireless efforts, particularly its cross-line missions in Deir ez-Zor, a region recently affected by hostilities, which have been essential in delivering much-needed humanitarian aid to those in desperate need.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea calls on key regional players to refrain from all actions inside Syria that exacerbate dangerous regional tensions and to support the intra-Syria political process.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings today.

Malta is deeply concerned by the escalating violence in the region. Shelling and attacks in the north-west and north-east and continued Israeli air strikes across Syria are adding to an already unstable and precariously volatile situation. The air strikes last week have the potential to further inflame the region. We stress that a broader regional escalation would have devastating and long-term consequences, and it must be avoided at all costs. The presence of multiple foreign militaries, terrorist groups and other combatants only worsen the environment, particularly for the civilian population, which finds itself trapped in an endless cycle of conflict.

After nearly 14 years of conflict, the humanitarian and protection situation remains catastrophic. Acute food insecurity affecting millions, a lack of education for Syrian children, economic collapse and the prevalence of illicit drugs threaten the future of millions of Syrians. We once again call for a significant scale-up of humanitarian resources to meet the immediate humanitarian needs, as well as the budgets for early-recovery and livelihood programmes.

Regrettably, despite the generosity of many States, the humanitarian response pan for this year remains just 25.8 per cent funded. Ensuring adequate and predictable funding is essential. It is the only way in which we can begin to address the severity of the crisis and work towards meaningful and durable solutions. In that regard, we once again commend the work of the United Nations in reaching an agreement with Damascus on the continued use of the border crossings at Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai. All crossings should remain authorized and in effect as long as they are needed. In addition, we emphasise the need for tangible progress on aid delivery via all modalities, including cross-line.

The fate of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons is critical. We reiterate that any return must

be safe, voluntary and dignified. We also remain deeply concerned about the fate of those missing or arbitrarily detained in Syria. Progress in that area is also key to moving forward confidence-building measures and allowing hundreds of thousands of families to finally receive the information to which they are entitled. Malta reiterates its support for the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria. We urge that its mandate be carried out in a gender-responsive and survivor-centred manner.

As we heard once again today, there is no military solution to this conflict. Only political progress in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can unlock the just and lasting peace that the Syrian people so desperately need and deserve. Malta once again calls for the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee as soon as possible. That intra-Syrian dialogue is the only way in which tangible breakthroughs can be achieved.

In conclusion, Malta reaffirms its support for the Syrian people, the humanitarian organizations working to reach them and the Office of the Special Envoy. De-escalation, a nationwide ceasefire, the resumption of the Constitutional Committee and genuine confidence-building steps are the only paths forward out of this nightmare.

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

Allow me to make three points.

At a time of acute crisis in the Middle East, the need for a credible political process that meets Syrians' aspirations remains the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace. However, Damascus has taken no significant action to allow the United Nations-led mediation to progress on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015). We are ready to lift the sanctions and to consider financing the reconstruction of Syria on the condition that tangible progress is made on the political process. In the immediate future, we reiterate our confidence in Mr. Pedersen's ability to implement all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

The situation of the more than 6 million Syrian refugees in the countries hosting them receives our full attention. We welcome the efforts made by the host countries. We are aware of the weight that the presence of millions of refugees places on their internal balance. That is why we are working to continue supporting them. The obstacles to the return of those refugees are economic, security-related and political. The surveys of Syrian refugees carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees demonstrate that. It is therefore up to the Syrian regime to provide guarantees that it will remove those obstacles to the return of refugees.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate throughout Syria. In the north-east, we are particularly concerned about food insecurity and the lack of access to drinking water. We call on all States to take action to respond to the emergency. France calls on all actors to strictly respect international humanitarian law throughout Syria. It reiterates the importance of the cross-border delivery of aid, which makes it possible to bring aid to 2.4 million people. We call on the Syrian regime to make the permits for the Bab Al-Salam, Al-Rai and Bab Al-Hawa points permanent, without any time limits.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

Regarding the Syrian political process, I would like to make two points.

First, a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process is the only way forward in resolving the Syrian issue. China supports Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to continue working with all parties in line with that principle and expects the existing dialogue mechanisms to work together to facilitate a political solution on the basis of communication and consultations with the Syrian Government. Terrorism is a long-term threat to the political process in Syria. China condemns the recent terrorist attacks in Syria, supports the Syrian Government in stepping up counter-terrorism efforts and calls on the international community to join forces to combat terrorist forces with zero tolerance.

