



Security Council

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Letter dated 20 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the videoconference on the Middle East (Syria) convened on Monday, 18 May 2020. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 by the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefing and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Briefing by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria,
Geir O. Pedersen**

Since my last report, I have engaged widely among Syrians from all parts of the country, who have been keen to communicate with the United Nations at this time when all of us are finding new ways to be in touch. I have been struck by how deep their concerns are about the current state and future of their beloved country, Syria.

I have heard relief that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has, so far, not hit Syria on the scale initially feared, but also fear that it could still do so. I sense deep anxiety over the fact that, even if violence has for the moment somewhat abated, it does continue, and it can escalate at any moment. I have heard immediate concerns at the further decline of the economy and the suffering this is causing. There is profound apprehension and worry about the fate and well-being of detainees, abductees and missing persons. There is, frankly, disappointment that the political process has not really delivered tangible improvements in the lives of Syrians. And there is a widespread sense that international competition is more prominent than cooperation, with Syrians paying the price.

I share those concerns, and I take them as a strong reminder to the international community of the importance of building constructive Syria diplomacy to support a political solution. It is hard, but it is not impossible, and we must try.

We have elements to build on. In the north-west, this month saw further progress in Russian-Turkish cooperation on the ground, pursuant to the agreement they reached in March, which brought relative calm to Idlib. We all hope that this bodes well for sustaining calm there.

But that calm has been punctuated by violent incidents and mutual attempts at cross-line offensives, most notably one by the extremist Wa-Harid Al-Mu'minin Operations Room. A number of Syrian soldiers were killed during that attack. This prompted an escalation, including increased artillery strikes on areas inside Idlib, as well as rocket fire towards Khmeimim Air Base in Latakia, before the episode was contained.

Meanwhile, there have also been further incidents of mutual shelling; attacks using improvised explosive devices around Afrin and the north-east; further tensions, targeted killings, military build-up and clashes in the south-west; and further reports of Israeli air strikes in Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo; as well as further incidents pointing to a resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the eastern desert.

In short, violence continues and there is a constant risk of escalation, which could lead to the unravelling of existing arrangements. We see such dangers right now in Dara'a. We must, at all costs, avoid a reversion to the all-out fighting, abuses and violations we have seen in the past.

Let us also remember that Syria's instability reverberates elsewhere too, including as far as Libya, given reports of fighters being recruited in Syria in large numbers and sent to fight on both sides of that conflict.

The Security Council has called on all parties to ensure a sustained period of calm throughout the country. Key players should be working together — and I stand ready to assist in that — so that significant calm in many areas is sustained, enhanced and expanded into a nationwide ceasefire, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015). Let me reiterate my belief that the presence of listed terrorist groups only underlines the need for a cooperative approach in countering them, one that ensures stability, protects civilians and fully respects international humanitarian law.

Thankfully, to date, Syria has not experienced mass COVID-19 outbreaks, which have been the fate of many other countries. Bearing in mind testing limitations, the officially reported caseload is 64, of which 58 are in Government-controlled areas and six are in the north-east. No cases have yet been reported in the north-west. We note the early measures enacted by the Syrian Government and other de facto authorities to address the pandemic, some of which are now being eased. Of course, as in all countries, the risk of broader outbreak remains. And, given the Syrian context, any such development could have devastating consequences in the country and beyond.

Under-Secretary-General Lowcock will update the Council on humanitarian issues in his briefing tomorrow. Let me note the importance of full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access, using all modalities, including scaled-up cross-line and cross-border access, to deliver assistance. As we scale up prevention and protection against COVID-19 in Government-controlled areas and in the north-west, such access is absolutely critical elsewhere too, including in the north-east, where gaps in medical supplies have widened.

Further to the Secretary-General's global call for the waiver of sanctions that may undermine the capacity of countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and medical support to respond to the pandemic, let me note the public assurances by relevant States that their sanctions programmes relating to Syria neither ban the flow of humanitarian supplies nor target medicine and medical devices. I welcome their commitments to fully and expeditiously apply humanitarian exemptions. I continue to closely follow this issue.

We are still awaiting concrete news on the issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Large-scale and unilateral releases as well as more meaningful actions on missing persons have never been more necessary. I continue to urge the Syrian Government and all other Syrian parties to step up their efforts in this regard. I believe they could follow the example of those Governments in the region and elsewhere that have already carried out large-scale releases on an exceptional basis as part of their pandemic response.

The COVID-19 crisis has added a new layer to Syria's grave and worsening economic predicament, which is the result of many internal and external factors and measures over a decade of conflict. The Syrian pound has continued to depreciate in recent weeks, with implications for the purchasing power of ordinary Syrians. Significant price increases and shortages in basic commodities are widespread across the country, with implications for food security.

We know that the crisis in Syria will not be resolved by a new constitution alone. But if the Constitutional Committee could work seriously, it could build trust, make an important contribution to a political settlement and be a door-opener. I am ready to convene a third session of the Small Body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva as soon as global travel conditions allow. We do not know when that will be. But let me stress, as both co-Chairs have affirmed to me, the importance of a substantive third session on the agreed agenda and the equal importance of there being no preconditions for moving on to other items of the constitution in subsequent sessions, consistent with the mandate and terms of reference and the core rules of procedure.

We remain in contact with both co-Chairs as we assess when the next session will be possible. I also recently offered a briefing to the civil society members of the Small Body. Those who wished to attend and could do so were updated on the agenda agreed between the co-Chairs. I believe that all three components of the Committee have been offered the information they need to prepare themselves for a substantive and forward-looking session when conditions so permit.

I have remained in close contact with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, whose members have been meeting virtually for the past several weeks. They emphasize the active leadership role that Syrian women are assuming in their communities, in the context of the severe economic crisis and of the humanitarian needs of Syrians across the country and beyond its borders. They have asked for special priority to help and protect the most vulnerable Syrians, including refugees and internally displaced persons; children and the elderly; women who suffer from violence and abuse; and detainees and abductees, who are now at greater risk because of the pandemic. They have reiterated to me that a political process within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) is the only way forward, with Syrian women as full partners at the table.

I have heard from a wide range of Syrian men and women, including civil society interlocutors across Syria and the region, via our Civil Society Support Room. Many continue to impress upon me their ability and desire to build bridges within Syrian society. Almost all of them perceive that the political process, and not only the Constitutional Committee, has stalled. All of them continue to highlight the critical importance of real progress on the issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Calls for accountability for serious offences and violations of international law are often raised. Everyone is concerned about the declining economic reality across Syria. Debates continue on the issue of sanctions. Many also note that COVID-19 has created new stresses for Syrian refugees — and for the countries hosting them. All seek the emergence of tangible steps towards the creation of a safe, calm and neutral environment across Syria upon which a comprehensive and credible political solution can be built. These are the same conditions that would allow the safe, dignified, voluntary and well informed return of refugees and internally displaced Syrians.