Secondly, the violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must stop. Since the outbreak of the current round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel has continued to launch air strikes on many sites in Syria, about which China is deeply concerned. We call on all the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and to make practical efforts to maintain the stability of the countries in the region, including Syria. We urge Israel to stop its attacks on Syria and foreign forces to end their illegal military presence in Syria. There can be no double standards on the issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

China's position on the Syrian humanitarian issue is consistent. We urge the parties concerned to cooperate actively in promoting progress on cross-line relief. At present, the humanitarian response plan for Syria is seriously underfunded, impeding the smooth implementation of early-recovery projects. Donors should effectively honour their commitments. Unilateral sanctions have seriously weakened Syria's capacity for economic recovery and social development and are the greatest obstacles to improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and should therefore be lifted immediately.

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

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their briefings.

The ongoing tense and violent situations across many fronts in Syria are highly worrisome, especially in combination with the escalation of violence in the wider region. We urge all major stakeholders to redouble efforts towards regional de-escalation in the interest of long-term peace and stability for all, including for an urgent immediate ceasefire in Gaza and a return to calm in Lebanon and across the Blue Line. Amid the growing regional turmoil, Syria continues to sleepwalk into further deterioration. Moreover, that is happening on our watch. We urgently need a viable political solution to the conflict through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process under the auspices of the United Nations. Slovenia fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts to find a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Syrians continue to face violent conflict, oppression, human rights violations and abuses, economic crisis and a desperate humanitarian situation. The war has already shattered countless lives and forced more than 14 million Syrians to leave their homes and seek safety elsewhere, including by embarking on perilous journeys to distant and foreign places. They are people with hopes and dreams trying to rebuild their shattered lives, and they are people with stories of how to give back to the communities that have heeded their plight. They must be protected and treated with dignity wherever they are seeking refuge. We must do more to counter the anti-refugee rhetoric and sentiment, as the conditions for their safe, voluntary, dignified and informed return have not yet been met.

The issue of detained and missing persons demands urgent action, with arbitrary detention and arrest, torture in detention and disappearances continuing in all areas of Syria. Such repressive practices must stop. The sheer scale of the issue is a stark reminder that no lasting reconciliation is possible without addressing the grief of the families of the missing. Slovenia reiterates that there cannot be lasting peace without accountability for the perpetrators. Survivors, victims and their loved ones deserve justice. We reiterate our call on the Government of Syria to ensure compliance with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice and to engage with the independent institution on missing persons in Syria.

Without the prospect of a political solution, the already dire humanitarian situation will only continue to worsen. We recognize that the current crisis continues to generate humanitarian needs unparalleled in scale, severity and complexity. The trend of an increasing number of people depending on international humanitarian assistance is not sustainable. The Syrian people need immediate, predictable and efficient aid flows, including cross-border and cross-line aid, across the whole country, as well as conditions that will allow them to begin rebuilding their homes, lives and communities.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support to Special Envoy's efforts, and we call on all parties to use the coming days during the high-level week of the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session to move towards working on a lasting political solution in Syria for the sake of the Syrian people and their future.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): For nearly a year, our region has been facing the dangers resulting from the escalation of the Israeli occupation entity and its crimes against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, along with its ongoing aggression against the States of the region, including my country, Syria. On 8 September, the Israeli occupation entity launched a blatant aerial attack on the countryside of Hama governorate, killing 18 martyrs, injuring 37 others and causing material damage to some residential areas and infrastructure, as well as water, electricity and communications networks.

My country, Syria, holds the countries supporting the Israeli occupation entity fully responsible for the consequences of those blatant attacks, as it would not have continued its brutal crimes and acts of aggression against the countries of the region without the umbrella of immunity, impunity and unconditional support provided by the United States of America and other Western countries, which threatens to ignite and blow up the region, jeopardizing regional and international peace and security.

Syria stresses its right to legitimate self-defence, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. It is determined to recover the occupied Syrian Arab Golan by all means permitted by international law.

Despite the complex circumstances and major challenges facing the region, the Syrian Government continues to take every step to improve the humanitarian situation, provide basic services to Syrians and create conditions conducive to the increased and expeditious return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons to their towns and villages. In that context, the Syrian Government adopted a number of decrees and procedures while continuing to improve its comprehensive administrative, legislative and institutional infrastructure. It also continues its constructive cooperation with the United Nations and humanitarian and development partners, providing them with support and all the necessary facilities, including the permits for their cross-border and cross-line operations.