Many civil society interlocutors also raised the issue of elections. We take note that parliamentary elections have been postponed, as one of the precautionary measures against the transmission of COVID-19 announced by the Syrian Government. I take this opportunity to note that those elections would be under the current constitutional framework. The United Nations is not specifically mandated, nor have we been so requested, to engage on the elections. I remain focused, in the context of the United Nations-facilitated political process pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), on working towards free and fair elections pursuant to a new constitution that are administered under United Nations supervision, meet the highest international standards of accountability and transparency and are inclusive of all eligible Syrians, including the diaspora.

In conclusion, let us recall that there have been too many episodes in the past decade where fleeting opportunities to turn dynamics towards a political path were lost. Those missed moments were followed by renewed violence and a hardening of positions among regional and international actors. We must not repeat that pattern. With some calm, with the common threats of COVID-19 and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and with the Syrian people continuing to suffer, I want to stress that renewed and meaningful international cooperation that builds trust and confidence among international stakeholders and with Syrians, including through reciprocal measures, is essential and could unlock progress.

I believe that dialogue between the Russian Federation and the United States of America has a key role to play here, and I encourage them to pursue such dialogue. The States that discuss Syria in the Astana and Small Group formats are key players too, as are the members of the Security Council. Ultimately, there is a need to come together to support a renewed effort in a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process guided by resolution 2254 (2015), towards a political settlement that can meet the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians and fully restore Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity.

Annex II**Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Yao Shaojun**

I thank the Special Envoy, Mr. Pedersen, for his briefing. We appreciate his dedication and devotion to the political process of Syria.

China has been following the situation in Syria very closely. We are worried about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria. The Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Mr. Pedersen, have appealed for a ceasefire on many occasions. We attach great importance to those appeals, and call on all parties to enhance mutual trust to pursue de-escalation and jointly combat the pandemic. There is a window of opportunity to promote inclusive dialogue and create favourable conditions for political solutions.

We have consistently maintained our position in support of a political solution of the conflict in Syria. The Syrian parties should continue to engage constructively with each other and maintain dialogue within the framework of the Constitutional Committee. The future of Syria must be decided by Syrians alone, free from foreign interference. It is of fundamental importance that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria be respected and upheld. China will continue to support the good offices of the Special Envoy, in pursuit of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

At the same time, the international community should be alert to the fact that terrorists are seeking to take advantage of the current situation. Terrorist groups are still mounting assaults in Idlib and other provinces, which pose a constant threat to the security and stability of Syria and the entire region. The Security Council should pay close attention and support the Special Envoy's calls for effective, cooperative and targeted counter-terrorism efforts. We call on relevant parties to step up dialogue and negotiations to swiftly find a long-term solution with regard to counter-terrorism.

Concerning COVID-19, although the number of confirmed cases in Syria is comparatively limited, containment and prevention measures are indispensable, given the quick transmission of the virus. The Syrian Government is taking effective measures in medical, transportation, education and many other sectors. We appreciate these efforts. It is the primary responsibility of the Syrian Government to cope with this public health crisis. China is ready to strengthen cooperation with the people and Government of Syria in combating the virus, and to offer assistance within our capacity.

It is also high time for the international community to provide greater support for the urgent efforts of Syria, which serve the interests of the Syrian people. Unilateral sanctions undermine countries' capacity to mobilize resources and respond to the pandemic, and therefore should be lifted without delay.

Annex III**Statement by the Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, José Singer Weisinger**

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing.

At this particular juncture, the Council needs to be more proactive than ever in order to revitalize a broad political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015).

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is, by all accounts, forcing Governments, communities and people around the world to think beyond the current situation and build a new future for themselves, with a renewed sense of common humanity. Humankind has never been so vulnerable to the impacts of a crisis for which no one seems to be prepared and from which no country is protected.

The Syrians deserve the same. The Syrians deserve the right to plan for the future — a future of freedom, justice and respect for their rights. Are we doing what we need to do to support them?

The Syrians need assurances — assurances that a nationwide ceasefire will be sustainable and long-lasting; that if they get infected with coronavirus, it is not a death sentence; that there will be accountability for the atrocities that have been committed against their civilians; and that, above all, they will be able to return to their homes, villages and cities, and that their basic needs will be met in the framework of an inclusive and just rule of law.

But to achieve all that, a political process needs to be in place that responds to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. Why are we not there yet? Let us ask ourselves that question. And let us avoid, once and for all, pointing fingers at one another and move forward.

The situation in Syria remains complex and fragile. The humanitarian situation is dire for millions, including those who are on the brink of starvation. The reports of human rights violations in the south and continued tensions along cross-lines across the north are deeply concerning for the Dominican Republic. We cannot afford to come together again, month after month, to repeat the same recipe for action.

We call on the Syrian Government, the opposition and civil society to unite, if not with each other, then with the Syrian people. We call on it to unite with the women and make their aspirations its aspirations, and to unite with the young people and make their aspirations its aspirations.

But we also call on those with influence on the parties in conflict to seize every opportunity they have to promote dialogue and concertation, to ensure that the ceasefire in the north holds and to extend it to the whole nation, and to help the parties commit to the Constitutional Committee while also advancing in terms of the release of detainees, increased confidence-building measures and the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons, providing them with all the assurances necessary for a dignified life. We remain confident that all this is possible.

Determination and political will be required to boost the broader political process, as envisioned in resolution 2254 (2015). The time is now. The responsibility is ours. How much longer must they wait?

Annex IV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

First, I, too, want to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. The most positive takeaway is certainly the ceasefire in Idlib, which holds despite the challenges.

The same cannot be said about the political process; once again, there are no new developments. The Syrian regime has clearly distanced itself from the whole process, with plans to organize parliamentary elections this year. This clearly violates the road map set out in resolution 2254 (2015).

The situation of political prisoners also remains a pressing issue. Unfortunately, the announcement of a general amnesty did not lead to the unilateral release of thousands of arbitrarily detained people.

The European Union has been clear in saying that none of the sanctions will be lifted or aid for reconstruction provided without a credible political process. That position has not changed; we demand that Syria act in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

According to the Syrian Government, sanctions are affecting the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. In a letter dated 6 May addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2020/368), the Syrian Mission stated that the measures imposed indirectly hinder the import of medical supplies and equipment into Syria. That claim, which was also made just now by the representative of the Russian Federation, is not true. If there are any difficulties with procurement, that means that companies do not want to do business with the Syrian Government because they lack confidence in it.

It is not only the international community or United Nations agencies that see little change in the regime's behaviour but also multinational corporations. To affiliate themselves with a Government that is known for arbitrary detention and chemical attacks is simply considered bad marketing. Sanctions have nothing to do with this negative perception.

In order to regain the trust of the international community and businesses, the Syrian Government needs to fulfil its international commitments under resolution 2254 (2015). Only then will it be possible to support Syria's reconstruction; that is the message of Estonia and the European Union.

Annex V**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing.

First, France is very concerned by the lack of progress on the Syrian file. The growing instability on the ground is worrying. The ceasefire agreement in the north-west remains very fragile. Shelling continues as well as sporadic fighting. It is of the utmost importance that the regime and its allies do not restart an offensive that would worsen the already dire humanitarian situation, especially in the context of a potential spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Coordinated action is needed to deal with the threat posed by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in respect of international humanitarian law.

The resurgence of Da'esh is also extremely worrying for international peace and security. Instability and unrest are also growing in regime-held areas, including in the south-west. That shows that the regime cannot bring stability.

On the political side, the lack of progress in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) is also deeply troubling. The regime's responsibility for the deadlock of the Constitutional Committee is clear. It had first opposed an agreement on its agenda, and now it is taking advantage of COVID-19 to endlessly postpone any meeting of the Committee, including by refusing a video-teleconference meeting. On the contrary, the opposition has constantly showed flexibility and openness. We call on Geir Pedersen to make it clear to the Security Council when he deems that negotiation is no longer possible on the Constitutional Committee.

No progress has been made on the detainee file despite the Special Envoy's call to free prisoners and facilitate access to detention centres. It is urgent that the Syrian regime proceed to large-scale releases of detainees and abductees and allow access to all detention facilities. The latest Astana meeting did not bring any progress. It is now time to move beyond the reciprocal exchanges of prisoners. The United Nations needs to be at the centre of those efforts. In this context, we need to work together to unlock the political process and implement all elements of resolution 2254 (2015).

The priority is to guarantee a sustainable and complete ceasefire everywhere in Syria. The Secretary-General and the Special Envoy have made this call to allow an effective response to COVID-19. The regime, unfortunately, has not responded to this appeal. A nationwide ceasefire is also necessary to create the conditions for a credible political process. All parties must work with the United Nations to that end, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Finally, it is key to launch a broader political process based on all elements of resolution 2254 (2015). That includes establishing a safe and neutral environment, including through the implementation of confidence-building measures. The Special Envoy has our full support in this regard, and we expect him to report to the Council on the progress he has made on all elements of resolution 2254 (2015).

France will not recognize the results of any elections that do not meet the standards for a free, fair and transparent ballot. Resolution 2254 (2015) sets the conditions for credible elections: they should take place in a safe country, under United Nations supervision and with the participation of all Syrians, including from the diaspora.

Time passes, but the crimes of the Syrian regime cannot be forgotten and cannot remain unpunished. France will continue to firmly support all efforts to collect and preserve evidence and fight impunity.

A peace agreement that addresses the root causes of the conflict is more than ever needed to bring peace and stability to Syria and the region. I therefore urge all actors to work together to that end and recall Russia's particular responsibility in that regard. As long as a credible political process is not firmly under way, France and the European Union will not fund the reconstruction in Syria.

Annex VI

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Christoph Heusgen

Germany fully supports the call by Special Envoy Pedersen for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria and his active engagement with the Syrian parties and regional and international key actors in this regard. His call needs to finally be taken up.

Given that the security situation throughout the country remains very fragile and that a major coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak would exacerbate the already alarming humanitarian situation, we need an immediate and lasting nationwide ceasefire.

Since this has not been achieved yet, at the cost of innocent civilian lives, we encourage the Special Envoy to inform the Security Council about exactly which party is hindering an agreement on a lasting, nationwide ceasefire in Syria.

A genuine and sustainable nationwide ceasefire is a prerequisite not only for an effective humanitarian response to COVID-19 but also for a resumption of the political process. We stress the central role of the United Nations in reaching such a genuine and sustainable nationwide ceasefire, which is also already included in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

Sustainable peace, stability and security in Syria can be achieved only through a political process under the auspices of the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

We therefore call for a swift return to the political process and reiterate our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen in this regard, including for adapting working methods that allow for the next session of the Constitutional Committee to take place soon despite the current Corona-related restrictions.

We are all well aware that it is the Syrian regime that is obstructing and delaying the work of the Constitutional Committee. The Syrian regime must finally end its obstruction and start engaging seriously and constructively in the Constitutional Committee.

We need substantive progress in the broader political process and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). As Russia claims that it is interested in a political solution and that the Astana format can move the United Nations-led political process forward, we urge Russia to use its influence over Damascus in this regard.

Germany's and the European Union's (EU) position on reconstruction remains crystal-clear — we will assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way.

We also support the call by Special Envoy Pedersen for unconditional large-scale releases of detainees and abductees and more meaningful action on missing persons. The Syrian regime, which holds the overwhelming majority of detainees, must finally release political detainees on a meaningful scale, starting with elderly people, women and children and those with health conditions.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, Governments around the world have released prisoners on humanitarian grounds. Unfortunately, it does not come as a surprise that the Syrian regime has, on the contrary, continued with arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and torture in its prisons.

We call on the Syrian regime to allow immediate, unconditional and unhindered access for relevant humanitarian organizations to all prisons and detention facilities

under its control, and to ensure adequate medical care and protective measures for all persons in detention in order to prevent COVID-19 leading to yet more loss of life and misery in Syrian prisons.

The Syrian regime must inform the families of the tens of thousands of missing persons about the fate of their loved ones.

We remain convinced that national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Syria will not be possible without justice and accountability. Germany therefore continues to support all efforts, in particular those of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, to ensure that the crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict do not go unpunished, that perpetrators are held accountable and that victims receive justice.

We welcome the most recent reports of the Organization on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Investigation and Identification Team and of the Board of Inquiry, as well as the latest report of Amnesty International, which documents attacks on medical facilities and schools in north-west Syria. All these reports clearly show that the Syrian regime and its ally Russia were responsible for indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in north-west Syria. There has to be a follow-up to the findings in these reports; impunity for those responsible for these serious violations of international humanitarian law cannot be an option.

It has, unfortunately, not been possible to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Those who committed and are still committing international crimes in Syria can thus not be prosecuted by the ICC.

The recent start of the trial in Germany of two former officials of the Syrian regime's security service charged with crimes against humanity sends an important message that those who commit crimes against humanity or war crimes cannot feel safe anywhere and will eventually be held accountable.

So long as the Syrian regime does not change its brutal behaviour and does not end its grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, there will be no lifting of sanctions. Even if the Syrian regime and its supporters falsely claim otherwise, these sanctions are targeted at the Syrian regime and not at the Syrian people. These sanctions specifically allow for the provision of humanitarian aid, including the medicines and medical equipment needed to respond to COVID-19 in Syria. As such, they do not affect the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need.

The European Commission has published a detailed guidance note with regard to humanitarian aid and EU sanctions vis-à-vis Syria. It explains that EU sanctions do not stand in the way or impede the provision of humanitarian aid — in particular medical equipment and supplies to fight the COVID-19 pandemic — and that they provide for humanitarian exemptions.