My country reaffirms that the success of the joint Syrian-United Nations efforts requires certain Western countries to revisit their policies of politicizing humanitarian work and withholding funds unless certain political conditions are met. We must also support sustainable solutions for those affected, promote early-recovery and livelihood projects, accelerate efforts to remove mines and unexploded ordnance and ensure that donor countries' pledges are fulfilled. Even as we approach the end of the year, the funding of the humanitarian response plan, to date, stands at only 26 per cent — the lowest among humanitarian response plans worldwide.

A few days ago, more than 3.7 million students attended 15,000 schools throughout Syria amid difficulties faced by the Syrian Government to provide the necessary conditions for their education. Children are suffering due to a lack of electricity and heating as winter approaches. That is attributed to the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union targeting all basic sectors and human rights, including the basic right to education. Those measures have directly restricted access to technical equipment, educational tools and materials. They have also undermined the ability of the Syrian Government and its humanitarian partners to rehabilitate schools affected by terrorism and have deprived Syrian students the opportunity to obtain international degrees and participate in online educational programmes and training courses.

The suffering of Syrian children and students as a result of the unilateral coercive measures is but one of the catastrophic effects of those inhumane and immoral measures, which have adversely affected all aspects of daily lives of Syrians. Those illegitimate measures have seriously harmed various vital sectors, including those highlighted and supported by humanitarian Council resolutions — namely, health, housing, education, water and electricity sectors.

My country's delegation once again calls for the complete, immediate and unconditional lifting of unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people, as they constitute a grave violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and human rights instruments, and constitute collective punishment. There are clear reports and evidence to that effect. The consequences are witnessed by the United Nations and its agencies in Syria, as well as visiting foreign delegations, including those from Western countries and others that cooperate in humanitarian, development or relief work. All of that is also confirmed by United Nations reports, the latest of which was the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2023/TP.8), as well as in other reports by special rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council, including Ms. Alena Douhan, Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

Terrorist organizations in north-western Syria continue to impose their obscurantist ideologies and to repress civilians, especially women and girls. They continue to attack safe towns and villages. In their latest attacks, two days ago, on the rural areas of Latakia and Idlib, they used nine drones, which confirms reports that Kyiv has been providing support and drones to terrorist organizations, with a Western green light from the United States and its Western allies, in exchange for those terrorist organizations — including Hayat

Tahrir Al-Sham — sending some of their terrorists and mercenaries to Ukraine to fight there and launch attacks against the Russian Federation.

Syria stresses its sovereign right to eradicate terrorism in all its forms and to dry up its sources. We hold the United States and its allies accountable for perpetuating this peculiar situation by continuing its policies of investing in terrorism and supporting the crimes of terrorist organizations and affiliated entities included on the Security Council's terrorist list. They perpetrate crimes against Syrians in the areas under their control and use civilians as human shields. My country warns against such policies and against attempts to whitewash those terrorist organizations, because that is tantamount to spreading an extremist ideology that jeopardizes the security and stability of Syria, the region and the world.

In conclusion, Syria reiterates its commitment to a Syrian-led and -owned political process, without any external interference and with full respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. We emphasize our continued cooperation and dialogue with the Special Envoy, in his capacity as a facilitator. We look forward to the success of his efforts to convene the ninth round of the Constitutional Committee in Baghdad. Mr. Pedersen noted his upcoming meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates during the high-level week of the General Assembly. My country reaffirms the need to end the illegal foreign military presence on Syrian territories and to put an end to all relevant acts of aggression, support for terrorist entities and militias and the looting of our national wealth under the pretext of fighting terrorism and the terrorist Da'esh organization. We also call for supporting the efforts of the Syrian Government to re-establish State authority and the rule of law throughout its national territory.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their insightful briefings.

Syria continues to suffer from security challenges, particularly in areas under the occupation of illegal United States forces and United Nations-designated terrorist groups. The sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic must be fully respected by all, and illegal foreign forces must withdraw from its territory.

A prominent example is the United States occupation, which, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, supports and protects terrorist groups and the ongoing aggression of Israel's occupying regime in support of terrorist groups. Israel deliberately targets civilians and civilian infrastructure in Syria, violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity with impunity and without any response from the Security Council. Just this morning that terrorist regime once again targeted civilians near Damascus International Airport. Israeli aggression and illegal actions pose a grave threat to international peace and security. The Council must act to stop Israel's ongoing violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including its continued occupation of the Syrian Golan.