The guidance note clearly states that medical equipment, including oxygen, respirators, personal protective equipment and ventilators, as well as medicines and other medical items required to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, are not subject to direct restrictions on export, supply, financing or use in Syria.

To be very clear, the primary responsibility for the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria lies with the regime. By destroying medical infrastructure, by arresting doctors and nurses or by blocking humanitarian convoys, the regime is waging a war against its own people and then blaming those who have helped to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and have provided billions of dollars to United Nations organizations. Its position is cynical beyond belief.

Annex VII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani**

My delegation wishes to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing, and commend him and his team on their continued efforts in facilitating the political process in Syria, particularly during this challenging time with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

We have taken note of the Special Envoy's remark that there is a widespread sense that international competition is more prominent than cooperation, with Syrians paying the price. It is a strong reminder to the international community to engage in constructive diplomacy with Syria in order to support a political solution.

As I mentioned at our last meeting (see S/2020/353), the political track needs to continue for the sake of the Syrian people. I am fully aware that it is easier said than done. My delegation therefore urges all parties, including the Council, to extend their full cooperation to the relevant United Nations-facilitated efforts, led by Special Envoy Pedersen.

In today's meeting, I would like to highlight several points.

First, a nationwide ceasefire in Syria is critical to ensuring sustained calm for all Syrians. We welcome the current relative calm in the north-west, as the Russian-Turkish ceasefire arrangement largely holds, and we thank the key parties in that regard. However, like the Special Envoy, we note the fragile situation, not only in the north-west, but also in other parts of Syria. This relative calm cannot be taken for granted. As tensions flare, we must urgently prevent an escalation.

The Special Envoy also highlighted the ongoing risks of escalation and the need to prevent a return to all-out fighting. We must not unravel the little progress we have made. We applaud what Mr. Pedersen and his team have been doing to engage with civil society and women's leaders.

While efforts are under way to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak, we must all remain committed to respecting a nationwide ceasefire. At the same time, we note that it will take more than a nationwide ceasefire to suppress the pandemic. A coordinated effort between all parties, including the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the World Health Organization, is indeed crucial.

Secondly, all parties need to keep the current momentum towards peace. The fear of an outbreak and its high risk it poses to the community has captured our attention. My delegation believes, however, that all work to achieve a renewed political framework must continue alongside efforts to mitigate the COVID-19 outbreak. We again thank the Special Envoy for his continued engagement with all key parties in order to ensure a Syrian-led and-owned political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015).

With regard to the Constitutional Committee, we sincerely hope that the preparatory work for the third meeting of the Committee in Geneva will also continue, with the support of all Committee members and other key parties. Discussion must continue despite the pandemic.

Thirdly, an all-out effort is needed to suppress COVID-19 in Syria. The number of cases in Syria remains relatively low, but we note the high risk of a major COVID-19 outbreak in Syria, as mentioned during today's meeting.

The densely populated areas, internally displaced persons camps and collective shelters throughout the country, including detention facilities, are particularly at risk.

The vulnerable groups therein live in cramped conditions, where social distancing is not possible, and lack adequate health facilities. Humanitarian assistance and access are important. The international community must redouble its efforts to contain the further spread of the pandemic in Syria.

We commend the efforts of the Government of Syria to address the COVID-19 pandemic. My delegation wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a basis for advancing the United Nations-facilitated political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

In conclusion, my delegation continues to call for a global ceasefire and an end to violence worldwide. In this last week of the holy month of Ramadan and as we approach Eid al-Fitr, we once again call for peace, harmony and reconciliation. Let the people of Syria enjoy and celebrate Eid al-Fitr with calm and dignity.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry

I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his briefing and his commitment. I would also like to commend his efforts to engage with all stakeholders at both the national and the international levels.

The Niger continues to support the calls of the Special Envoy and the Secretary-General for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria so as to enable a coordinated fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. A complete ceasefire is indeed critical for any progress on the political process, but is also essential for smooth and swift humanitarian operations, especially in the north-east and in Idlib province.

It is very encouraging to see the Russian-Turkish ceasefire, signed on 6 March, to halt fighting in the Syrian province of Idlib, still holding. It needs to be supported. It might not be the solution we would like to see for the Syrian crisis, but it has reduced hostilities to enable Syria to address the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. My delegation therefore reiterates its call for continued diplomatic work between the Astana guarantors, the Council members and Special Envoy Pedersen to build on that momentum and to make progress on the political front, as mandated by resolution 2254 (2015).

My delegation believes that the Syrian crisis can be settled only on a non-politicized and non-militarized basis, because only a climate of security can allow the establishment of a peace process. We therefore call on all belligerents to build on the ceasefire and refrain from any action that could escalate the situation.

Similarly, we remain convinced that the formula for ending the Syrian crisis must be inspired by the Syrians themselves, in their various components, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We also call on all parties to be more flexible during negotiations at the Constitutional Committee level in order to advance the political track for lasting peace in Syria.

Furthermore, the Niger calls on both sides to show empathy in these unprecedented times by ensuring medical care for all detainees and the release of any arbitrary detainees and abductees, and by clarifying the situation of the missing persons.

Lastly, the Niger recognizes the danger posed by terrorist groups in Syria. We believe that the Government has the right to fight terrorism, but must respect obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law with regard to the principle of proportionality and the protection of civilian and civilian infrastructure.

The Niger commends the admirable contribution of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and all Syrian women as they play a leading role in de-escalating tensions, maintaining non-violence, raising awareness and fighting the spread of COVID-19 in towns and in refugee and internally displaced persons camps.

Annex IX

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing. The pandemic has affected the political settlement in Syria, just as it has affected many other processes around the world. But the Special Envoy is determined, and we support him. The Special Envoy is in constant contact with the Syrians on the issue of the next round of Constitutional Committee talks. Some accuse Syrians of avoiding dialogue under the pretext of not being able to meet in person, but these meetings are critical for discussing sensitive details about the future of their country. Leaks or provocations that could emerge from the use of video-conference platforms might undermine those efforts. It would be unacceptable if the settlement process were to break down for a lack of confidentiality.

We will continue to make efforts through contact with the parties concerned, both in our national capacity and together with Turkey and Iran, within the framework of the Astana format.

There are significant differences between the situation on the ground in Government territories and in areas outside of Damascus control, especially in the terrorist-held Idlib and the occupied Syrian territories. In most of Syria, the people and Government are working to restore a normal life. The coronavirus pandemic is an additional challenge. The authorities are taking the necessary measures by testing for the disease, equipping isolation rooms for patients with coronavirus and opening laboratories in Aleppo, Latakia and, eventually, Homs.

But suffocating sanctions have led to a deterioration in the socioeconomic situation in Syria. Sanctions impact ordinary Syrians. Our colleagues will not convince us that exemptions remove all problems. That is not true. It is impossible to conduct banking transactions from Syria, including for the purchase of medical equipment. In addition, international humanitarian non-governmental organizations cannot take effective action for fear of being sanctioned. There is ample evidence of that. We therefore again call for the lifting of unilateral sanctions.

In Idlib, the ceasefire is generally being maintained, although terrorists frequently attack Syrian army positions. The Russian military, together with its Turkish colleagues, continues to patrol designated areas even as radical groups impede their work, incite provocations and create blockades, thereby confirming the need to separate the moderate opposition from the terrorists.

Terrorist attacks are also carried out in other areas, most notably along the east coast of the Euphrates river. The problem of foreign terrorist fighters and other prisoners in the north-east has not gone away. Militants riot in prisons, escape to other countries and beyond the region. We would like to hear what is being done in that regard. We also have not gotten responses to our queries on what is happening in the north-east of the country, where United States forces are present illegally in the Al-Hol camp, as well as in the Al-Tanf area, in the Rukban camp. Stability and security in those areas can be ensured only if they return under the control of the legitimate Government.

Attempts to freeze the dividing lines that, unfortunately, have been drawn in today's Syria are unacceptable. Those lines should be erased. The joint efforts of Syrians in the Constitutional Committee and the effectiveness of responses to the threats facing the Syrian nation — coronavirus, terrorism and foreign occupation — call for concrete steps to be taken to restore the unity and territorial integrity of Syria. That applies to the inside. The external perimeter should come together to provide humanitarian assistance and enable the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria so as to facilitate the political process without interfering in it.

Annex X**Statement by the Political Coordinator of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Isis Gonsalves**

I thank Mr. Geir Pedersen for his briefing. Peace and stability in Syria can be restored only through a Syrian-owned and -led political process, facilitated by the United Nations, and require an environment that encourages cooperation and reconciliation. A cessation of hostilities is therefore essential to realizing the goals of resolution 2254 (2015). Now more than ever, sustained calm is needed to enable an all-out fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In that regard, we are pleased that the 5 March ceasefire in the north-west continues to hold, and we echo the Special Envoy's appeal for it to extend to the rest of the country.

It is our hope that, despite the virus-related challenges and restrictions, work on the Constitutional Committee will continue and that, through compromise and commitment, consensus on the provisions of a new constitution can finally be achieved. We reiterate that the meaningful participation of women in the negotiation process is imperative to ensure fair and balanced outcomes for all.

Resolution 2254 (2015) highlights the need for all parties to undertake confidence-building measures to make the political process more viable and to help to sustain a cessation of hostilities. In that context, action on the issue of missing persons and detainees should be prioritized, particularly in view of the current pandemic.

Syria is facing a grave economic situation, which is further exacerbated by the measures that have had to be taken, justifiably, to contain and suppress COVID-19. We reiterate the call for the lifting of unilateral coercive measures in order to enable Syria to sustain an effective response to the pandemic and address its current economic challenges.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to support the determined efforts of the Special Envoy. His continued positive engagement with all parties concerned will only serve to promote cooperation and advance the wider process.

The Council has a great responsibility to assist Syria, through positive action, to help it emerge from the despair of 10 years of conflict. We must set aside geopolitical quarrels and unite in support of Syria and its people.

Annex XI

Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations

Let me begin by thanking United Nations Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing on the political situation in Syria.

South Africa welcomes the relative calm across Syria and commends the parties for adhering to the 5 March ceasefire agreement between Turkey and Russia in the north-west of the country, despite some incidents of shelling across the front lines. We call on the parties to work towards a permanent ceasefire that will pave the way for the establishment of an enabling environment in which an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue aimed at achieving a lasting political solution reflective of the will of the Syrian people can take place.

Special Envoy Pedersen's constant and continued engagements with the various parties puts him in a unique position and provides him with the understanding that can help him support negotiations for a nationwide ceasefire. The road map for achieving a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the Syrian conflict has already been outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), and we call for all sides to adhere to its provisions and see to its full implementation. South Africa also calls for the Security Council's — and the international community's — continued support for the Constitutional Committee and for the various political processes undertaken to bring an end to the conflict in Syria.

South Africa remains fully supportive of the Constitutional Committee and appreciates the willingness and readiness of the United Nations to convene the third meeting of the Committee as soon as the global travel restrictions resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are lifted and allow for face-to-face meetings. Through our own experiences in the matter, South Africa understands that the drafting process for a Constitution can be challenging but it can also result in distinct rewards for all sectors of society. For there to be peace in Syria, it remains imperative that external interference in Syria come to an end. South Africa fully supports Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We are also concerned at the spillover effect that the conflict in Syria has had on other regions, some indirectly so. The spillover effect has been felt in North Africa, where external interference has exacerbated the conflict and contributed to further instability. South Africa reaffirms that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. It is only through dialogue, negotiations, trust and confidence in and with all parties that sustained peace and prosperity can be achieved in Syria.

With more than 50 confirmed cases of COVID-19 present in Syria, South Africa reiterates its support for the Special Envoy's call for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout the country. Indeed, this will allow for the Syrian Government, the United Nations and its implementing agencies to adequately prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage the parties to work together to create a unified response to combat the disease. Moreover, in keeping with the call of the Secretary-General and other international actors, the economic measures imposed on the Syrian Government must be eased to allow for efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure that all Syrians have access to the necessary equipment and supplies to fight the virus.

Annex XII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Kais Kabtani**

I thank the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, for his briefing.

At this moment of global uncertainty and hardship, a renewed and straightforward focus on peace and calm in Syria in line with the appeal of Special Envoy Pedersen is an imperative necessity in order to enable the effective tackling of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and promote progress in the Syria's political process. While violence has been de-escalated to a significant extent, calm remains tentative in the north-west of the country, tangible tensions persist in the north-east, terrorism is on the rise in central Syria, and security remains fragile in the south.

Tunisia reiterates its call on all parties to keep their abiding commitments, exercise self-restraint and work together to maintain an environment of sustained calm throughout Syria. We also recall the close nexus between the ceasefire and the parallel political process in Syria set forth in resolution 2254 (2015). We renew our support for the efforts to achieve both aims by Special Envoy Pedersen, acting within his mandated prerogatives under the resolution.

The resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) is a matter of grave concern and a serious reminder that the threat of terrorism is far from over. In fact, ISIS made an enormous leap in the number of claimed attacks in Syria and in Iraq in April as compared to prior months. Tunisia again stresses the importance of collective and determined counter-terrorism efforts aimed at eradicating Council-designated terrorist groups in Syria and beyond. Such efforts are fundamental for a long-term political solution to the Syrian conflict. We emphasize that understandings on the ceasefire in Idlib remain temporary solutions of respite, until they jointly and genuinely address the presence of terrorists of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other affiliated extremist groups and eradicate the safe haven these groups have established in the region.