The brutal terrorist attacks by Israel, on 17 and 18 September, aimed at the mass killing of innocent civilians in Lebanon and in part of Syria are a blatant violation of international law, particularly international humanitarian and human rights law and constitute a crime against humanity. The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns those horrific attacks and calls on the Security Council to condemn Israel and take decisive action to end its malicious activities in the region. We will address that internationally wrongful act in the Council meeting scheduled for this afternoon.

The humanitarian and economic situation in Syria remains critical. Iran commends the tireless efforts of United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners in their work towards alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. Despite such valuable efforts, the politicization of humanitarian aid and the obstruction of international efforts to support Syria's reconstruction by Western countries have prolonged the conflict and worsened the suffering of the Syrian people.

The United States and its allies also continue to pursue their failed policy of inhumane, unilateral sanctions, effectively using them as a tool for the collective punishment of the Syrian people. As we have said before, those harmful measures must be lifted, both as a legal obligation and a moral necessity, as they only create unnecessary hardship and hinder Syria's recovery. It is also essential to provide impartial, non-politicized humanitarian aid to all regions of Syria to save lives and alleviate the crisis.

In conclusion, we remain firmly committed to a political resolution of the Syrian crisis. Any solution must fully respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and end the illegal presence of foreign forces. They are the main source of instability and insecurity, enabling terrorist groups to strengthen their position and commit further atrocities.

Iran strongly supports the prompt resumption of the Constitutional Committee meetings. In that context, we fully support the Special Envoy's active engagement with all parties involved in resolving the conflict.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Rajasingham for their comprehensive briefings. I agree with almost all the points they made.

Syria may not feature high on the international agenda these days, owing to other pressing crises, yet the humanitarian landscape in the country is nothing short of catastrophic. A staggering 16.7 million people, which means over 70 per cent of the population, are in need of humanitarian aid. That is a direct result of the deadlock in reaching a political settlement to the conflict. As millions of innocent people continue to pay the price of a devastation they have not created, it is essential that their humanitarian needs are met. That is the least international community can and must do.

Yet despite repeated calls by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Syria is facing a critical funding shortfall. It should not be forgotten that cuts in international humanitarian finance mean less food on the table, less hygiene, less health services and less protection for millions of women, children, the elderly, the disabled and the displaced. It also means greater risks to regional stability in an already extremely troublesome atmosphere.

Millions who live in north-west Syria, in particular, are among the most vulnerable and depend on the life-saving cross-border aid for survival. Therefore, uninterrupted delivery of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance is critical, and Türkiye is doing its utmost to ensure its continuity. Also, we expect all border crossings to continue to be available, in a predictable and stable way, for use for those purposes.

A dangerous result of the ongoing conflict in Syria is the presence of terrorist organizations, which exploit the turmoil in the country to create space for their separatist objectives. Today the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces terrorist organization remains a major destabilizing fact factor on the ground. In addition to its oppression of the local population and violations of all sorts that have been ongoing for years, that PKK offshoot is now impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need in Tall Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn. That terrorist organization's attempts to announce a so-called social covenant and organize so-called local elections in north-east Syria constitute a direct threat to the unity and territorial integrity of Syria and contravene the letter and spirit of resolution 2254 (2015). All actors must recognize those facts and stop any support to those organizations.

The 13-year-old conflict in Syria has inflicted massive destruction and civil hardships on the country and its people. The security, economic and humanitarian situation are all continuously worsening. The only way out of the conflict is a comprehensive political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). That is why we consider the resumption of the Constitution Committee an essential step. We call on all relevant actors to desist from pursuing single dimensional policies and obstructions, adopt a holistic approach and focus on invigorating the United Nations-facilitated political process.

I wish everybody a successful high-level week.

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

Mr. Wood (United States of American): I apologize for taking the floor. I just need to respond to some remarks made by the representative of the Syrian regime.

The outrageous claim that the United States is providing support to some alleged Ukrainian terrorist action in Syria is patently absurd. But that type of claim is right out of the Russian playbook, which, as we all know, is to make lots of false claims and see what actually gets traction.

Council members have to remember that this ridiculous charge comes from a regime that denies carrying out chemical-weapons attacks against its own people. I will end my intervention right there.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.