The recent agreement reached between the Syrian parties on the agenda of the Constitutional Committee has been an encouraging development and an important step on the road to lasting peace in Syria. Tunisia recognizes that COVID-19 has caused the Constitutional Committee's discussions and other peace processes across conflict zones to grind to a halt. We look forward to the convening of the third round of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva when the situation so allows.

We urge the Syrian parties to exercise flexibility, seek commonalities and engage constructively and without preconditions in the negotiations of the Constitutional Committee. Tunisia expresses its support for the good offices of Special Envoy Pedersen in the Committee's work and in the political process broadly termed.

Finally, Tunisia reiterates that there is no military solution to the conflict. The only viable way forward is a political settlement that enjoys Syrian ownership and leadership, as well as United Nations sponsorship, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) — a settlement that safeguards Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity and meets Syrians' legitimate aspirations for freedom and dignity.

The political solution to the Syrian crisis is long-overdue. The Syrians' resilience is over-stretched. This conflict must end.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

I thank the Special Envoy for his comprehensive briefing to the Security Council today.

We remain concerned about the security situation in Syria. While we are not seeing the levels of violence in the north-west today that we saw at the beginning of the year, we are well aware of the recent clashes between armed groups and regime forces south of the M4 motorway and the regime's ongoing shelling of the Idlib de-escalation zone. The ceasefire in Idlib and in the north-east of the country must be upheld in practice and not in name only. We also fully condemn continued attacks by extremist forces, including Da'esh.

We remain concerned about a rise in violence in the south of the country and the risk that this violence might cause reconciliation agreements there to fall apart. We would be grateful for an update, including from our Russian colleagues, on implementation of those reconciliation agreements reached in summer 2018. It remains vital that localized ceasefires lead to a nationwide ceasefire, as called for by the United Nations Special Envoy and the Secretary-General. This is necessary not only to bring an end to this devastating conflict in accordance resolution 2254 (2015) but to enable full attention to be devoted to the fight against coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

In that regard, we continue to support efforts led by the World Health Organization to confront the real risk posed to all parts of Syria by COVID-19. We recognize the efforts made by authorities across the country and urge practical cooperation among them all to confront a disease that knows no boundaries.

There remains an urgent need for medical supplies and other necessary humanitarian aid to reach recipients in need without hindrance. We should not be dogmatic about the modalities of making that happen, including by renewing cross-border assistance to all areas that need it. We will have an opportunity to further discuss this matter tomorrow.

As to sanctions, in support of what some others have said, goods and medical supplies used for humanitarian purposes are not subject either to European Union sanctions or United Kingdom national sanctions. Additional exemptions from sanctions are also available for humanitarian activity in Syria. I would just like to note that the United Kingdom and our United States and European partners are the leading donors for humanitarian aid in Syria, including in regime-held areas. The problems facing the Syrian health sector and the economy are a result not of sanctions, but of the Syrian regime's actions through its cronyism, corruption and brutal conduct of the war, which includes, I am afraid, politically motivated punitive restrictions on humanitarian aid. If the Syrian regime and its allies want to see removal of sanctions, then they know what they have to do: engage seriously with the Special Envoy and the United Nations-led political process to achieve a peaceful end to the conflict in the country.

Now, with regard to the political process, we are disappointed that, despite the urgent humanitarian needs, the deteriorating economy and the continued threat of COVID-19, there still appears to be no urgency in working with the Special Envoy to achieve political progress towards a political settlement. Like others, we welcomed the formation of the Constitutional Committee last year, but it has been over a month since the agenda for the Constitutional Committee was agreed and nearly six months

since its last meeting. We cannot let hard won progress on this front be lost because of lethargy and disinterest from Damascus. I call on Russia to bring its influence to bear on its Syrian clients.

In order to support momentum and keep the progress alive, we encourage at least that the co-Chairs of the Committee urgently meet by videoconference to discuss outstanding issues, including how a full meeting can work in practice. We also urge the regime to make widespread releases of political prisoners and vulnerable people and to ensure that medical care is available for those still in detention. While we welcome negotiated releases, we would note that one-for-one releases are insufficient in a context where the regime holds far more detainees than opposition forces do. I would like to emphasize once again — and for the record — that there cannot be any reconstruction funding from the United Kingdom without the regime's genuine engagement with a credible and sustainable political process.

Let me conclude by reiterating what I believe we all have said, namely, that the deliberate targeting of humanitarian infrastructure and civilians is never acceptable, whether it be through ground attacks, barrel bombs, air strikes or chemical weapons. We note Amnesty International's recent report detailing 18 attacks on medical facilities and schools between May 2019 and February 2020, which only adds to the evidence provided by the Board of Inquiry and the Commission of Inquiry. As with the chemical-weapon attacks carried out by the Syrian regime and detailed in the report of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, those responsible must and will be held to account. In the meantime, such disregard for international humanitarian law must cease.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

I thank United Nations Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing today. The United States fully agrees with him that there should be an immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria. Not only is a ceasefire an essential element of resolution 2254 (2015), but a ceasefire would also enable efforts to suppress the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). I want to reiterate in this context that the United Nations must be at the centre of any effort to establish a ceasefire and that Special Envoy Pedersen has the authority to monitor lines of contact to ensure that the ceasefire agreements are honoured.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that the Al-Assad regime is intent on exploiting the COVID-19 crisis for its own strategic political and military advantage. When Russia and China forced the reduction of cross-border aid points from four to two, they said that the United Nations should engage the regime to facilitate cross-line aid from Damascus to Syrian civilians. The United Nations has engaged. But since then, the Secretary-General has reported that efforts to gain approval from the regime to deliver medical aid to COVID-19 hotspots are taking months — and this, from a regime that has already used chemical weapons against its own people, deprived its people of food and water, and destroyed medical facilities. Years of such appalling behaviour prove that the Al-Assad regime will stop at nothing to pursue a military victory, even if it means refusing to deliver medical supplies that are essential for suppressing COVID-19.

In the light of these dreadful, irrefutable facts, we must collectively ask how the Security Council can help restore stability in Syria. The answer lies in making progress on all tracks of resolution 2254 (2015). The Council must make every effort to ensure the Al-Assad regime reverses its destructive pattern of behaviour against its own people and agrees to a comprehensive, enduring and verifiable nationwide ceasefire. Equally important is making progress on the Constitutional Committee, whose stakeholders have agreed on an agenda, but which has not met because of the regime co-Chair's unwillingness to convene virtually.

The Trump Administration calls once again for the Al-Assad regime to protect the fate of thousands of civilians held arbitrarily in detention centres. As we have noted before, the crowded and inhumane conditions of these centres dramatically increase the risk of a rapid spread of COVID-19. We demand the immediate release of all civilians detained arbitrarily, especially women, children and the elderly. The Al-Assad regime must also immediately grant impartial and independent entities, including medical and health organizations, access to regime detention facilities in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

There is one way forward: full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). It bears repeating that the only way forward is the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). That is what will move Syria towards a future of peace, prosperity and dignity for all its people. Accordingly, that is the approach we must pursue as a Council.

Annex XV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy

I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing.

Recently, there have been signs of hope, as the efforts made by relevant parties, the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy have to a certain degree borne fruit, namely, the relatively calm situation on the ground since the beginning of March, as well as the progress made within the framework of the Constitutional Committee.

Yet the calm is fragile, with a number of sporadic incidents of violence, as well as the reported increased operations of terrorist groups in several parts of Syria. The progress towards a political solution is being hampered by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Meanwhile, this pandemic is also worsening the humanitarian situation, which is already desperate.

Time and tide wait for no one. The pandemic may take away some of the time and the means; we cannot let it take away our humanity and love for peace. Let us not waste the positive momentum, but let us join forces to fight the common enemies, which are war and COVID-19.

My delegation would therefore like first to re-emphasize the importance of maintaining and promoting stability in order to create the most favourable conditions for a lasting solution through dialogue and negotiation. We strongly support the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire in Syria, and we urge all actors to heed that call to facilitate not only an all-out effort to combat COVID-19 but also the political process in Syria.

Secondly, it is important for the Council to be united during this time so as to take advantage of any achievement we have made and any viable diplomatic efforts in order to help the Syrian people through this current impasse, as well as to provide unwavering humanitarian support for people in urgent need. We would also like to stress the importance of the unceasing support for the facilitation work of the United Nations.

Last but not least, Viet Nam has always firmly believed in a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution, with full respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States, in full accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Annex XVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Pedersen, for his input.

I reiterate our long-standing position that the Syrian crisis must be settled through political means. In that context, we extend our support to the work of the Constitutional Committee, as has been expressed by the Astana format meetings on numerous occasions. While the Committee should be supported to do its work, as a matter of principle, any and all forms of external pressure must be avoided by all, as stipulated in its rules of procedure. At the same time, any possible assistance to the Committee, even by the United Nations, must be extended only at the request of the Committee itself, in accordance with its rules of procedure.

As a principled position, which also has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Astana format summits, we continue to reject any separatist agendas as well as any and all attempts to create new realities on the ground, including through illegitimate self-rule initiatives.

The sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all. Accordingly, all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian Government must leave the Syrian territory. A living example in that regard is the occupation of certain parts of Syria by forces of the United States, which continue to support and shield terrorist groups under the guise of combating terrorism.

Similarly, Israel's acts of aggression against Syria are in gross violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, in the face of which the Syrian Government has a sovereign right to decide how and when to exercise its inherent right to individual or collective self-defence. Such acts of aggression must come to an end.

We also stress that the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel is illegal and that the recognition by the United States of its annexation to Israel is null and void. While condemning such unlawful, irresponsible acts, we stress that the Golan is, and will remain, an integral part of the Syrian territory.

Finally, the right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to the Syrians, and the international community should assist them in realizing that right.

Annex XVII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari**

A few days ago, the Security Council virtually celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the victory over nazism and fascism in the Second World War. The victors, including us, pledged to make concerted efforts to maintain international peace and security and to spare humankind from the ravages of war, which twice brought about scourges that were more horrifying than the black plague that invaded Europe and the world in medieval times. That led to the birth of the United Nations, whose Charter enshrines the international legal framework and fundamental principles of the structure of international relations, manifested in respect for the sovereignty and sovereign equality of Member States and refraining from interfering in their internal affairs and from threatening or using force.

Today, 75 years after the collapse of the ideologies of extremist regimes that set a precedent for the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida and the Al-Nusra Front in our region — regimes that were based on acts of aggression, hegemonic ambitions, discriminatory practices and hatred — we are witnessing the systematic violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations by the Governments of some Western States, which were supposed to have experienced the two World Wars and realized their impacts, and were therefore entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. However, those very same Governments have systematically violated the basic principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter and sought to undermine the choices of the peoples of Member States through acts of military invasion, armed aggression, investment in terrorism and economic and financial coercion. These practices are a consecration of the law of power and the law of the jungle rather, than the power of law and the power of justice.

Moreover, we express our concern, condemnation and disapproval of the distortion of facts about the Second World War voiced by two permanent members of the Security Council, which deny the more than 27 million martyrs whom the Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation, lost in the war against nazism. Whoever has the audacity to do that will not find it difficult to distort the facts about Syria's struggle and that of its people, army and leadership against terrorism.

For its part, my country, Syria, still believes in the purposes and principles of the United Nations, to which it was a signatory in San Francisco, alongside the other founding Member States. Today, and every day, Syria is committed to maintaining its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, as emphasized in the relevant Council resolutions.

The Turkish regime continues to violate its obligations under international law, the Adana agreement and the Sochi, Astana and Moscow understandings, as well as Security Council resolutions, especially those related to combating terrorism. That regime persists in providing multifaceted support and sponsorship to its affiliated terrorist groups operating in different parts of northern Syria.

Those terrorist groups have taken advantage of the period of calm following the Moscow agreement and the global preoccupation with efforts to confront the coronavirus disease pandemic to reorganize their forces and increase their armaments in preparation for committing more terrorist crimes. The latest such crime was when the terrorist groups affiliated with Huras Al-Din and the Turkestan Islamic Party — as it is clear that these terrorist organizations do not even have Arabic names, but rather names associated with the Ottoman era and their Turkish operator — attacked one of the military points in the village of Tanjara, near Al-Ghab region in the

north-west, and targeted it with a barrage of mortar shells and machine-gun fire, which led to a number of martyrs and wounded soldiers. Likewise, the terrorists of the Turkish-backed Turkestan Islamic Party destroyed the tower of the Zeyzoun power plant, in the Idlib countryside, after they had looted the equipment of the station, in cooperation with Turkish technicians, and transported it into Turkish territory through the crossings that some in the United Nations promote as so-called humanitarian. In addition to that, the Turkish regime violated the Constitution and Convention of the International Telecommunication Union by installing a number of cellular communications stations inside Syrian territory and providing Internet coverage and cellular communications, particularly to terrorist organizations, in northern Syria through a Turkish Internet service provider called HATNet and a Turkish telecommunications company called e-LUX.

Furthermore, the cutting off of water from the Allouk station, which is controlled by the Turkish occupying forces and their affiliated terrorist groups, and the denial of drinking water to the more than 1 million citizens of Al-Hasakah and its vicinity are a war crime and a crime against humanity. We are saddened by the fact that those who claim to stand up for the right of Syrians to regain their security and daily livelihood, be they Western countries, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs or the specialized agencies of the United Nations, have not said a word to condemn these inhumane practices.

On the other hand, the American occupation forces have begun to establish a new military base in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor governorate, in north-eastern Syria, with the aim of tightening their control over Syrian oil fields and continuing to plunder the resources of the Syrian people. The period since the Special Envoy's previous briefing (see S/2020/353) has also witnessed military attacks carried out by the Israeli occupying forces from over the occupied Syrian Golan and the airspace of neighbouring countries.

These acts of aggression, comprising flagrant violations of international law and the provisions of the Charter, are the tip of the iceberg of aggressive practices aimed at prolonging the crisis in my country, obstructing settlement efforts and supporting terrorist organizations and proxy separatist militias. As usual, under pressure from its three Western permanent members, the Security Council has remained silent in the face of such actions, which threaten regional and international peace and security, seeking to render the Council a platform for NATO. That risks undermining the foundations of the multilateral international order and bringing it back to the pre-Second World War era. There are currently six NATO member States in the Security Council. With Turkey at this meeting, the number becomes seven, which is about half the Council members.

In that context, my delegation reiterates that we will not give up our legitimate right to defend our homeland and its resources, combat terrorism and liberate our occupied territories, whether occupied by the United States, Turkey, Israel or their affiliated terrorist organizations. Any presence of foreign military forces on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic without the explicit consent of the Syrian Government is an act of aggression and occupation, and it will be dealt with as such in accordance with our national Constitution and our rights under international law.

The success of any political process requires the provision of appropriate conditions, notably respect for the first paragraph of the Council's resolutions, which affirms the strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Such a commitment requires an end to the illegal foreign military presence, acts of aggression, support for terrorism and unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people, as well as a cessation

of the efforts of States hostile to Syria to impose their visions, intransigence and conditions on the Syrian people.

My country is a victim of unprecedented and prescribed terrorism sponsored by States members of the Council and beyond in order to obtain political concessions commensurate with its interventionist agendas in the internal affairs of States of the region. That explains the frantic attempt to invade States in the region and to try to change legitimate Governments by force and impose new facts on the ground in order to undermine the possibility of establishing a Palestinian State, sustaining the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan and achieving the illusion of the so-called “deal of the century” promoted by the American Administration.

The tyranny of power and investment in terrorism will not lead us to drink from the river of madness. We have been, and continue to be, a safety valve for stability and moderation in the region, and our strong attachment to our sovereignty and independence reflects our true understanding of the victory over nazism and fascism in the Second World War.

In conclusion, it is very unfortunate that I have not heard any comments from the Special Envoy or some Council members about condemning the cutting off of water by the Turkish regime in Al-Hasakah city for the third time this month. It is also very unfortunate that I have not heard any comment from the Special Envoy or some Council members with regard to how the hooligans of the Turkish regime affiliated with the Huras Al-Din terrorist group blew up the electricity station in Zeyzoun, located in the Idlib countryside, after they looted its equipment and transported it to the Turkish territories in order to be sold as scrap.

It is very unfortunate that I have not heard any comments from the Special Envoy or some Council members about how the American occupation is stealing Syrian gas and oil around the clock. Furthermore, only yesterday the American air force dropped hot air balloons on farms in Al-Shaddadah town, south of Al-Hasakah, which led to the burning of more than 200 hectares of farms planted with wheat.

Annex XVIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu**

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting. I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. He has the full support of Turkey in his efforts to advance the political process.

We all agree, I believe, that a political settlement, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), remains the only way forward in Syria. A serious political process requires, above all, the seriousness of the Al-Assad regime and its backers in the efforts towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Today, despite sporadic violations, the ceasefire is holding in Idlib. Turkey continues its efforts to stabilize the situation on the ground. Joint patrols have been carried out with Russia on the M4 motorway since 15 March. Over 140,000 internally displaced persons have returned to their homes. Our aim is to ensure a lasting ceasefire in Idlib. This is essential to improving the humanitarian situation, facilitating the return of displaced people and advancing the political process.

However, we are witnessing a continuous military build-up by the regime in Idlib. Taking into account the track record of the regime, this development threatens the lives of millions of Syrians, mostly women and children. We cannot allow the regime to interpret the ceasefire as an opportunity to regroup for its next offensive. Turkey is committed to protecting the civilians in Idlib and reserves its right of self-defence to respond to any attack.

We have emphasized the importance of reaching a ceasefire for reviving the political track, and the ceasefire in Idlib has certainly helped with that. We are pleased that there is now an agreement on the agenda of the third round. The next round of Constitutional Committee meetings should be held without delay, once it is possible to convene in person. But we have to make sure that the Committee's meetings are conducted seriously. These meetings must deliver concrete outcomes. The Security Council has the responsibility to support the Committee's work and not to allow the regime to water it down again.

It is also ironic and shameless that the Al-Assad regime, which deliberately targeted and tortured doctors and nurses for a decade and obliterated the medical infrastructure of its country by systematically attacking hospitals, is now calling for a lifting of sanctions under the pretext of fighting the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Last month, almost all members of the Council expressed their sympathies for the victims of the terrorist attack that took place in Afrin on 28 April. Let me recall that this barbaric attack was perpetrated by the Kurdish Workers Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG), and was followed by another, in Al-Bab, on 9 May. In these two attacks, the PKK/YPG killed more than 50 civilians, including babies. Since mid-March, the PKK/YPG has carried out more than 30 terrorist attacks throughout northern Syria. These indiscriminate attacks include suicide bombings.

All these attacks have taken place at a time when the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces have pretended to support the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. It is no secret that these terrorist groups have been using such occasions to gain legitimacy. We all have the duty not to fall into this trap and to demonstrate a united front against terrorism by condemning the PKK/YPG's terrorist attacks, without hesitation.

Attempts to include the PKK/YPG in the political process through so-called reconciliation talks are both unjustified and unacceptable. A terrorist entity with

a separatist agenda for Syria, in contradiction with all relevant Security Council resolutions, has no place within this process.

Let me briefly touch upon the use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime. Turkey welcomes the report of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The Team's report, in addition to the reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, provides indisputable evidence that the Syrian regime is in non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity, and those responsible for these crimes must be held accountable and brought to justice.

Turkey will continue to support all efforts, including the steps to be taken by the OPCW and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, towards ensuring full accountability in Syria. This remains crucial for a credible political process.

By way of massacring thousands of innocent civilians, the Syrian regime has gained control over some parts of Syria. Yet it has no legitimacy in the eyes of the Syrians. There are millions who cannot go back to their homeland for the simple reason that their most fundamental right — the right to life — is under threat. These millions of people are not represented in Damascus or here in New York, but their voices need to be heard. Their grievances need to be addressed. That can be achieved only through an election, as described by the Permanent Representative of France, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). In the tenth year of the civil war in Syria, we need to do more, not less. And it is our collective duty to make sure that these Council meetings have a meaningful outcome beyond words.

As usual, I will not honour the delusional state of mind of the previous speaker with a response. He does not represent the Syrian people. I will provide an answer, on behalf of my country and the nearly 9 million Syrians whom we protect, once there is a legitimate representative behind the name plate of the Syrian Arab Republic.
